George Washington

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George Washington (February 22, 1732 [O.S. February 11, 1731][Note 1][Note 2] – December 14, 1799) was the first President of the United States (1789–1797), the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He presided over the convention that drafted the Constitution, which replaced the Articles of Confederation and established the position of President.

Washington was elected President as the unanimous choice of the 69 electors in 1788, and he served two terms in office. He oversaw the creation of a strong, well-financed national government that maintained neutrality in the wars raging in Europe, suppressed rebellion, and won acceptance among Americans of all types. His leadership style established many forms and rituals of government that have been used since, such as using a cabinet system and delivering an inaugural address. Further, the peaceful transition from his presidency to the presidency of John Adams established a tradition that continues into the 21st century. Washington was hailed as "father of his country" even during his lifetime.[3][4]

Washington was born into the provincial gentry of Colonial Virginia; his wealthy planter family owned tobacco plantations and slaves. After both his father and older brother died when he was young, Washington became personally and professionally attached to the powerful William Fairfax, who promoted his career as a surveyor and soldier. Washington quickly became a senior officer in the colonial forces during the first stages of the French and Indian War. Chosen by the Second Continental Congress in 1775 to be commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in the American Revolution, Washington managed to force the British out of Boston in 1776, but was defeated and almost captured later that year when he lost New York City. After crossing the Delaware River in the dead of winter, he defeated the British in two battles, retook New Jersey and restored momentum to the Patriot cause.

George Washington

1st President of the United States

In office

April 30, 1789[nb] – March 4, 1797

Vice President	John Adams
Preceded by	Position established
Succeeded by	John Adams

Senior Officer of the Army

In office

July 13, 1798 – December 14, 1799

Appointed by	John Adams
Preceded by	James Wilkinson
Succeeded by	Alexander Hamilton

Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army

In office

June 15, 1775 – December 23, 1783

Appointed by	Continental Congress
Preceded by	Position established
Succeeded by	Henry Knox (Senior Officer of the Army)

Delegate to the Second Continental Congress from Virginia

Because of his strategy, Revolutionary forces captured two major British armies at Saratoga in 1777 and Yorktown in 1781. Historians laud Washington for his selection and supervision of his generals, encouragement of morale and ability to hold together the army, coordination with the state governors and state militia units, relations with Congress and attention to supplies, logistics, and training. In battle, however, Washington was repeatedly outmaneuvered by British generals with larger armies. After victory had been finalized in 1783, Washington resigned as Commander-in-chief rather than seize power, proving his opposition to dictatorship and his commitment to American republicanism.

Dissatisfied with the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, in 1787 Washington presided over the Constitutional Convention that drafted the United States Constitution. Elected unanimously as the first President of the United States in 1789, he attempted to bring rival factions together to unify the nation. He supported Alexander Hamilton's programs to pay off all state and national debt, to implement an effective tax system and to create a national bank (despite opposition from Thomas Jefferson).

Washington proclaimed the United States neutral in the wars raging in Europe after 1793. He avoided war with Great Britain and guaranteed a decade of peace and profitable trade by securing the Jay Treaty in 1795, despite intense opposition from the Jeffersonians. Although he never officially joined the Federalist Party, he supported its programs. Washington's Farewell Address was an influential primer on republican virtue and a warning against partisanship, sectionalism, and involvement in foreign wars. He retired from the presidency in 1797 and returned to his home, Mount Vernon, and his domestic life where he managed a variety of enterprises. He freed all his slaves by his final will.

Washington had a vision of a great and powerful nation that would be built on republican lines using federal power. He sought to use the national government to preserve liberty, improve infrastructure, open the western lands, promote commerce, found a permanent capital, reduce regional

In office	
May 10, 1775 – June 15, 1775	
Preceded by	Position established
Succeeded by	Thomas Jefferson
Delegate to the First Continental Congress from Virginia	
In office	
September 5, 1774 – October 26, 1774	
Preceded by	Position established
Succeeded by	Position abolished
Personal details	
Born	February 22, 1732 Westmoreland, Virginia, British America
Died	December 14, 1799 (aged 67) Mount Vernon, Virginia, U.S.
Resting place	Washington Family Tomb Mount Vernon, Virginia
Political party	none
Spouse(s)	Martha Dandridge Custis
Religion	Deism[1] Episcopal[2]
Signature	
Military service	
Allegiance	Great Britain United States
Service/branch	Virginia provincial militia Continental Army United States Army
Years of service	Militia: 1752–1758 Continental Army: 1775–1783 U.S. Army: 1798–1799
Rank	General of the Armies (Promoted posthumously: 1976)
Commands	Virginia Colony's regiment Continental Army United States Army

tensions and promote a spirit of American nationalism.[5] At his death, Washington was eulogized as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen" by Henry Lee.[6]

The Federalists made him the symbol of their party but for many years, the Jeffersonians continued to distrust his influence and delayed building the Washington Monument. As the leader of the first successful revolution against a colonial empire in world history, Washington became an international icon for liberation and nationalism, especially in France and Latin America.[7] He is consistently ranked among the top three presidents of the United States, according to polls of both scholars and the general public.

Battles/wars	French and Indian War • Battle of Jumonville Glen • Battle of Fort Necessity • Braddock Expedition • Battle of the Monongahela • Forbes Expedition American Revolutionary War • Boston campaign • New York and New Jersey campaign • Philadelphia campaign • Yorktown campaign
Awards	Congressional Gold Medal Thanks of Congress

^ March 4 is the official start of the first presidential term. April 6 is when Congress counted the votes of the Electoral College and certified a president. April 30 is when Washington was sworn in.

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Early life (1732–1753)

Further information: Ancestry of George Washington

The first child of Augustine Washington (1694–1743) and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington (1708–1789), George Washington was born on their Pope's Creek Estate near present-day Colonial Beach in Westmoreland County, Virginia. According to the Julian calendar and Annunciation Style of enumerating years, then in use in the British Empire, Washington was born on February 11, 1731; when the Gregorian calendar was implemented in the British Empire in 1752, in accordance with the provisions of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750, his birth date became February 22, 1732.[8][Note 1][Note 2]

Washington's ancestors were from Sulgrave, England; his great-grandfather, John Washington, had emigrated to Virginia in 1657.[9] George's father Augustine was a slave-owning tobacco planter who later tried his hand in iron-mining ventures.[10] In George's youth, the Washingtons were moderately prosperous members of the Virginia gentry, of "middling rank" rather than one of the leading planter families.[11] At this time, Virginia and other southern colonies had become a slave society, in which slaveholders formed the ruling class and the economy was based on slave labor.[12]

Six of George's siblings reached maturity, including two older half-brothers, Lawrence and Augustine, from his father's first marriage to Jane Butler Washington, and four full siblings, Samuel, Elizabeth (Betty), John Augustine and Charles. Three siblings died before becoming adults: his full sister Mildred died when she was about one,[13] his half-brother Butler died while an infant,[14] and his half-sister Jane died at the age of 12, when George was about 2.[13] George's father died when George was 11 years old, after which George's half-brother Lawrence became a surrogate father and role model. William Fairfax, Lawrence's father-in-law and cousin of Virginia's largest landowner, Thomas, Lord Fairfax, was also a formative influence.

