Report

GEORGE WASHINGTON

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George Washington (1732-1799), first PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. When Washington retired from public life in 1797, his homeland was vastly different from what it had been when he entered public service in 1749. To each of the principal changes he had made an outstanding contribution. Largely because of his leadership the Thirteen Colonies had become the United States, a sovereign, independent nation.

As commander in chief during the American Revolution, he built a large army, held it together, kept it in a maneuverable condition, and prevented it from being destroyed by a crushing defeat. By keeping the army close to the main force of the British, he prevented them from sending raiding parties into the interior. The British did not risk such forays because of their belief that their remaining forces might be overwhelmed. The British evacuation of Boston in 1776, under Washington's siege, gave security to nearly all New England.

Drawing from his knowledge of the American people and of the way they lived and fought, Washington took advantage of British methods of fighting that were not suited to a semiprimitive environment. He alternated between daring surprise attacks and the patient performance of routine duties. Washington's operations on land alone could not have overcome the British, for their superior navy enabled them to move troops almost at will. A timely use of the French fleet contributed to his crowning victory at Yorktown in 1781.

After the war Washington took a leading part in the making of the CONSTITUTION and the campaign for its ratification. Its success was assured by 1797, at the end of the second term of his presidency. In 1799 the country included nearly all its present-day territory between the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi River.

President Washington acted with CONGRESS to establish the first great executive departments and to lay the foundations of the modern federal judiciary. He directed the creation of a diplomatic service. Three presidential and five congressional elections carried the new government, under the Constitution, through its initial trials.

A national army and navy came into being, and Washington acted with vigor to provide land titles, security, and trade outlets for pioneers of the trans-Allegheny West. His policy procured adequate revenue for the national government and supplied the country with a sound currency, a well-supported public credit, and an efficient network of national banks. Manufacturing and shipping received aid for continuing growth.

In the conduct of public affairs, Washington originated many practices that have survived. He withheld confidential diplomatic documents from the House of Representatives, and made treaties without discussing them in the Senate chamber. Above all, he conferred on the presidency a prestige so great that political leaders afterward esteemed it the highest distinction to occupy the chair he had honored.

Most of the work that engaged Washington had to be achieved through people. He found that success depended on their cooperation and that they would do best if they had faith in causes and leaders. To gain and hold their approval were among his foremost objectives. He thought of people, in the main, as right-minded and dependable, and he believed that a leader should make the best of their good qualities.

As a Virginian, Washington belonged to, attended, and served as warden of the established (Anglican) church. But he did not participate in communion, nor did he adhere to a sectarian creed. He frequently expressed a faith in Divine Providence and a belief that religion is needed to sustain morality in society. As a national leader he upheld the right of every sect to freedom of worship and equality before the law, condemning all forms of bigotry, intolerance, discrimination, and persecution.

Throughout his public life, Washington contended with obstacles and difficulties. His courage and resolution steadied him in danger, and defeat steeled his will. His devotion to his country and his faith in its cause sustained him. Averse to harsh measures, he was generous in victory. "His integrity," wrote Thomas JEFFERSON, "was the most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known. He was, indeed, in every sense of the word, a wise, a good, and a great man."

**Early Career**

George Washington was born in Westmoreland county, Va., on a farm, later known as Wakefield, on Feb. 11, 1731, Old Style (Feb. 22, 1732, New Style). His first American ancestor, John Washington, came to Virginia from England in 1657. This immigrant's descendants remained in the colony and gained a respected place in society. Farming, land buying, trading, milling, and the iron industry were means by which the family rose in the world. George's father, Augustine, had four children by his first wife and six by his second wife, Mary Ball, George's mother. From 1727 to 1735, Augustine lived at Wakefield, on the Potomac River between Popes Creek and Bridges Creek, about 50 miles (80 km) inland and close to the frontier.

Of George's early life little is known. His formal education was slight. He soon revealed a skill in mathematics and surveying so marked as to suggest a gift for practical affairs akin to youthful genius in the arts. Men, plantation life, and the haunts of river, field, and forest were his principal teachers. From 1735 to 1738, Augustine lived at "Little Hunting Creek" (later Mount Vernon). In 1738 he moved to Ferry Farm opposite Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock River. Augustine died when George was 11, leaving several farms. Lawrence, George's half brother, inherited Mount Vernon, where he built the central part of the now famous mansion. Another half brother, Augustine, received Wakefield. Ferry Farm went to George's mother, and it would pass to George after her death.

These farms bounded the world George knew as a boy. He lived and visited at each. Ambitious to gain wealth and eminence, mainly by acquiring land, he was obliged to depend chiefly on his own efforts. His mother once thought of a career for him in the British Navy but was evidently deterred by a report from her brother in England that an obscure colonial youth could not expect more at Britain's hands than a job as a common sailor. George's youthful model was Lawrence, a cultivated gentleman, whom he accompanied on a trip to Barbados, West Indies, in 1751. Here George was stricken with smallpox, which left lasting marks on his face.

