

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

George Washington



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Focus Question

How can George Washington's influence still be seen in the United States today?

Words to Know

cabinet
chancellor
delegates
front
inaugurated
indissoluble

militia
punitive
seat
surrogate
tenure
tuberculosis

Front cover: A portrait shows George Washington in Massachusetts during the Revolutionary War.

Title page: A statue of Washington at the Valley Forge National Historical Park shows the first U.S. president in military attire.

Page 3: A painting shows Washington with his family at Mount Vernon.

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Front cover: George Washington at Dorchester Heights, Massachusetts (colour litho), Leutze, Emanuel Gottlieb (1816–68) (after)/Private Collection/Peter Newark American Pictures/Bridgeman Images; title page: © John Greim/REX Shutterstock; page 3: © Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group/REX Shutterstock; page 4: © Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo; page 5: © James P. Blair/Corbis; page 7: © GraphicaArtis/Corbis; page 12: © Granger, NYC; page 13: © Wisconsinart/Dreamstime.com; page 14: © Pat Benic/Pool/Corbis; page 17: George Washington and his Family, 1798 (oil on canvas), Ferris, Jean Leon Gerome (1863–1930)/Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia, USA/Bridgeman Images; page 18: © sframephoto/iStock/Thinkstock; page 19 (top right, bottom right): © North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo; page 19 (top left): © Science Source; page 19 (center left): © Ivy Close Images/Alamy Stock Photo; page 19 (bottom left): George Washington, c. 1786 (painted plaster), Houdon, Jean-Antoine (1741–1828)/Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, USA/gift of Ronald E. Fritz/Bridgeman Images

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Correlation

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George Washington took the oath of office as the first president of the United States on April 30, 1789, in New York City.

I Do Solemnly Swear ...

George Washington looked out at the cheering crowd. It had been an amazing personal journey. Many years earlier, when he had accepted his first military commission, he never could have imagined that he would be standing here—at Federal Hall in New York City—about to be **inaugurated** as the president of the United States.

Washington stood up straight as the **Chancellor** of New York, Robert Livingston, approached him, Bible in hand. Washington had only to place his hand on it and recite:

I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

And with that, George Washington became the first president of the United States.

A Young Farmer

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732, to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington. George's father earned a modest living as a farmer on the family estate in rural Virginia. When George was just eleven years old, his father died and his half brother Lawrence—one of his eight siblings—became a **surrogate** father to him.

George had little formal education. As a young man, he learned more enduring lessons from practical experiences while working. He was always busy at Mount Vernon, the family farm, tending the fields and raising cattle. In 1752, after Lawrence died of **tuberculosis**, George assumed control of the family estate. At twenty years old, he began a career as a farmer.



Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia. When he was three, his family moved to this home in Virginia—Mount Vernon.

The French and Indian War

Aside from his love of farming, Washington was passionate about the military. Lawrence Washington's descriptions of his earlier military experience likely sparked Washington's military interest.

In 1752, the future United States was a collection of thirteen British colonies, each with its own **militia**. That year, Lieutenant Robert Dinwiddie appointed Washington to the position of officer's adjutant, or assistant, in Virginia. Soon, surrounding circumstances would propel Washington to assume greater responsibility.

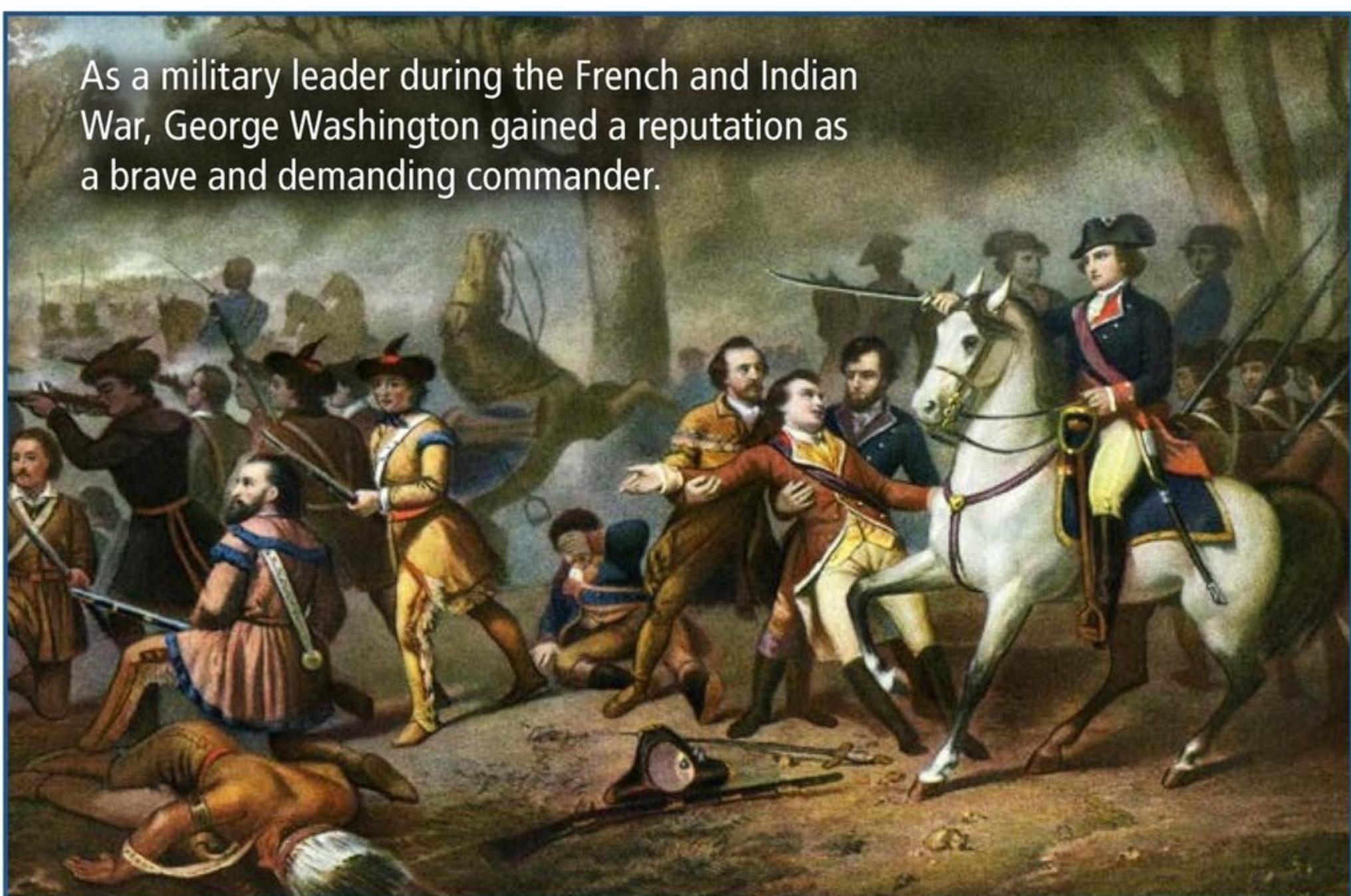
In November 1753, the British were concerned about French settlers in the Ohio Valley who were expanding their territorial holdings. Dinwiddie sent Washington to Fort LeBoeuf in Pennsylvania, some three hundred miles away, to negotiate with the French, who dismissed the idea of leaving. By 1754, the French had become allied with Native Americans against the British. The situation was heating up.