Washington spent much of his boyhood at Ferry Farm in Stafford County near Fredericksburg. Lawrence Washington inherited another family property from his father, a plantation on the Potomac River which he named Mount Vernon, in honor of his commanding officer, Admiral Edward Vernon. George inherited Ferry Farm upon his father's death and eventually acquired Mount Vernon after Lawrence's death.[15]

The death of his father prevented Washington from crossing the Atlantic to receive the rest of his education at England's Appleby School, as his older brothers had done. He received the equivalent of an elementary school education from a variety of tutors,[16] and also a school run by an Anglican clergyman in or near Fredericksburg.[17] Talk of securing an appointment in the Royal Navy for him when he was 15 was dropped when his widowed mother objected.[18] Thanks to Lawrence's connection to the powerful Fairfax family, at age 17 in 1749, Washington was appointed official surveyor for Culpeper County, a well-paid position which enabled him to purchase land in the Shenandoah Valley, the first of his many land acquisitions in western Virginia. Thanks also to Lawrence's involvement in the Ohio Company, a land investment company funded by Virginia investors, and Lawrence's position as commander of the Virginia militia, Washington came to the notice of the new lieutenant governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie. Washington was hard to miss: At exactly six feet, he towered over most of his contemporaries.[19]

In 1751, Washington travelled to Barbados with Lawrence, who was suffering from tuberculosis, with the hope that the climate would be beneficial to Lawrence's health. Washington contracted smallpox during the trip, which left his face slightly scarred, but immunized him against future exposures to the dreaded disease.[20] Lawrence's health did not improve; he returned to Mount Vernon, where he died in 1752.[21] Lawrence's position as Adjutant General (militia leader) of Virginia was divided into four offices after his death. Washington was appointed by Governor Dinwiddie as one of the four district adjutants in February 1753, with the rank of major in the Virginia militia.[22] Washington also joined the Freemasons fraternal association in Fredericksburg at this time.[23]

French and Indian War (or 'Seven Years War', 1754–1758)

Main article: George Washington in the French and Indian War

See also: Military career of George Washington, Battle of Jumonville Glen, Battle of Fort Necessity, and Forbes Expedition

The Ohio Company was an important vehicle through which British investors planned to expand into the Ohio Valley, opening new settlements and trading posts for the Indian trade[24] In 1753, the French themselves began expanding their military control into the Ohio Country, a territory already claimed by the British colonies of Virginia and Pennsylvania. These competing claims led to a war in the colonies called the French and Indian War (1754–62), and contributed to the start of the global Seven Years' War (1756–63). By chance, Washington became involved in its beginning.

Robert Dinwiddie, lieutenant governor of colonial Virginia, was ordered by the British government to guard the British territorial claims including the Ohio River basin. In late 1753, he sent George Washington, who in 1752 received his deceased half-brother's post as adjutant general of the Virginia's militia for the Southern District and was eager to

Washington's map, accompanying his *Journal to the Ohio* (1753–1754).

prove himself, to deliver a letter asking the French to vacate the Ohio Valley.[24] During his trip Washington met with Tanacharison (also called "Half-King") and other Iroquois chiefs allied with England at Logstown to secure their support in case of a military conflict with the French; Washington and Tanacharison became friends. Washington delivered the letter to the local French commander Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, who politely refused to leave.[25] Washington kept a diary during his expedition that was printed on Dinwiddie's order and made Washington's name recognizable in Virginia.[26] That helped him to obtain a commission to raise a company of 100 men and start his military career.[27]

Dinwiddie sent Washington back to the Ohio Country to protect an Ohio Company's crew constructing a fort at present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. However, before he reached the area, a French force drove out colonial traders and began construction of Fort Duquesne. A small detachment of French troops led by Joseph Coulon de Jumonville, was discovered by Tanacharison and a few warriors east of present-day Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Along with their Mingo allies, Washington and some of his militia unit then ambushed the French. What exactly happened during and after the battle is a matter of some controversy, but the immediate outcome was that Jumonville was injured in the initial attack and then was killed - whether tomahawked by Tanacharison in cold blood or somehow shot by another onlooker with a musket as the injured man sat with Washington is not completely clear.[28][29]

The French responded by attacking and capturing Washington at Fort Necessity in July 1754.[30] However, he was allowed to return with his troops to Virginia. Historian Joseph Ellis concludes that the episode demonstrated Washington's bravery, initiative, inexperience and impetuosity.[31] These events had international consequences; the French accused Washington of assassinating Jumonville, who they claimed was on a diplomatic mission.[31] Both France and Great Britain were ready to fight for control of the region and both sent troops to North America in 1755; war was formally declared in 1756.[32]

Braddock disaster 1755

Main article: Braddock Expedition

In 1755, Washington was the senior American aide to British General Edward Braddock on the ill-fated Braddock expedition. This was the largest British expedition to the colonies, and was intended to expel the French from the Ohio Country. The French and their Indian allies ambushed Braddock, who was mortally wounded in the Battle of the Monongahela. After suffering devastating casualties, the British retreated in disarray; however, Washington rode back and forth across the battlefield, rallying the remnants of the British and Virginian forces to an organized retreat.[33]

Commander of Virginia Regiment

Governor Dinwiddie rewarded Washington in 1755 with a commission as "Colonel of the Virginia Regiment and Commander in Chief of all forces now raised in the defense of His Majesty's Colony" and gave him the task of defending Virginia's frontier. The Virginia Regiment was the first full-time American military unit in the colonies (as opposed to part-time militias and the British regular units). Washington was ordered to "act defensively or offensively" as he thought best.[34]

In command of a thousand soldiers, Washington was a disciplinarian who emphasized training. He led his men in brutal campaigns against the Indians in the west; in 10 months units of his regiment fought 20 battles, and lost a third of its men. Washington's strenuous efforts meant that Virginia's frontier population suffered less than that of other colonies; Ellis concludes "it was his only unqualified success" in the war.[35][36]

In 1758, Washington participated in the Forbes Expedition to capture Fort Duquesne. He was embarrassed by a friendly fire episode in which his unit and another British unit thought the other was the French enemy and opened fire, with 14 dead and 26 wounded in the mishap. Washington was not involved in any other major fighting on the expedition, and the British scored a major strategic victory, gaining control of the Ohio Valley, when the French abandoned the fort. Following the expedition, he retired from his Virginia Regiment commission in December 1758. Washington did not return to military life until the outbreak of the revolution in 1775.[37]

Lessons learned

Although Washington never gained the commission in the British army he yearned for, in these years the young man gained valuable military, political, and leadership skills.[38][39] He closely observed British military tactics, gaining a keen insight into their strengths and weaknesses that proved invaluable during the Revolution. He demonstrated his toughness and courage in the most difficult situations, including disasters and retreats. He developed a command presence—given his size, strength, stamina, and bravery in battle, he appeared to soldiers to be a natural leader and they followed him without question.[40][41]

Washington learned to organize, train, drill, and discipline his companies and regiments. From his observations, readings and conversations with professional officers, he learned the basics of battlefield tactics, as well as a good understanding of problems of organization and logistics.[42] He gained an understanding of overall strategy, especially in locating strategic geographical points.[43]

Historian Ron Chernow is of the opinion that his frustrations in dealing with government officials during this conflict led him to advocate the advantages of a strong national government and a vigorous executive agency that could get results;[38] other historians tend to ascribe Washington's position on government to his later American Revolutionary War service.[Note 3] He developed a very negative idea of the value of militia, who seemed too unreliable, too undisciplined, and too short-term compared to regulars.[44] On the other hand, his experience was limited to command of at most 1000 men, and came only in remote frontier conditions that were far removed from the urban situations he faced during the Revolution at Boston, New York, Trenton and Philadelphia.[45]

Between the wars: Mount Vernon (1759–1774)

On January 6, 1759, Washington married the wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis, then 28 years old. Surviving letters suggest that he may have been in love at the time with Sally Fairfax, the wife of a friend.[46] Nevertheless, George and Martha made a compatible marriage, because Martha was intelligent, gracious, and experienced in managing a planter's estate.[47]

Together the two raised her two children from her previous marriage, John Parke Custis and Martha Parke Custis; later the Washingtons raised two of Mrs. Washington's grandchildren, Eleanor Parke Custis and George Washington Parke Custis. George and Martha never had any children together – his earlier bout with smallpox in 1751 may have made him sterile.[48][49] The newlywed couple moved to Mount Vernon, near Alexandria, where he took up the life of a planter and political figure.