When but 15, George was competent as a field surveyor. In 1748 he went as an assistant on a surveying party sent to the Shenandoah Valley by Thomas, 6th Baron Fairfax, a neighbor of Lawrence and owner of vast tracts of land in northern Virginia. A year later George secured a commission as surveyor of Culpeper county. In 1752 he became the manager of a sizable estate when he inherited Mount Vernon on the death of Lawrence.

George's early experiences had taught him the ways of living in the wilderness, had deepened his appreciation of the natural beauty of Virginia, had fostered his interest in the Great West, and had afforded opportunities for acquiring land. The days of his youth had revealed a striving nature. Strength and vigor heightened his enjoyment of activities out of doors. Quick to profit by mistakes, he was otherwise deliberate in thought. Not a fluent talker, he aspired to gain practical knowledge, to acquire agreeable manners, and to excel in his undertakings.

**French and Indian War**

In the early 1750's, Britain and France both strove to occupy the upper Ohio Valley. The French erected Fort Le Boeuf, at Waterford, Pa., and seized a British post, Venango, on the Allegheny River. Alarmed by these acts, Virginia's governor, Robert Dinwiddie, sent Washington late in 1753 on a mission to assert Britain's claim. He led a small party to Fort Le Boeuf, where its commander stated France's determination to possess the disputed area. Returning to Williamsburg, Washington delivered the defiant reply. He also wrote a report which told a vivid winter's tale of wilderness adventure that enhanced his reputation for resourcefulness and daring.

Dinwiddie then put Washington in command of an expedition to guard an intended British fort at the forks of the Ohio, at the present site of Pittsburgh. En route, he learned that the French had expelled the Virginia fort builders and were completing the works, which they named Fort Duquesne. He advanced to Great Meadows, Pa., about 50 miles (80 km) southeast of the fort, where he erected Fort Necessity. On May 28, 1754, occurred one of the most disputed incidents of his career. He ambushed a small French detachment, the commander of which, Joseph Coulon de Villiers, sieur de Jumonville, was killed along with nine of his men. The others were captured. This incident started the French and Indian War. The French claimed that their detachment was on a peaceful mission; Washington thought that it was engaged in spying. He returned to Fort Necessity, which a large French force attacked on July 3. It fell after a day's fighting. In making the surrender, Washington signed a paper that imputed to him the blame for *"l'assassinat"* (murder) of Jumonville. Not versed in French, Washington later explained that he had not understood the meaning of the incriminating word.

By the terms of the surrender, he and his men were permitted to return, disarmed, to the Virginia settlements. The news of his defeat moved Britain to send to Virginia an expedition under Gen. Edward Braddock, whom Washington joined as a voluntary aide-de-camp, without command of troops. Braddock's main force reached a point on the Monongahela River about 7 miles (11 km) southeast of Fort Duquesne where, on July 9, 1755, he suffered a surprise attack and a defeat that ended in disordered flight. Washington's part was that of inspiriting the men. His bravery under fire spread his fame to nearby colonies and abroad. Dinwiddie rewarded him by appointing him, in August, to the command of Virginia's troops, with the rank of colonel.

His new duties excluded him from leadership in the major campaigns of the war, the operations of which were directed by British officials who assigned to Virginia the humdrum task of defending its inland frontiers. No important battles were fought there. Washington drilled his rough and often unsoldierly recruits, stationed them at frontier posts, settled disputes, struggled to maintain order and discipline, labored to procure supplies and to get them transported, strove to have his men paid promptly and provided with shelter and medical care, sought support from the Virginia government, and kept it informed. His command trained him in the management of self-willed men, familiarized him with the leaders of Virginia, and schooled him in the rugged politics of a vigorous society.

The French and Indian War also estranged him from the British. Thereafter, he never expressed a feeling of affection for them. He criticized Braddock for blaming the Virginians as a whole for the shortcomings of a few local contractors. He also thought that Braddock was too slow in his marches. As commander in Virginia, he resented his subordination to a British captain, John Dagworthy, and made a trip to Boston early in 1756 in order to get confirmation of his authority from the British commander in America. He objected that one of his major plans was upset by ill-considered orders from Britain, and in 1758 he disputed with British officers about the best route for an advance to Fort Duquesne. The war ended in such a way as to withhold from him a suitable recognition for his arduous services of nearly six years and to leave him, if not embittered, a somewhat disappointed man.

**Life at Mount Vernon**

Resigning his commission late in 1758, he retired to Mount Vernon. On Jan. 6, 1759, he married Martha Dandridge, widow of Daniel Parke Custis, whose estate included 15,000 acres (6,000 hectares) and 150 slaves. Washington became devoted to Martha's two children by her first marriage, John Parke Custis and Martha Custis.

As a planter, Washington concentrated at first on tobacco raising, keeping exact accounts of costs and profits. He soon learned that it did not pay. British laws required that his exports should be sent to Britain, sold for him by British merchants, and carried in British ships. Also, he had to buy in Britain such foreign finished goods as he needed. On various occasions he complained that his tobacco was damaged on shipboard or sold in England at unduly low prices. He thought that he was often overcharged for freight and insurance, and he objected that British goods sent to him were overpriced, poor in quality, injured in transit, or not the right type or size. Unable to control buying and selling in England, he decided to free himself from bondage to British traders. Hence he reduced his production of tobacco and had his slaves make goods of the type he had imported, especially cloth. He developed a fishery on the Potomac, increased his production of wheat, and operated a mill. He sent fish, wheat, and flour to the West Indies where he obtained foreign products or money with which to buy them.