A mezzotint of Martha Washington, based on a 1757 portrait by Wollaston

Washington's marriage to Martha greatly increased his property holdings and social standing, and made him one of Virginia's wealthiest men. He acquired one-third of the 18,000-acre (73 km^2) Custis estate upon his marriage, worth approximately $100,000, and managed the remainder on behalf of Martha's children, for whom he sincerely cared.[50]

Washington enlarged the house at Mount Vernon after his marriage.

In 1754, Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie had promised land bounties to the soldiers and officers who volunteered to serve during the French and Indian War.[51] Governor Norborne Berkeley finally fulfilled Dinwiddie's promise in 1769–1770,[51][52] with Washington subsequently receiving title to 23,200 acres (94 km^2) near where the Kanawha River flows into the Ohio River, in what is now western West Virginia.[53] He also frequently bought additional land in his own name. By 1775, Washington had doubled the size of Mount Vernon to 6,500 acres (26 km^2), and had increased its slave population to over 100. As a respected military hero and large landowner, he held local office and was elected to the Virginia provincial legislature, the House of Burgesses, beginning in 1758.[54]

Washington lived an aristocratic lifestyle—fox hunting was a favorite leisure activity.[55] He also enjoyed going to dances and parties, in addition to the theater, races, and cockfights. Washington also was known to play cards, backgammon, and billiards.[56] Like most Virginia planters, he imported luxuries and other goods from England and paid for them by exporting his tobacco crop.[57]

Washington began to pull himself out of debt in the mid-1760s by diversifying his previously tobacco-centric business interests into other ventures[57] and paying more attention to his affairs.[58] In 1766, he started switching Mount Vernon's primary cash crop away from tobacco to wheat, a crop that could be processed and then sold in various forms in the colonies, and further diversified operations to include flour milling, fishing, horse breeding, spinning, weaving and (in the 1790s) whiskey production.[57] Patsy Custis's death in 1773 from epilepsy enabled Washington to pay off his British creditors, since half of her inheritance passed to him.[59]

A successful planter, he was a leader in the social elite in Virginia. From 1768 to 1775, he invited some 2000 guests to his Mount Vernon estate, mostly those he considered "people of rank". As for people not of high social status, his advice was to "treat them civilly" but "keep them at a proper distance, for they

will grow upon familiarity, in proportion as you sink in authority".[60] In 1769, he became more politically active, presenting the Virginia Assembly with legislation to ban the importation of goods from Great Britain.[61]

Washington at age 40 (1772)

American Revolution (1775–1783)

Main articles: George Washington in the American Revolution and Military career of George Washington

Washington opposed the 1765 Stamp Act, the first direct tax on the colonies, and began taking a leading role in the growing colonial resistance when protests against the Townshend Acts (enacted in 1767) became widespread. In May 1769, Washington introduced a proposal, drafted by his friend George Mason, calling for Virginia to boycott English goods until the Acts were repealed.[62] Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts in 1770. However, Washington regarded the passage of the Intolerable Acts in 1774 as "an Invasion of our Rights and Privileges".[63]

In July 1774, he chaired the meeting at which the "Fairfax Resolves" were adopted, which called for the convening of a Continental Congress, among other things. In August, Washington attended the First Virginia Convention, where he was selected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress.[64]

Commander in chief

After the Battles of Lexington and Concord near Boston in April 1775, the colonies went to war. Washington appeared at the Second Continental Congress in a military uniform, signaling that he was prepared for war.[65] Washington had the prestige, military experience, charisma and military bearing of a military leader and was known as a strong patriot. Virginia, the largest colony, deserved recognition, and New England—where the fighting began—realized it needed Southern support. Washington did not explicitly seek the office of commander and said that he was not equal to it, but there was no serious competition.[66] Congress created the Continental Army on June 14, 1775. Nominated by John Adams of Massachusetts, Washington was then appointed General and Commander-in-chief.[67]

General George Washington at Trenton by John Trumbull, Yale University Art Gallery (1792).

Washington had three roles during the war. In 1775–77, and again in 1781 he led his men against the main British forces. Although he lost many of his battles, he never surrendered his army during the war, and he continued to fight the British relentlessly until the war's end. He plotted the overall strategy of the war, in cooperation with Congress.[68]

Second, he was charged with organizing and training the army. He recruited regulars and assigned Baron and General Friedrich von Steuben, a veteran of the Prussian general staff, to train them. The war effort and getting supplies to the troops were under the purview of Congress,[69] but Washington pressured the Congress to provide the essentials.[70]

In June 1776, Congress' first attempt at running the war effort was established with the committee known as "Board of War and Ordnance", succeeded by the Board of War in July 1777, a committee which eventually included members of the military.[69] The command structure of the armed forces was a hodgepodge of Congressional appointees (and Congress sometimes made those appointments without Washington's input) with state-appointments filling the lower ranks and of all of the militia-officers. The results of his general staff were mixed, as some of his favorites (like John Sullivan) never mastered the art of command.[68]

Eventually, he found capable officers, like General Nathanael Greene and his chief-of-staff Alexander Hamilton. The American officers never equaled their opponents in tactics and maneuver, and consequently they lost most of the pitched battles. The great successes, at Boston (1776), Saratoga (1777) and Yorktown (1781), came from trapping the British far from base with much larger numbers of troops.[68]

Third, and most important, Washington was the embodiment of armed resistance to the Crown—the representative man of the Revolution. His enormous stature and political skills kept Congress, the army, the French, the militias, and the states all pointed toward a common goal. By voluntarily stepping down and disbanding his army when the war was won, he permanently established the principle of civilian supremacy in military affairs. And yet his constant reiteration of the point that well-disciplined professional soldiers counted for twice as much as erratic amateurs helped overcome the ideological distrust of a standing army.[71]

Victory at Boston

Washington assumed command of the Continental Army in the field at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in July 1775, during the ongoing siege of Boston. Realizing his army's desperate shortage of gunpowder, Washington asked for new sources. American troops raided British arsenals, including some in the Caribbean, and some manufacturing was attempted. They obtained a barely adequate supply (about 2.5 million pounds) by the end of 1776, mostly from France.[72]

Washington taking Control of the Continental Army, 1775.

Washington reorganized the army during the long standoff, and forced the British to withdraw by putting artillery on Dorchester Heights overlooking the city. The British evacuated Boston in March 1776 and Washington moved his army to New York City.[73]

Although highly disparaging toward most of the Patriots, British newspapers routinely praised Washington's personal character and qualities as a military commander. These articles were bold, as Washington was an enemy general who commanded an army in a cause that many Britons believed would ruin the empire.[74]

Defeat at New York City and Fabian tactics

In August 1776, British General William Howe launched a massive naval and land campaign designed to seize New York. The Continental Army under Washington engaged the enemy for the first time as an army of the newly independent United States at the Battle of Long Island, the largest battle of the entire war. The Americans were heavily outnumbered, many men deserted, and Washington was badly beaten. Subsequently, Washington was forced to retreat across the East River at night. He did so without loss of life or materiel.[75]

Washington Crossing the Delaware, December 25, 1776, by Emanuel Leutze, 1851

Washington retreated north from the city to avoid encirclement, enabling Howe to take the offensive and capture Fort Washington on November 16 with high Continental casualties. Washington then retreated across New Jersey; the future of the Continental Army was in doubt due to expiring enlistments and the string of losses.[76] On the night of December 25, 1776, Washington staged a comeback with a surprise attack on a Hessian outpost in western New Jersey. He led his army across the Delaware River to capture nearly 1,000 Hessians in Trenton, New Jersey. Washington followed up his victory at Trenton with another over British regulars at Princeton in early January. The British retreated back to New York City and its environs, which they held until the peace treaty of 1783. Washington's victories wrecked the British carrot-and-stick strategy of showing overwhelming force then offering generous terms. The Americans would not negotiate for anything short of independence.[77] These victories alone were not enough to ensure ultimate Patriot victory, however, since many soldiers did not reenlist or deserted during the harsh winter. Washington and Congress reorganized the army with increased rewards for staying and punishment for desertion, which raised troop numbers effectively for subsequent battles.[78]

Historians debate whether or not Washington preferred a Fabian strategy[Note 4] to harass the British with quick, sharp attacks followed by a retreat so the larger British army could not catch him, or whether he preferred to fight major battles.[Note 5] While his southern commander Greene in 1780–81 did use Fabian tactics, Washington did so only in fall 1776 to spring 1777, after losing New York City and seeing much of his army melt away. Trenton and Princeton were Fabian examples. By summer 1777, however, Washington had rebuilt his strength and his confidence; he stopped using raids and went for large-scale confrontations, as at Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth and Yorktown.[79]

1777 campaigns

In the late summer of 1777, the British under John Burgoyne sent a major invasion army south from Quebec, with the intention of splitting off rebellious New England. General Howe in New York took his army south to Philadelphia instead of going up the Hudson River to join with Burgoyne near Albany. It

was a major strategic mistake for the British, and Washington rushed to Philadelphia to engage Howe, while closely following the action in upstate New York. In pitched battles that were too complex for his relatively inexperienced men, Washington was defeated. At the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, Howe outmaneuvered Washington, and marched into the American capital at Philadelphia unopposed on September 26. Washington's army unsuccessfully attacked the British garrison at Germantown in early October. Meanwhile, Burgoyne, out of reach from help from Howe, was trapped and forced to surrender his entire army at Saratoga, New York.[80] It was a major turning point militarily and diplomatically. France responded to Burgoyne's defeat by entering the war, openly allying with America and turning the Revolutionary War into a major worldwide war. Washington's loss of Philadelphia prompted some members of Congress to discuss removing Washington from command. This attempt failed after Washington's supporters rallied behind him.[81]

Valley Forge

Main article: Valley Forge

General Washington and Lafayette look over the troops at Valley Forge.

Washington's army of 11,000[82] went into winter quarters at Valley Forge north of Philadelphia in December 1777. Over the next six months, the deaths in camp numbered in the thousands (the majority being from disease),[83] with historians' death toll estimates ranging from 2000[83] to 2500,[84][85] to over 3000 men.[86] The next spring, however, the army emerged from Valley Forge in good order, thanks in part to a full-scale training program supervised by General von Steuben.[87] The British evacuated Philadelphia to New York in 1778,[88] shadowed by Washington. Washington attacked them at Monmouth, fighting to an effective draw in one of the war's largest battles.[89] Afterwards, the British continued to head towards New York, and Washington moved his army outside of New York.[88]

Victory at Yorktown

In the summer of 1779 at Washington's direction, General John Sullivan carried out a scorched earth campaign that destroyed at least 40 Iroquois villages in central and upstate New York; the Indians were British allies who had been raiding American settlements on the frontier.[90] In July 1780, 5,000 veteran French troops led by General Comte Donatien de Rochambeau arrived at Newport, Rhode Island to aid in the war effort.[91] The Continental Army having been funded by $20,000 in French gold, Washington delivered the final blow to the British in 1781, after a French

General Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau at Yorktown, Virginia, 1781.

naval victory allowed American and French forces to trap a British army in Virginia. The surrender at Yorktown on October 17, 1781, marked the end of major fighting in continental North America.[92]

General George Washington Resigning His Commission by John Trumbull, Capitol Rotunda (commissioned 1817)

Demobilization

Washington could not know that after Yorktown, the British would not reopen hostilities. They still had 26,000 troops occupying New York City, Charleston and Savannah, together with a powerful fleet. The French army and navy departed, so the Americans were on their own in 1782–83. The treasury was empty, and the unpaid soldiers were growing restive, almost to the point of mutiny or possible coup d'état. Washington dispelled unrest among officers by suppressing the Newburgh Conspiracy in March 1783, and Congress came up with the promise of a five-year bonus.[93]

With the initial peace treaty articles ratified in April, a recently formed Congressional committee under Hamilton, was considering needs and plans for a peacetime army. On May 2, 1783, the Commander in Chief submitted his *Sentiments on a Peace Establishment*[94] to the Committee, essentially providing an official Continental Army position. The original proposal was defeated in Congress in two votes (May 1783, October 1783) with a truncated version also being rejected in April of 1784.[95]

By the Treaty of Paris (signed that September), Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States. Washington disbanded his army and, on November 2, gave an eloquent farewell address to his soldiers.[96]

On November 25, the British evacuated New York City, and Washington and the governor took possession. At Fraunces Tavern on December 4, Washington formally bade his officers farewell and on December 23, 1783, he resigned his commission as commander-in-chief. Historian Gordon Wood concludes that the greatest act in his life was his resignation as commander of the armies—an act that stunned aristocratic Europe.[97] King George III called Washington "the greatest character of the age" because of this.[98]

Historian John Shy says that by 1783 Washington was "a mediocre military strategist but had become a master political tactician with an almost perfect sense of timing and a developed capacity to exploit his charismatic reputation, using people who thought they were using him".[99]

United States Constitution

Main article: Constitutional Convention (United States)

Washington's retirement to Mount Vernon was short-lived. He made an exploratory trip to the western frontier in 1784,[67] was persuaded to attend the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, and was unanimously elected president of the Convention. He participated little in the debates (though he did vote for or against the various articles), but his high prestige maintained collegiality and kept the delegates at their labors. The delegates designed the presidency with

Washington in mind, and allowed him to define the office once elected.[100] After the Convention, his support convinced many to vote for ratification; the new Constitution was ratified by all thirteen states.[101]

Washington at the Signing of the United States Constitution, September 17, 1787, by Howard Chandler Christy, 1940.