From the start he was a progressive farmer who promoted reforms to eliminate soil-exhausting practices that prevailed in his day. He strove to improve the quality of his livestock, and to increase the yield of his fields, experimenting with crop rotation, new implements, and fertilizers. His frequent absences on public business hindered his experiments, for they often required his personal direction.

He also dealt in Western lands. Virginia's greatest estates, he wrote, were made "by taking up ... at very low prices the rich back lands" which "are now the most valuable lands we possess." His Western urge had largely inspired his labors during the French and Indian War. At that time, Britain encouraged settlement in the Ohio Valley as a means of gaining it from the French. In July 1754, Governor Dinwiddie offered 200,000 acres (80,000 hectares) in the West to colonial volunteers. Washington became entitled to one of these grants. After the war he bought claims of other veterans, served as agent of the claimants in locating and surveying tracts, and obtained for himself (by July 1773) 10,000 acres (4,000 hectares) along the Ohio between the Little Kanawha and Great Kanawha rivers, and 10,000 acres on the Great Kanawha. In 1775 he sought to settle his Kanawha land with servants.

Washington lived among neighbors who acquiesced in slavery and, if opposed to it, saw no feasible means of doing away with it. In 1775 he endorsed a strong indictment of the slave trade, but in 1776 he opposed the royal governor of Virginia who had urged slaves of patriot masters to gain freedom by running away and joining the British army to fight for the king. When Washington was famous as a world figure he dissociated himself, publicly, from slavery, although he continued to own many slaves. He favored emancipation if decreed by law. In his will he ordered that his slaves be freed after the death of Mrs. Washington.

**Early Political Activity**

After expelling France from North America, Britain decided to reserve most of the Ohio Valley as a fur-producing area. By the Quebec Act (1774), Britain detached from Virginia the land it claimed north of the Ohio River and added it to the royal Province of Quebec. This act struck at Washington's plans because it aimed to leave the Indians in possession of the north bank of the Ohio, where they could menace any settlers on his lands across the river. In April 1775 the governor of Virginia, John Murray, 4th earl of Dunmore, canceled Washington's Kanawha claims on the pretext that his surveyor had not been legally qualified to make surveys. At this time, also, Britain directed Dunmore to stop granting land in the West. Thus Washington stood to lose the fruits of his efforts during the French and Indian War.

As a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses from 1759 to 1774, Washington opposed the Stamp Act, which imposed crushing taxes on the colonies for the support of a large British army in America. Virginia, he said, was already paying enough to Britain: its control of Virginia's trade enabled it to acquire "our whole substance." When the Townshend Revenue Act (1767) levied taxes on tea, paper, lead, glass, and painter's colors, Washington pledged not to buy such articles ("paper only excepted"). By mid-1774 he believed that British laws, such as the Boston Port Act and the Massachusetts Government Act, showed that Britain intended to do away with self-government in the colonies and to subject them to a tyrannical rule. In May he joined other Virginia burgesses in proposing that a continental congress should be held, and that a "provincial congress" be created to take the place of the Virginia assembly, which Dunmore had disbanded.

Washington was chairman of a meeting at Alexandria in July that adopted the Fairfax Resolves, and he was elected one of the delegates to the 1st Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia in September. There the Fairfax Resolves provided the basis for the principal agreement signed by its members--the Continental Association. This forbade the importing into the colonies of all goods from Britain and all goods subject to British taxes. Moreover, it authorized all towns and counties to set up committees empowered to enforce its provisions. The Continental Congress thus enacted law and created a new government dedicated to resisting British rule. Washington spent the winter of 1774-1775 in Virginia, organizing independent military companies which were to aid the local committees in enforcing the Continental Association and, if need be, to fight against British troops.

**The American Revolution**

When the 2d Continental Congress met on May 10, 1775, the fighting near Boston (Lexington-Concord) had occurred. The British Army was cooped up in Boston, surrounded by nearly 14,000 New England militiamen. On Feb. 2, 1775, the British House of Commons had declared Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion. This imputed to the people of that colony the crime of treason. Washington, by appearing at the 2d Congress in uniform (the only member thus attired), expressed his support of Massachusetts and his readiness to fight against Britain. In June, Congress created the Continental Army and incorporated into it the armed New Englanders around Boston, undertaking to supply and pay them and to provide them with generals. On June 15, Washington was unanimously elected general and commander in chief.

The tribute of a unanimous election reflected his influence in Congress, which endured throughout the American Revolution despite disagreements among the members. In 1775 they divided into three groups. The militants, led by Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Richard Henry Lee, favored vigorous military action against Britain. Most of them foresaw the need of effective aid from France, which the colonies could obtain only by offering their commerce. Before that could be done they must become independent states. Another group, the moderates, represented by Benjamin Harrison and Robert Morris, hoped that a vigorous prosecution of the war would force Britain to make a pro-American settlement. Only as a last resort would the moderates turn to independence. The third group, the conciliationists, led by John Dickinson, favored defensive measures and looked to "friends of America" in England to work out a peace that would safeguard American rights of self-taxation, thereby keeping the colonies in the British Empire. Washington agreed with the militants and the moderates as to the need for offensive action. The conciliationists and the moderates, as men of fortune, trusted him not to use the army to effect an internal revolution that would strip them of their property and political influence.

Early in the war, Washington and the army had to act as if they were agents of a full-grown nation. Yet Congress, still in an embryonic state, could not provide suddenly a body of law covering all the issues that figure in a major war. Many actions had to be left to Washington's discretion. His commission (June 17, 1775) stated: "You are hereby vested with full power and authority to act as you shall think for the good and welfare of the service." There was a danger that a strong general might use the army to set up a military dictatorship. It was therefore urgent that the army would be under a civil authority. Washington agreed with the other leaders that Congress must be the superior power. Yet the army needed a good measure of freedom of action. A working arrangement gave such freedom, while preserving the authority of Congress. If there was no need for haste, Washington advised that certain steps should be taken, and Congress usually approved. In emergencies, he acted on his own authority and at once reported what he had done. If Congress disapproved, he was so informed, and the action was not repeated. If Congress did nothing, its silence signified assent. So attentive was Washington to Congress, and so careful was he when acting on his own initiative, that no serious conflict clouded his relations with the civil authority.

**Washington Takes Command**

When he took command of the army at Cambridge on July 3, 1775, the majority of Congress was reluctant to adopt measures that denoted independence, although favoring an energetic conduct of the war. The government of Lord North decided to send an overpowering army to America, and to that end tried to recruit 20,000 mercenaries in Russia. On August 23, George III issued the Royal Proclamation of Rebellion, which branded Washington as guilty of treason and threatend him with "condign punishment." Early in October, Washington concluded that in order to win the war the colonies must become independent.

In August 1775, Washington insisted to Gen. Thomas Gage, the British commander at Boston, that American officers captured by the British should be treated as prisoners of war--not as criminals (that is, rebels). In this, Washington asserted that the conflict was a war between two separate powers and that the Union was on a par with Britain. He defended the rank of American officers as being drawn from "the uncorrupted choice of a brave and free people, the purest source and original fountain of all power." In August-September he initiated an expedition for the conquest of Canada and invited the king's subjects there to join the 13 colonies in an "indissoluble union." About the same time he created a navy of six vessels, which he sent out to capture British ships bringing supplies to Boston. Congress had not favored authorizing a navy, then deemed to be an arm of an independent state. Early in November, Washington inaugurated a campaign for arresting, disarming, and detaining the Tories. Because their leaders were agents of the British crown, his policy struck at the highest symbol of Britain's authority. He urged the opening of American ports to French ships and used his prestige and the strength of the army to encourage leaders of the provincial governments to adopt measures that committed their colonies to independence. His influence was evident in the campaigns for independence in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York. He contributed as much to the decision for independence as any man. The Declaration of Independence was formally adopted on July 4, 1776.

**The Military Campaigns**

Washington's military record during the revolution is highly creditable. His first success came on March 17, 1776, when the British evacuated Boston. He had kept them surrounded and immobilized during a siege of more than eight months. He had organized a first American army and had recruited and trained a second. His little fleet had distressed the British by intercepting their supplies. Lack of powder and cannon long kept him from attacking. Once they had been procured, he occupied, on March 4-5, 1776, a strong position on Dorchester Heights, Mass., where he could threaten to bombard the British camp. The evacuation made him a hero by proving that the Americans could overcome the British in a major contest. For five months thereafter the American cause was brightened by the glow of this outstanding victory--a perilous time when confidence was needed to sustain morale.

Washington's next major achievement was made in the second half of 1776, when he avoided a serious defeat and held the army together in the face of overwhelming odds. In July and August the British invaded southern New York with 34,000 well-equipped troops. In April, Washington's force had consisted of only 7,500 effective men. Early in June, Congress had called 19,800 militia for service in Canada and New York. In a few weeks Washington had to weld a motley throng into a unified force. Even then his men were outnumbered three to two by the British. Although he suffered a series of minor defeats (Brooklyn Heights, August 26-29; Kip's Bay, September 15; Harlem Heights, September 16; White Plains, October 28; Fort Washington, November 16), the wonder is that he escaped a catastrophe.

After the setbacks in New York, he retreated through New Jersey, crossing the Delaware River in December. The American cause now sank to its lowest ebb. Washington's main army, reduced to 3,000 men, seemed about to disintegrate. It appeared that the British could march easily to Philadelphia. Congress moved to Baltimore. In these dire straits Washington made a dramatic move that ended an agonizing campaign in a blaze of glory. On the stormy night of December 25-26 he recrossed the Delaware, surprised Britain's Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, and captured 1,000 prisoners. This move gave him a striking position in central New Jersey, whereupon the British ceased offensive operations and pulled back to the vicinity of New York.