Presidency (1789–1797)

Main article: Presidency of George Washington

The Electoral College elected Washington unanimously as the first president in 1789,[Note 6] and again in the 1792 election; he remains the only president to have received 100 percent of the electoral votes.[Note 7] John Adams, who received the next highest vote total, was elected Vice President. At his inauguration, Washington took the oath of office as the first President of the United States of America on April 30, 1789, on the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City.[103]

Lansdowne portrait of George Washington painted by Gilbert Stuart in 1796

The 1st United States Congress voted to pay Washington a salary of $25,000 a year—a large sum in 1789. Washington, already wealthy, declined the salary, since he valued his image as a selfless public servant. At the urging of Congress, however, he ultimately accepted the payment, to avoid setting a precedent whereby the presidency would be perceived as limited only to independently wealthy individuals who could serve without any salary.[104] The president, aware that everything he did set a precedent, attended carefully to the pomp and ceremony of office, making sure that the titles and trappings were suitably republican and never emulated European royal courts. To that end, he preferred the title "Mr. President" to the more majestic names suggested.[105]

Washington proved an able administrator. An excellent delegator and judge of talent and character, he talked regularly with department heads and listened to their advice before making a final decision.[106] In handling routine tasks, he was "systematic, orderly, energetic, solicitous of the opinion of others ... but decisive, intent upon general goals and the consistency of particular actions with them".[107]

Washington reluctantly served a second term. He refused to run for a third, establishing the customary policy of a maximum of two terms for a president.[108]

Domestic issues

See also: Whiskey Rebellion

Washington was not a member of any political party and hoped that they would not be formed, fearing conflict that would undermine republicanism.[109] His closest advisors formed two factions, setting the framework for the future First Party System. Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton had bold plans to establish the national credit and build a financially powerful nation, and formed the basis of the Federalist Party. Secretary of the State Thomas Jefferson, founder of the Jeffersonian Republicans, strenuously opposed Hamilton's agenda, but Washington typically favored Hamilton over Jefferson, and it was Hamilton's agenda that went into effect. Jefferson's political actions, his support of Philip Freneau's *National Gazette*,[110] and his attempt to undermine Hamilton, nearly led George Washington to dismiss Jefferson from his cabinet.[111] Though Jefferson left the cabinet voluntarily, Washington never forgave him, and never spoke to him again.[111]

George Washington by Rembrandt Peale, De Young Museum (ca. 1850)

The Residence Act of 1790, which Washington signed, authorized the President to select the specific location of the permanent seat of the government, which would be located along the Potomac River. The Act authorized the President to appoint three commissioners to survey and acquire property for this seat. Washington personally oversaw this effort throughout his term in office. In 1791, the commissioners named the permanent seat of government "The City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia" to honor Washington. In 1800, the Territory of Columbia became the District of Columbia when the federal government moved to the site according to the provisions of the Residence Act.[112]

In 1791 partly as a result of the Copper Panic of 1789, Congress imposed an excise tax on distilled spirits, which led to protests in frontier districts, especially Pennsylvania. By 1794, after Washington ordered the protesters to appear in U.S. district court, the protests turned into full-scale defiance of federal authority known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The federal army was too small to be used, so Washington invoked the Militia Act of 1792 to summon militias from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey.[113] The governors sent the troops and Washington took command, marching into the rebellious districts. The rebels dispersed and there was no fighting, as Washington's forceful action proved the new government could protect itself. These events marked the first time under the new constitution that the federal government used strong military force to exert authority over the states and citizens.[114]

Foreign affairs

In February 1793 a major war broke out between conservative Great Britain and its allies and revolutionary France, launching an era of large-scale warfare that engulfed Europe until 1815. Washington, with cabinet approval, proclaimed American neutrality. The revolutionary government of France sent diplomat Edmond-Charles Genêt, called "Citizen Genêt", to America. Genêt was welcomed with great enthusiasm and propagandized the case for France in the French war against Great Britain, and for this purpose promoted a network of new Democratic Societies in major cities. He issued French letters of marque and reprisal to French ships manned by American sailors so they could capture British

Miniature Portrait of Washington by Robert Field (1800)

merchant ships. Washington, warning and mistrustful of the influence of Illuminism that had been so strong in the French Revolution (as recounted by John Robison and Abbé Augustin Barruel) and its Reign of Terror, demanded the French government recall Genêt, and denounced the societies.[115]

Hamilton and Washington designed the Jay Treaty to normalize trade relations with Great Britain, remove them from western forts, and resolve financial debts left over from the Revolution.[116] John Jay negotiated and signed the treaty on November 19, 1794. The Jeffersonians supported France and strongly attacked the treaty. Washington's strong support mobilized public opinion and proved decisive in securing ratification in the Senate by the necessary two-thirds majority.[117] The British agreed to depart from their forts around the Great Lakes, subsequently the United States-Canadian boundary had to be re-adjusted, numerous pre-Revolutionary debts were liquidated, and the British opened their West Indies colonies to American trade. Most importantly, the treaty delayed war with Great Britain and instead brought a decade of prosperous trade with Great Britain. The treaty angered the French and became a central issue in many political debates.[118] Relations with France deteriorated after the treaty was signed, leaving his successor, John Adams, with the prospect of war.[119][120]

Farewell Address

Main article: George Washington's Farewell Address

Washington's Farewell Address (issued as a public letter in 1796) was one of the most influential statements of republicanism. Drafted primarily by Washington himself, with help from Hamilton, it gives advice on the necessity and importance of national union, the value of the Constitution and the rule of law, the evils of political parties, and the proper virtues of a republican people. He called morality "a necessary spring of popular government". He said, "Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."[121]

Washington's Farewell Address (September 19, 1796)

Washington's public political address warned against foreign influence in domestic affairs and American meddling in European affairs. He warned against bitter partisanship in domestic politics and called for men to move beyond partisanship and serve the common good. He warned against "permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world",[122] saying the United States must concentrate primarily on American interests. He counseled friendship and commerce with all nations, but warned against involvement in European wars and entering into long-term "entangling" alliances. The address quickly set American values regarding foreign affairs.[123]

Retirement (1797–1799)

After retiring from the presidency in March 1797, Washington returned to Mount Vernon with a profound sense of relief. He devoted much time to his plantations and other business interests, including his distillery which produced its first batch of spirits in February 1797.[124] As Chernow (2010) explains, his plantation operations were at best marginally profitable. The lands out west yielded little income because they were under attack by Indians and the squatters living there refused to pay him rent. Most Americans assumed he was rich because of the well-known "glorified façade of wealth and grandeur" at Mount Vernon.[125] Historians estimate his estate was worth about $1 million in 1799 dollars, equivalent to about $18 million in 2009 purchasing power.[126]

By 1798, relations with France had deteriorated to the point that war seemed imminent, and on July 4, 1798, President Adams offered Washington a commission as lieutenant general and Commander-in-chief of the armies raised or to be raised for service in a prospective war. He reluctantly accepted, and served as the senior officer of the United States Army between July 13, 1798, and December 14, 1799. He participated in the planning for a Provisional Army to meet any emergency that might arise, but avoided involvement in details as much as possible; he delegated most of the work, including leadership of the army, to Hamilton.[127][128]

Death

Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon, Virginia

On Thursday, December 12, 1799, Washington spent several hours inspecting his plantation on horseback, in snow, hail, and freezing rain—later that evening eating his supper without changing from his wet clothes.[129] That Friday he awoke with a severe sore throat and became increasingly hoarse as the day progressed, yet still rode out in the heavy snow, marking trees on the estate that he wanted cut. Sometime around 3 a.m. that Saturday, he suddenly awoke with severe difficulty breathing and almost completely unable to speak or swallow.[129] A firm believer in bloodletting, a standard medical practice of that era which he had used to treat various ailments of enslaved Africans on his plantation, he ordered estate overseer Albin Rawlins to remove half a pint of his blood. A total of three physicians were sent for including Washington's personal physician Dr. James Craik[130] along with Dr. Gustavus Brown and Dr. Elisha Dick. Craik and Brown thought that Washington had what they diagnosed as "quinsey" or "quincy", while Dick, the younger man, thought the condition was more serious or a "violent inflammation of the throat". [131] By the time the three physicians had finished their treatments and bloodletting of the President, there had been a massive volume of bloodloss—half or more of his total blood content being removed over the course of just a few hours.[129][132][133] Recognizing that the bloodletting and other treatments were failing, Dr. Dick proposed performing an emergency tracheotomy, a procedure that few American physicians were familiar with at the time, as a last-ditch effort to save Washington's life; but the other two doctors rejected this proposal.[129][134]