On Oct. 17, 1777, Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga, N. Y., his army of 5,000 men--all that were left of the 9,500 who had invaded New York from Canada. To this great victory Washington made two contributions. First, in September 1775, he sent an expedition to conquer Canada. Although that aim was not attained, the project put the Americans in control of the approaches to northern New York, particularly Lake Champlain. Burgoyne encountered so many obstacles there that his advance was seriously delayed. That in turn gave time for the militia of New England to turn out in force and to contribute decisively to his defeat. Second, in 1777, Washington conducted a campaign near Philadelphia that prevented Gen. William Howe from using his large army for the relief of Burgoyne. Washington's success at Trenton had placed him where he could both defend Philadelphia and strike at British-held New York. Howe had thereupon undertaken a campaign with the hope of occupying Philadelphia and of crushing Washington's army. Although Washington suffered minor defeats--at Brandywine Creek on September 11 and at Germantown on October 4--he again saved his army and, by engaging Howe in Pennsylvania, made possible the isolation and eventual defeat of Burgoyne.

Unable to overcome Washington in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, the British shifted their main war effort to the South. In 1781 their invasion of Virginia enabled Washington to strike a blow that virtually ended the war. France had joined the United States as a full-fledged ally in February 1778, thereby putting French troops at Washington's disposal and, more important, giving him the support of a strong navy which he deemed essential to victory. His plan of 1781 called for an advance from New York to Virginia of a large American-French army which would act in concert with the French fleet, to which was assigned the task of controlling Chesapeake Bay, thereby preventing an escape by sea of the British forces under Lord Cornwallis. Washington's army trapped Cornwallis at Yorktown, Va., on the York River, and the French admiral, count de Grasse, gained command of the bay. Outnumbered, surrounded on land, and cut off by sea, Cornwallis surrendered his 7,000 troops on October 19. Although Britain still had large forces in America, the Yorktown blow, along with war weariness induced by six years of failure, moved the war party in England to resign in March 1782 in favor of a ministry willing to make peace on the basis of the independence of the United States.

**Political Leadership During the War**

Washington's political leadership during the Revolution suggests that of an active president of later times. He labored constantly to keep people of all classes at work for the cause. He held a central position between two extremes. He strove to retain the support of the common people, who made up the army and--as farmers and workers--produced the supplies. Composing the left wing, they cherished democratic ideas that they hoped to realize by popular rule in the state governments. Washington appealed to them by his faith in popular sovereignty, his sponsorship of a republic and the rights of man, and his unceasing efforts to assure that his soldiers were well paid and adequately supplied with food, clothing, arms, medical care, and shelter. His personal bravery, industry, and attention to duty also endeared him to the rank and file, as did his sharing of dangers and hardships, as symbolized by his endurance at Valley Forge during the bleak winter of 1777-1778. The right wing consisted of conservatives whose leaders were men of wealth. Washington retained their confidence by refusing to use the army to their detriment and by insisting on order, discipline, and respect for leadership. It was his aim that the two wings should move in harmony. In this he succeeded so fully that the American Revolution is rare among political upheavals for its absence of purges, reigns of terror, seizures of power, and liquidation of opponents.

Before 1778, Washington was closely affiliated with the left wing. Afterward, he depended increasingly on the conservatives. In the winter of 1777-1778 there was some talk of replacing him with Gen. Horatio Gates, the popular hero of Saratoga. This estranged Washington from some of the democratic leaders who sponsored Gates. The French alliance, coming after the American people had made heavy sacrifices, tended to relax their efforts now that France would carry much of the burden. These developments lessened the importance of the popular leaders in Washington's counsels and increased the standing of the conservatives. Washington sought maximum aid from France, but also strove to keep the American war effort at a high pitch lest France should become the dominant partner--a result he wished to avoid. His character and tact won the confidence and respect of the French, as typified by the friendship of the Marquis de Lafayette.

In 1782 some of the army officers, irked by the failure of Congress to fulfill a promise concerning their pay, threatened to march to Philadelphia and to use force to obtain satisfaction. In an address on March 15, 1783, Washington persuaded the officers to respect Congress and pledged to seek a peaceful settlement. Congress responded to his appeals by granting the officers five years' full pay, and the crisis ended. It evoked from Washington a striking statement condemning government by mere force. "If men," he wrote, "are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on a matter which may involve the most serious ... consequences, ... reason is of no use to us, the freedom of speech may be taken away, and dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter."

Throughout the war, Washington retained a commanding position in the army. Generals Philip Schuyler, Henry Knox, Nathanael Green, and Henry Lee were especially attached to him. His relations with Horatio Gates became strained but not ruptured. A rebuke to Charles Lee so angered that eccentric general as to cause him eventually to retire and to denounce Washington as a demigod. General Benedict Arnold suffered a somewhat milder, though merited, rebuke shortly before he agreed to sell information to Britain about the defenses at West Point.

(In 1976 an act of Congress promoted Washington to six-star General of the Armies so that he would rank above all other American generals.)

**The Confederation Years**

After the war, several states were beset with troubles that alarmed Washington and conservative leaders who were close to him. British merchants flooded the United States with British goods. Inadequate markets abroad for American products obliged American merchants to export coin or to buy imports on credit. Britain excluded American ships from the trade of the British West Indies, to the distress of New England. A shortage of money depressed the prices of American products and enhanced the difficulty of paying debts--not only those owed to British merchants but also those that had been contracted by Congress or the states to finance the war. As the debt burdens grew, debtors demanded that the states issue large quantities of paper money. About half the states did so. Such paper depreciated, to the loss of creditors. The strife between debtor and creditor in Massachusetts exploded in an uprising, Shays' Rebellion, that threatened to overthrow the state government.

Apprehensive men turned to Washington for leadership. It seemed to them, and to him, that the troubles of the times flowed from the weaknesses of the central government under the Articles of Confederation. The Union could not provide a single, stable, adequate currency because the main powers over money were vested in the states. Because Congress could not tax, it could not maintain an army and navy. Nor could it pay either the principal or the interest on the national debt. Washington believed that the central government should be strengthened so that it could safeguard property, protect creditors against hostile state laws, afford the Union a uniform, nondepreciating currency, and collect taxes in order both to pay the national debt and to obtain revenues sufficient for current needs. He also thought that Congress should be empowered to foster domestic manufacturing industries as a means of lessening the importation of foreign goods. Washington's anxieties over events in the 1780's were deepened by his memories of bitter experiences during the Revolution, when the weakness of Congress and the power of the states had handicapped the army in countless ways.

The Constitutional Convention met at Philadelphia in May 1787. Washington, a delegate of Virginia, served as its president. His closest associate then was James MADISON. The Constitution, as adopted, embodied Washington's essential ideas. It provided for a "mixed" or "balanced" government of three branches, so devised that all three could not easily fall under the sway of any faction, thus assuring that every important group would have some means of exerting influence and of protecting its interests in a lawful manner. The federal government, as remodeled, was vested with powers adequate for managing the common affairs of the Union, while leaving to the states control over state-confined property and business, schools, family relations, and nonfederal crimes and lesser offenses. Washington helped to persuade the Virginia legislature to ratify the Constitution, making use of *The Federalist* papers written in its defense by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay.

**The Presidency**

Unanimously elected the first president, Washington was inaugurated in New York City on April 30, 1789. Acting with a cooperative Congress, he and his aides constructed the foundations on which the political institutions of the country have rested since that time.

His qualifications for his task could hardly have been better. For 15 years he had contended with most of the problems that faced the infant government. By direct contact he had come to know the leaders who were to play important parts during his presidency. Having traveled widely over the country, he had become well acquainted with its economic conditions and practices. Experience had schooled him in the arts of diplomacy. He had listened closely to the debates on the Constitution and had gained a full knowledge both of its provisions and of the ideas and interests of representative leaders. He had worked out a successful method for dealing with other men and with Congress and the states. Thanks to his innumerable contacts with the soldiers of the Revolutionary army, he understood the character of the American people and knew their ways. For eight years after 1775 he had been a de facto president. The success of his work in founding a new government was a by-product of the qualifications he had acquired in the hard school of public service.

**The Executive Departments**

The Constitution designated the president as the only official charged with the duty of enforcing all the federal laws. In consequence, Washington's first concern was to establish and develop the executive departments. In a sense such agencies were arms of the president--the instruments by which he could perform his primary duty of executing the laws. At the outset, Washington and his co-workers established two rules that became enduring precedents: the president has the power to select and nominate executive officers and the power to remove them if they are unworthy.

Congress did its first important work in 1789, when it made provision for five executive departments. The men heading these departments formed the president's cabinet. One act established the war department, which Washington entrusted to Gen. Henry Knox. Then came the creation of the treasury department, its beginnings celebrated by the brilliant achievements of its first secretary, Alexander Hamilton. The department of state was provided for, and Thomas Jefferson took office as its first secretary in March 1790. The office of postmaster general came into being next, and the appointment went to Samuel Osgood. Washington's first attorney general, Edmund Randolph, was selected after his office had been created.

In forming his CABINET Washington chose two liberals--Jefferson and Randolph--and two conservatives--Hamilton and Knox. The liberals looked to the South and West, the conservatives to the Northeast. On subjects in dispute, Washington could secure advice from each side and so make informed decisions.

In constructing the new government, Washington and his advisers acted with exceptional energy. The challenge of a large work for the future inspired creative efforts of the highest order. Washington was well equipped for the work of building an administrative structure. His success arose largely from his ability to blend planning and action for the attainment of a desired result. First, he acquired the necessary facts, which he weighed carefully. Once he had reached a decision, he carried it out with vigor and tenacity. Always averse to indolence and procrastination, he acted promptly and decisively. In everything he was thorough, systematic, accurate, and attentive to detail. From subordinates he expected standards like his own. In financial matters he insisted on exactitude and integrity.

**The Federalist Program**

From 1790 to 1792 the elements of Washington's financial policies were expounded by Hamilton in five historic reports. Hamilton was a highly useful assistant who devised plans, worked out details, and furnished cogent arguments. The Federalist program consisted of seven laws. Together they provided for the payment, in specie, of debts incurred during the Revolution; created a sound, uniform currency based on coin; and aimed to foster home industries in order to lessen the country's dependence on European goods.