Washington died at home around 10 p.m. on Saturday, December 14, 1799, aged 67. In his journal, Lear recorded Washington's last words as being "'Tis well."[135]

The diagnosis of Washington's final illness and the immediate cause of his death have been subjects of debate since the day he died.[133][129][136] In the days immediately following his death, Craik and Dick's published account stated that they felt his symptoms had been consistent with what they called "*cynanche trachealis*", a term of that period for describing severe inflammation of the structures of the upper airway.[137][134][133] Even at that early date, there were accusations of medical malpractice, with some believing that Washington had been bled to death.[133][134] Various modern medical authors have speculated that Washington probably died from a severe case of epiglottitis which was complicated by the given treatments (all of which were accepted medical practice in Washington's day)—most notably the massive deliberate bloodloss, which almost certainly caused hypovolemic shock.[Note 8]

Throughout the world, men and women were saddened by Washington's death. Napoleon ordered 10 days of mourning throughout France; in the United States, thousands wore mourning clothes for months.[138] To protect their privacy, Martha Washington burned the correspondence between her husband and her following his death. Only a total of five letters between the couple are known to have survived, two letters from Martha to George and three from him to Martha.[139][140]

On December 18, 1799, a funeral was held at Mount Vernon, where his body was interred.[141] Congress passed a joint resolution to construct a marble monument in the United States Capitol for his body, supported by Martha. In December 1800, the United States House passed an appropriations bill for $200,000 to build the mausoleum, which was to be a pyramid that had a base 100 feet (30 m) square. Southern opposition to the plan defeated the measure because they felt it was best to have his body remain at Mount Vernon.[142]

In 1831, for the centennial of his birth, a new tomb was constructed to receive his remains. That year, an unsuccessful attempt was made to steal the body of Washington.[143] Despite this, a joint Congressional committee in early 1832 debated the removal of Washington's body from Mount Vernon to a crypt in the Capitol, built by Charles Bulfinch in the 1820s. Southern opposition was intense, antagonized by an ever-growing rift between North and South. Congressman Wiley Thompson of Georgia expressed the fear of Southerners when he said:

> Remove the remains of our venerated Washington from their association with the remains of his consort and his ancestors, from Mount Vernon and from his native State, and deposit them in this capitol, and then let a severance of the Union occur, and behold the remains of Washington on a shore foreign to his native soil.[142]

His remains were moved on October 7, 1837 to the new tomb constructed at Mount Vernon, presented by John Struthers of Philadelphia.[144] After the ceremony, the inner vault's door was closed and the key was thrown into the Potomac.[145]

Legacy

Main article: George Washington's legacy

As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, hero of the revolution and the first president of the United States, George Washington's legacy remains among the greatest in American history. Congressman Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, a Revolutionary War comrade, famously eulogized Washington:[146]

> First in war—first in peace—and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and enduring scenes of private life; pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding, his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting. To his equals he was condescending, to his inferiors kind, and to the dear object of his affections exemplarily tender; correct throughout, vice shuddered in his presence, and virtue always felt his fostering hand; the purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues. His last scene comported with the whole tenor of his life—although in extreme pain, not a sigh, not a groan escaped him; and with undisturbed serenity he closed his well-spent life. Such was the man America has lost—such was the man for whom our nation mourns.

The *Constable-Hamilton Portrait* by Gilbert Stuart, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (1797)

Lee's words set the standard by which Washington's overwhelming reputation was impressed upon the American memory. Washington set many precedents for the national government, and the presidency in particular, and was called the "Father of His Country" as early as 1778.[Note 9][147][148][149] Washington's Birthday (celebrated on Presidents' Day), is a federal holiday in the United States.[150]

During the United States Bicentennial year, George Washington was posthumously appointed to the grade of General of the Armies of the United States by the congressional joint resolution Public Law 94-479 passed on January 19, 1976, with an effective appointment date of July 4, 1976.[67] This restored Washington's position as the highest-ranking military officer in U.S. history.[Note 10]

See also: Historical rankings of Presidents of the United States and Cultural depictions of George Washington

Cherry tree

See also: Parson Weems#The cherry-tree anecdote

The most famous story about Washington's childhood is that he chopped down his father's favorite cherry tree and admitted the deed when questioned: "I can't tell a lie, Pa." The anecdote was first reported by biographer Parson Weems, who after Washington's death interviewed people who knew him as a child over a half-century earlier. The Weems text was very widely reprinted throughout the 19th century, for example in McGuffey *Readers.* Adults wanted children to learn moral lessons from history, especially as taught by example from the lives of great national heroes like Washington. After 1890 however, historians insisted on scientific research methods to validate every statement, and there was no documentation for this anecdote apart from Weems' report that he learned it in an interview with an old person. Joseph Rodman in 1904 noted that Weems plagiarized other Washington tales from published fiction set in England, but no one has found an alternative source for the cherry tree story.[151][152]

Monuments and memorials

Washington Monument

Starting with victory in their Revolution, there were many proposals to build a monument to Washington. After his death, Congress authorized a suitable memorial in the national capital, but the decision was reversed when the Republicans took control of Congress in 1801. The Republicans were dismayed that Washington had become the symbol of the Federalist Party; furthermore, the values of Republicanism seemed hostile to the idea of building monuments to powerful men.[153] Further political squabbling, along with the North-South division on the Civil War, blocked the completion of the Washington Monument until the late 19th century. By that time, Washington had the image of a national hero who could be celebrated by both North and South, and memorials to him were no longer controversial.[154] Predating the obelisk on the National Mall by several decades, the first public memorial to Washington was built by the citizens of Boonsboro, Maryland, in 1827.[155]

George Washington's likeness under construction on Mount Rushmore

Today, Washington's face and image are often used as national symbols of the United States.[156] He appears on contemporary currency, including the one-dollar bill and the quarter coin, and on U.S. postage stamps. Along with appearing on the first postage stamps issued by the U.S. Post Office in 1847,[157] Washington, together with Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, and Lincoln, is depicted in stone at the Mount Rushmore Memorial. The Washington Monument, one of the best known American landmarks, was built in his honor. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia, was constructed between 1922 and 1932 with voluntary contributions from all 52 local governing bodies of the Freemasons in the United States.[158][159]

Lieutenant General George Washington by Clark Mills, Washington Circle, Washington, D.C. (1860)

Many places and entities have been named in honor of Washington. Washington's name became that of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., one of two national capitals across the globe to be named after an American president (the other is Monrovia, Liberia). The state of Washington is the only state to be named after a United States President.[160] George Washington University and Washington University in St. Louis were named for him, as was Washington and Lee University (once Washington Academy), which was renamed due to Washington's large endowment in 1796. Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland (established by Maryland state charter in 1782) was supported by Washington during his

lifetime with a 50 guineas pledge,[161] and with service on the college's Board of Visitors and Governors until 1789 (when Washington was elected President).[162] According to the US Census Bureau's 1993 geographic data, Washington is the 17th most common street name in the United States,[163] and the only person's name so honored.[Note 11]

There are many "Washington Monuments" in the United States, including two well-known equestrian statues, one in Manhattan and one in Richmond, Virginia. The first statue to show Washington on horseback was dedicated in 1856 and is located in Manhattan's Union Square.[164] The second statue is known as either the Virginia Washington Monument or as the George Washington Equestrian Statue[165] and was unveiled in 1858.[165][166] It was the second American statue of Washington on horseback[166] but figures prominently in the official seal of the Confederate States of America.[165][167]

A marble statue of Washington was made from life by sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon, and now sits in the Rotunda of the State Capitol in Richmond, Virginia. A duplicate, one of 22 bronze exact replicas,[168] was given to the British in 1921 by the Commonwealth of Virginia and now stands in front of the National Gallery at Trafalgar Square.[169]

In 1917, the 886 Washingtonia asteroid was named in his honor.

Papers

Main article: The Papers of George Washington

The serious collection and publication of Washington's documentary record began with the pioneer work of Jared Sparks in the 1830s, *Life and Writings of George Washington* (12 vols., 1834–1837). *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799* (1931–44) is a 37 volume set edited by John C. Fitzpatrick. It contains over 17,000 letters and documents and is available online from the University of Virginia.[170]

The definitive letterpress edition of his writings was begun by the University of Virginia in 1968, and today comprises 52 published volumes, with more to come. It contains everything written by Washington, or signed by him, together with most of his incoming letters. Part of the collection is available online from the University of Virginia.[171]

Personal property auction record

On June 22, 2012, George Washington‘s personal annotated copy of the “Acts Passed at a Congress of the United States of America” from 1789, which includes The Constitution of the United States and a draft of the Bill of Rights, was sold at Christie's for a record $9,826,500, with fees the final cost, to The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. This was the record for a document sold at auction.[172]

Personal life

Along with Martha's biological family, George Washington had a close relationship with his nephew and heir, Bushrod Washington, son of George's younger brother, John Augustine Washington. After his uncle's death, Bushrod became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. George, however, apparently did not get along well with his mother, Mary Ball Washington (Augustine's second wife), who was a very demanding and difficult person.[173]

The Washington Family by Edward Savage, painted between 1789 and 1796, shows (from left to right): George Washington Parke Custis, George Washington, Eleanor Parke Custis, Martha Washington, and an enslaved servant: probably William Lee or Christopher Sheels.

As a young man, Washington had red hair.[174] A popular myth is that he wore a wig, as was the fashion among some at the time. However, Washington did not wear a wig; instead, he powdered his hair,[175] as is represented in several portraits, including the well-known, unfinished Gilbert Stuart depiction, *The Athenaeum portrait*.[176]

Washington had unusually great physical strength that amazed younger men. Jefferson called Washington "the best horseman of his age", and both American and European observers praised his riding; the horsemanship benefited his hunting, a favorite hobby. Washington was an excellent dancer and frequently attended the theater, often referencing Shakespeare in letters.[177] He drank in moderation and precisely recorded gambling wins and losses, but Washington disliked the excessive drinking, gambling, smoking, and profanity that was common in colonial Virginia. Although he grew tobacco, he eventually stopped smoking, and considered drunkenness a man's worst vice; Washington was glad that post-Revolutionary Virginia society was less likely to "force [guests] to drink and to make it an honor to send them home drunk."[178]

Washington suffered from problems with his teeth throughout his life. He lost his first adult tooth when he was twenty-two and had only one left by the time he became President.[179] John Adams claims he lost them because he used them to crack Brazil nuts but modern historians suggest the mercury oxide, which he was given to treat illnesses such as smallpox and malaria, probably contributed to the loss. He had several sets of false teeth made, four of them by a dentist named John Greenwood.[179] Contrary to popular belief, none of the sets were made from wood. The set made when he became President was carved from hippopotamus and elephant ivory, held together with gold springs.[180] Dental problems left Washington in constant pain, for which he took laudanum.[181] This distress may be apparent in many of the portraits painted while he was still in office,[181] including the one still used on the $1 bill.[176][Note 12]

Slavery

Main article: George Washington and slavery

Washington was the only prominent Founding Father to arrange in his will for the manumission of all his slaves following his death.[182] He privately opposed slavery as an institution which he viewed as economically unsound and morally indefensible. He also regarded the divisiveness of his countrymen's feelings about slavery as a potentially mortal threat to the unity of the nation.[183] Yet, as general of the

army, president of the Constitutional Convention, and the first president of the United States, he never publicly challenged the institution of slavery,[184] possibly because he wanted to avoid provoking a split in the new republic over so inflammatory an issue.[185]

Washington had owned slaves since the death of his father in 1743, when at the age of eleven, he inherited 10 slaves. At the time of his marriage to Martha Custis in 1759, he personally owned at least 36 slaves, which meant he had achieved the status of a major planter (historians defined this in the Upper South as owning 20 or more slaves). The wealthy widow Martha brought at least 85 "dower slaves" to Mount Vernon by inheriting a third of her late husband's estate. Using his wife's great wealth, Washington bought more land, tripling the size of the plantation at Mount Vernon, and purchased the additional slaves needed to work it. By 1774, he paid taxes on 135 slaves (this figure does not include the "dowers"). The last record of a slave purchase by him was in 1772, although he later received some slaves in repayment of debts.[186] Washington also used some hired staff[124] and white indentured servants; in April 1775, he offered a reward for the return of two runaway white servants.[187]

Washington came to oppose slavery on both moral and economic grounds. Before the American Revolution, he had expressed no moral reservations about slavery. But by 1779, he would tell his manager at Mount Vernon that he wished to sell his slaves when the war ended, if the Americans were victorious.[188] He concluded that maintaining a large, and increasingly elderly, slave population at Mount Vernon was no longer economically profitable, and that people who were compelled to work would never work hard.[189] Washington could not legally sell the "dower slaves", and because they had long intermarried with his own slaves, he could not sell his slaves without breaking up families, which he wanted to avoid.[190] In 1786, Washington wrote to Robert Morris, saying, "There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of slavery."[191] Still, according to historian John Ferling, Washington also wanted the material benefits of owning slaves and wanted to leave his wife's family a large inheritance.[192]

As president, following the transfer of the national capital to Pennsylvania in 1790, Washington brought eight enslaved people to work for him in the President's House in Philadelphia, where state law would have automatically granted freedom to any slaves who had resided in the state for more than 6 months. He circumvented that provision of the law by maintaining that he was not a Pennsylvania resident and ensuring that neither he nor any of his slaves stayed in the state for more than six months at a time.[193] When one of the slaves, Oney Judge, a personal attendant to Martha, escaped, Washington complained that the slave had fled "without the least provocation," and he secretly sent agents to hunt her down. Martha urged Washington to advertise a reward for her capture, and the ad (http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/Oney_Judge_Runaway_Ad.jpg) was placed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 24, 1796. When the escaped former slave was spotted in New Hampshire, she said that she would agree to return out of affection for the Washington family, but only if they would guarantee her freedom, a proposal the Washingtons refused. They were still trying, surreptitiously, to recapture her two years later.[194][195] Another slave, Hercules who served as Washington's chef in the Presidential House in Philadelphia, managed to escape from Mount Vernon despite Washington's suspicions that he had been planning it.[196][197] Washington would eventually replace the slaves at the President's House with immigrant German indentured servants.

By 1794, as he contemplated retirement, Washington began organizing his affairs so that in his will he could free all the slaves whom he owned outright.[198] As historian Gordon S. Wood writes in his review of Joseph Ellis' biography of Washington, "He did this in the teeth of opposition from his relatives, his

neighbors, and perhaps even Martha. It was a courageous act, and one of his greatest legacies."[189] At the time of Washington's death in 1799, 317 slaves lived at Mount Vernon: 123 were owned by Washington himself, 154 were held by his wife as "dower slaves", and 40 others were rented from a neighbor.[199] Washington's will provided for all of his slaves to be freed upon the death of his widow, but she chose to free them about 12 months after his death. The will also provided for the training of the younger former-slaves in useful skills and for the creation of an old-age pension fund for the older ones.[200]

Religion

Main article: George Washington and religion

The exact nature of Washington's religious beliefs has been debated by historians and biographers for over two hundred years. Although he visited several denominations in his public life, he was primarily affiliated with the Anglican and, later, Episcopal church. He served as a vestryman and as church warden for both Fairfax Parish in Alexandria and Truro Parish,[201] administrative positions that, like all positions in Virginia while it had an official religion, required one to swear they would not speak or act in a way that did not conform to the tenets of the Church.