The Tariff Act (1789), the Tonnage Act (1789), and the Excise Act (1791) levied taxes, payable in coin, that gave the government ample revenues. The Funding Act (1790) made provision for paying, dollar for dollar, the old debts of both the Union and the states. The Bank Act (1791) set up a nationwide banking structure owned mainly by private citizens, which was authorized to issue paper currency that could be used for tax payments as long as it was redeemed in coin on demand. A Coinage Act (1792) directed the government to mint both gold and silver coins, and a Patent Law (1791) gave inventors exclusive rights to their inventions for 14 years.

The Funding Act, the Excise Act, and the Bank Act aroused an accelerating hostility so bitter as to bring into being an opposition group. These opponents, the Republicans, precursors of the later Democratic party, were led by Jefferson and Madison. The Funding Act enabled many holders of government certificates of debt, which had been bought at a discount, to profit as the Treasury redeemed them, in effect, at their face values in coin. Washington undoubtedly deplored this form of private gain, but he regarded it as unavoidable if the Union was to have a stable currency and a sound public credit. The Bank Act gave private citizens the sole privilege of issuing federal paper currency, which they could lend at a profit. The Excise Act, levying duties on whiskey distilled in the country, taxed a commodity that was commonly produced by farmers, especially on the frontier. The act provoked armed resistance--the Whiskey Rebellion--in western Pennsylvania, which Washington suppressed with troops, but without bloodshed or reprisals, in 1794.

The Republicans charged that the Federalist acts tended to create an all-powerful central government that would devour the states. A protective tariff that raised the prices of imported goods, a centralized banking system operated by moneyed men of the cities, national taxes that benefited the public creditors, a restricted currency, and federal securities (as good as gold) that could be used to buy foreign machines and tools needed by manufacturers--all these features of Washington's program, so necessary to industrial progress, repelled debtors, the poorer farmers, and the most zealous defenders of the states.

**The Judiciary System**

Under Washington's guidance a federal court system was established by the Judiciary Act of Sept. 24, 1789. The Constitution provided for its basic features. Because the president is the chief enforcer of federal laws, it is his duty to prosecute cases before the federal courts. In this work his agent is the attorney general. To guard against domination of judges, even by the president, the Constitution endowed them with tenure during good behavior.

The Judiciary Act of 1789 was so well designed that its most essential features have survived. It provided for 13 judicial districts, each with a district court of federal judges. The districts were grouped into three circuits in which circuit courts were to hear appeals from district courts. The act also created a supreme court consisting of a chief justice and five associate justices to serve as the final arbiter in judicial matters, excepting cases of impeachment. Washington's selection of John Jay as the first chief justice was probably the best choice possible for the work of establishing the federal judiciary on a sound and enduring basis.

**Foreign Affairs**

In foreign affairs, Washington aimed to keep the country at peace, lest involvement in a great European war should shatter the new government before it could acquire strength. He also sought to gain concessions from Britain and Spain that would promote the growth of pioneer settlements in the Ohio Valley. In addition, he desired to keep up the import trade of the Union, which yielded revenue from tariff duties that enabled the government to sustain the public credit and to meet its current expenses.

**The British and French**

The foreign policy of Washington took shape under the pressure of a war between Britain and revolutionary France. At the war's inception Washington had to decide whether two treaties of the French-American alliance of 1778 were still in force. Hamilton held that they were not, because they had been made with the now-defunct government of Louis XVI. Washington, however, accepted Jefferson's opinion that they were still valid because they had been made by an enduring nation--a principle that has since prevailed in American diplomacy.

Fearing that involvement in the European war would blight the infant government, Washington issued a proclamation of neutrality on April 22, 1793. This proclamation urged American citizens to be impartial and warned them against aiding or sending war materials to either belligerent.

Because Britain was the dominant sea power, France championed the doctrine of neutral rights that was asserted in the French-American alliance. The doctrine held that neutrals--the United States in this case--might lawfully trade with belligerents in articles not contraband of war. Britain acted on a contrary theory respecting wartime trade and seized American ships, thereby violating rights generally claimed by neutrals. Such seizures goaded the Republican followers of Jefferson to urge measures that might have led to a British-American war. Washington then sent John Jay on a treaty-making mission to London.

Jay's Treaty of Nov. 19, 1794, outraged France because it did not uphold the French-American alliance and because it conferred benefits on Britain. Although Washington disliked some of its features, he signed it (the Senate had ratified it by a two-thirds vote). One reason was that keeping open the import trade from Britain continued to provide the Treasury with urgently needed revenues from tariff duties.

Unable to match Britain on the sea, the French indulged in a campaign to replace Washington with their presumed partisans, in order to vitiate the treaty. They also waged war on the shipping of the United States, and relations between the two countries went from bad to worse.

**The Western Frontier**

Washington's diplomacy also had to deal with events in the West that involved Britain and Spain. Pioneers in Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Ohio country, who were producers of grain, lumber, and meats, sought good titles to farmlands, protection against Indians, and outlets for their products via the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and New Orleans.