Stained glass window of Washington kneeling in prayer, Capitol Prayer Room, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.

Like the deists Washington avoided the word "God" and instead used the term "Providence".[1] He never spoke of Jesus, though he did refer to Christianity as the religion of Christ.

Eyewitness accounts exist of Washington engaging in private devotions.[202]

Washington frequently accompanied his wife to church services. Although third-hand reports say he took communion,[203] he is usually characterized as never or rarely participating in the rite.[204][205] He would regularly leave services before communion with the other non-communicants (as was the custom of the day), until, after being admonished by a rector, he ceased attending at all on communion Sundays.[206]

Chernow, in a 2010 podcast, summed up Washington's religious views:

> There has been a huge controversy, to put it mildly, about Washington's religious beliefs. Before the Revolutionary War he was Anglican – Church of England – which meant after the war, he was Episcopalian. So, he was clearly Christian ... He was quite intensely religious, because even though he uses the word Providence, he constantly sees Providence as an active force in life, particularly in American life. I mean, every single victory in war he credits to Providence. The miracle of the Constitutional Convention he credits to Providence. The creation of the federal government and the prosperity of the early republic, he credits to Providence ... I was struck at how frequently in his letters he's referring to Providence, and it's Providence where there's a sense of design and purpose, which sounds to me very much like religion ... Unfortunately, this particular issue has become very very politicized.[2]

Freemasonry

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria, Virginia

Washington was initiated into Freemasonry in 1752.[207] He had a high regard for the Masonic Order and often praised it, but he seldom attended lodge meetings. He was attracted by the movement's dedication to the Enlightenment principles of rationality, reason and fraternalism; the American lodges did not share the anti-clerical perspective that made the European lodges so controversial.[208] In 1777, a convention of Virginia lodges recommended Washington to be the Grand Master of the newly established Grand Lodge of Virginia; however, Washington declined, due to his necessity to lead the Continental Army at a critical stage, and because he had never been installed as Master or Warden of a lodge, he did not consider it Masonically legal to serve as Grand Master.[209] In 1788, Washington, with his personal consent, was named Master in the Virginia charter of Alexandria Lodge No. 22.[210]

Postage and currency

See also: US Presidents on US postage stamps

Since 1847, one of the defining hallmarks of a U.S. President is his appearance on U.S. currency and postage. George Washington appears on contemporary U.S. currency, including the one-dollar bill and the U.S. quarter dollar. On U.S. postage stamps Washington, along with Benjamin Franklin, appeared on the nation's first postage stamps in 1847. Throughout U.S. postal history Washington appears on many postage issues, more than all other presidents combined.[157]

Washington, issue of 1862, 24c

Washington, issue of 1895, 2c

Washington-Franklin Issues of 1908 - 1923, 5c

Washington Valley F issue of 1

See also

- List of federal judges appointed by George Washington
- List of Notable Freemasons
- List of Presidents of the United States, sortable by previous experience

Notes

1. ^ *a* *b* Contemporary records, which used the Julian calendar and the Annunciation Style of enumerating years, recorded his birth as February 11, 1731. The provisions of the British Calendar (New Style) Act 1750, implemented in 1752, altered the official British dating method to the Gregorian calendar with the start of the year on January 1 (it had been March 25). These changes resulted in dates being moved forward 11 days, and for those between January 1 and March 25, an advance of one year. For a further explanation, see: Old Style and New Style dates.
2. ^ *a* *b* Engber, Daniel (January 18, 2006). "What's Benjamin Franklin's Birthday?" (http://www.slate.com/id/2134455/). *Slate*. Retrieved 2011-05-21. (Both Franklin's and Washington's confusing birth dates are clearly explained.)
3. ^ Ellis and Ferling, for example, do not discuss this stance in reference to Washington's French and Indian War service, and cast it almost exclusively in terms of his negative experiences dealing with the Continental Congress during the Revolution. See Ellis (2004, p. 218); Ferling (2009, pp. 32–33, 200, 258–272, 316). Don Higginbotham places Washington's first formal advocacy of a strong central government in 1783. Higginbotham (2002, p. 37).
4. ^ The term comes from the Roman strategy used by General Fabius against Hannibal's invasion in the Second Punic War.
5. ^ Ferling and Ellis argue that Washington favored Fabian tactics and Higginbotham denies it. Ferling (2010, pp. 212, 264); Ellis (2004, p. 11); Higginbotham (1971, p. 211).
6. ^ Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress called its presiding officer "President of the United States in Congress Assembled". That person had no executive powers, but the similarity of titles has confused some into thinking there were other presidents before Washington.[102]
7. ^ Under the system in place at the time, each elector cast two votes, with the winner becoming president and the runner-up vice president. All electors in the elections of 1789 and 1792 cast one of their votes for Washington; thus it may be said that he was elected president unanimously.
8. ^ At least three modern medical authors (Wallenborn (1997), Shapiro 1975, Scheidemandel 1976) concluded that Washington most probably died from acute bacterial epiglottitis complicated by the administered treatments. These treatments included multiple doses of calomel (a cathartic or purgative), and extensive bloodletting (with 3.75 total liters of blood being taken, which is at least half of a normal adult's blood-volume).
    - *See Vadakan (2005, Footnotes) for* Shapiro *and* Scheidemandel *references.* Vadakan's article also directly quotes Doctors Craik and Dick's account (as published in the *Times of Alexandria* newspaper) of their treatment of Washington during his fatal illness.
9. ^ The earliest known image in which Washington is identified as the Father of (His/Our/the) Country is in the frontispiece of a 1779 German-language almanac. With calculations by David Rittenhouse and published by Francis Bailey in Lancaster County Pennsylvania, *Der Gantz Neue Nord-Americanishe Calendar* has Fame appearing with an image of Washington, holding a trumpet to her lips from which the words "*Der Landes Vater*" (translated as "the father of the country" or "the father of the land") comes forth.
10. ^ In Bell (2005), William Gardner Bell states that when Washington was recalled back into military service from his retirement in 1798, "Congress passed legislation that would have made him General of the Armies of the United States, but his services were not required in the field and the appointment was not made until the Bicentennial in 1976, when it was bestowed posthumously as a commemorative honor." How many U.S. Army five-star generals have there been and who were they? (http://www.history.army.mil/html/faq/5star.html) states that with Public Law 94-479, President Ford specified that Washington would "rank first among all officers of the Army, past and present. "General of the Armies of the United States" is only associated with two people...one being Washington and the other being John J. Pershing.

11. ^ The rest of the Top 20 street names are all descriptive (Hill, View and so on), arboreal (Pine, Maple, etc.) or numeric (Second, Third, etc.).
12. ^ The Smithsonian Institution states in "The Portrait—George Washington: A National Treasure" that:

    > Stuart admired the sculpture of Washington by French artist Jean-Antoine Houdon, probably because it was based on a life mask and therefore extremely accurate. Stuart explained, "When I painted him, he had just had a set of false teeth inserted, which accounts for the constrained expression so noticeable about the mouth and lower part of the face. Houdon's bust does not suffer from this defect. I wanted him as he looked at that time." Stuart preferred the Athenaeum pose and, except for the gaze, used the same pose for the Lansdowne painting.[181]

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