In the northern area, Britain held, within the United States, seven trading posts of which the most important were Niagara, Detroit, and Mackinac. The determination of the Indians to preserve their hunting lands against the inroads of pioneers seeking farms encouraged the British in Canada in their efforts to maintain their hold on the fur trade and their influence on the Indians of the area north of the Ohio River.

The focus of the strife was the land south of present-day Toledo. The most active Indian tribes engaged were the Ottawa, the Pottawatomi, the Chippewa, and the Shawnee. Two American commanders suffered defeats that moved Washington to wrath. British officials in Canada then backed the Indians in their efforts to expel the Americans from the country north of the Ohio River. A third U.S. force, under Gen. Anthony Wayne, defeated the Indians so decisively in 1794 in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, at the site of present-day Toledo, that they lost heart and the English withdrew their support. Wayne then imposed a victor's peace. By the Treaty of Greenville (1795) the tribes gave up nearly all their lands in Ohio, thereby clearing the way for pioneers to move in and form a new state.

In 1796 the British evacuated the seven posts that they had held within the United States. Because Jay's Treaty had called for the withdrawal, it registered another victory for Washington's diplomacy.

**The Spanish Frontier**

On the southwestern frontier the United States faced Spain, then the possessor of the land south of the 31st parallel, from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River. Intent upon checking the growth of settlement south of the Ohio River, the Spaniards used their control of the mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans to obstruct the export of American products to foreign markets. The two countries each claimed a large area, known as the Yazoo Strip, north of the 31st parallel.

In dealing with Spain, Washington sought both to gain for the western settlers the right to export their products, duty free, by way of New Orleans, and to make good the claim of the United States to the territory in dispute. The land held by Spain domiciled some 25,000 people of European stocks, who were generally preferred by the resident Indians (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, with 14,000 warriors), to the 150,000 frontiersmen who had pushed into Kentucky, Tennessee, and western Georgia.

The selection of Jefferson as the first secretary of state reflected the purpose of Washington to aid the West. But before 1795 he failed to attain that goal. His task was complicated by a tangle of frontier plots, grandiose land-speculation schemes, Indian wars, and preparations for war that involved Spanish officials, European fur traders, and the Indian tribes, along with settlers, adventurers, military chieftains, and speculators from the United States.

Conditions in Europe forced Washington to neglect the Southwest until 1795, when a series of misfortunes moved Spain to yield and agree to the Treaty of San Lorenzo. The treaty recognized the 31st parallel as the southern boundary of the United States and granted to Americans the right to navigate the whole of the Mississippi, as well as a three-year privilege of landing goods at New Orleans for shipment abroad.

When Washington left office the objectives of his foreign policy had been attained. By avoiding war he had enabled the new government to take root, he had prepared the way for the growth of the West, and by maintaining the import trade he had safeguarded the national revenues and the public credit.

**Washington Steps Down**

By the end of 1795, Washington's creative work had been done. Thereafter he and his collaborators devoted their efforts largely to defending what they had accomplished. A conservative spirit became dominant and an era of "High Federalism" dawned. As his health declined, Washington became saddened by attacks made by his Republican opponents, who alleged that Hamilton had seized control of the administration, that a once-faithful ally, France, had been cast aside, that the Federalists were plotting to create a monarchy on the British model, and that they had corrupted Congress in order to effect their program. The attack reached its high (or low) point when Washington's foes reprinted forged letters that had been published to impugn his loyalty during the Revolution. He made no reply to his detractors.

Washington had been reelected unanimously in 1792. His decision not to seek a third term established a tradition that has been broken only once and is now embedded in the 22d Amendment of the Constitution. In his Farewell Address of Sept. 17, 1796, he summarized the results of his varied experience, offering a guide both for that time and for the future. He urged his countrymen to cherish the Union, to support the public credit, to be alert to "the insidious wiles of foreign influence," to respect the Constitution and the nation's laws, to abide by the results of elections, and to eschew political parties of a sectional cast. Asserting that America and Europe had different interests, he declared that it "is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world," trusting to temporary alliances for emergencies. He also warned against indulging in either habitual favoritism or habitual hostility toward particular nations, lest such attitudes should provoke or involve the country in needless wars.

**Last Years**

Washington's retirement at Mount Vernon was interrupted in 1798 when he assumed nominal command of a projected army intended to fight against France in an anticipated war. Early in 1799 he became convinced that France desired peace and that Americans were unwilling to enlist in the proposed army. He successfully encouraged President John Adams to break with the war party, headed by Hamilton, and to end the quarrel.

Washington's last public efforts were devoted to opposing the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, which challenged his conviction that the Constitution decreed that federal acts should be the supreme law of the land. Continuing to work at his plantation, he contracted a cold and died on Dec. 14, 1799, after an illness of two days.

Among Americans, Washington is unusual in that he combined in one career many outstanding achievements in business, warfare, and government. He took the leading part in three great historic events that extended over a period of 20 years. After 1775 he was animated by the purpose of creating a new nation dedicated to the rights of man. His success in fulfilling that purpose places him in the first rank among the figures of world history.

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# Source

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