In April 1754, a British fort located in modern-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, fell to the French, who renamed it Fort Duquesne. Determined to win it back, Washington, now a lieutenant colonel, launched a successful surprise attack on the fort

on May 28, 1754, killing the commander and twelve French soldiers and taking the rest prisoner. Washington was immediately promoted to colonel. The French and Indian War was underway.

In retaliation, the French attacked Washington's base of operations—Fort Necessity in Pennsylvania—in July. The hastily built fort was in an open area within bullet range of the nearby forest. The French overwhelmed Washington's men and won the battle. Washington was forced to surrender. As part of negotiations, and in exchange for control of Fort Necessity, the French allowed Washington to retreat. He felt discouraged by the scant support the Virginia government gave him. His army was small and underfed, and other officials who had attained

As a military leader during the French and Indian War, George Washington gained a reputation as a brave and demanding commander.



their positions by royal commission challenged his authority. In their eyes, Washington merely worked for the colonial governor.

However, Washington would soon establish his reputation as a fine military officer, despite his misjudgment of the location of Fort Necessity. Led by General John Forbes and aided by Washington, a second push by British forces on Fort Duquesne in 1758 was also successful, and later that year the French were defeated. George Washington retired with the honorary title of brigadier general.

Thinking his military career was behind him, Washington returned to Mount Vernon. In early 1759, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, a widow from one of Virginia's wealthiest families. Martha added thousands of acres of her own land as well as a large number of slaves to Washington's already considerable estate.

George and Martha Washington owned as many as 318 slaves. Although he became a slave owner by marriage, Washington personally opposed slavery. He was unwilling to sell any of his slaves because that would mean breaking up some of their families. Washington ordered all of his remaining slaves to be freed upon Martha's death. When Washington died before her in 1799, Martha freed them the following year.

Revolution

As Washington farmed Mount Vernon, he kept an eye on the political changes happening around him. By the 1760s, Great Britain had passed a number of laws taxing the colonists on items such as sugar and tea. Great Britain enforced this taxation with **punitive** measures, eventually going so far as to close Boston Harbor. Colonists were unified in their opposition.

To address these issues, the colonists selected Washington and representatives from other colonies to attend a secret meeting called the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in September 1774. The meeting would last for nearly two months. At this point, Washington was not ready to advocate formal independence. He did, however, support future military action against Britain if it continued to disrespect the rights of the colonies. Washington attended the meeting in his military uniform, and in November he took control of the volunteer armies of Virginia.

Delegates met again at the Second Continental Congress in May 1775 and appointed George Washington commander of the Continental Army. The colonies had cut more ties with Britain and were ready for freedom. With delegate Thomas Jefferson taking the lead, the congress wrote the

Declaration of Independence, which was eventually approved on July 4, 1776.

On July 3, 1775, George Washington began his **tenure** as commander of the Continental Army. With typical humility, he refused any salary. During his first months as leader, he strengthened his army with more ammunition and won early battles against the British. The following March, he won an important victory when he drove the British army out of Boston and into New York City. Washington and his soldiers then rushed to New York City, where they faced strong opposition under the command of British General William Howe. In addition, the powerful British navy dominated the waters around the city.

In the summer of 1776, General Howe dealt the Americans a humiliating defeat in Long Island,



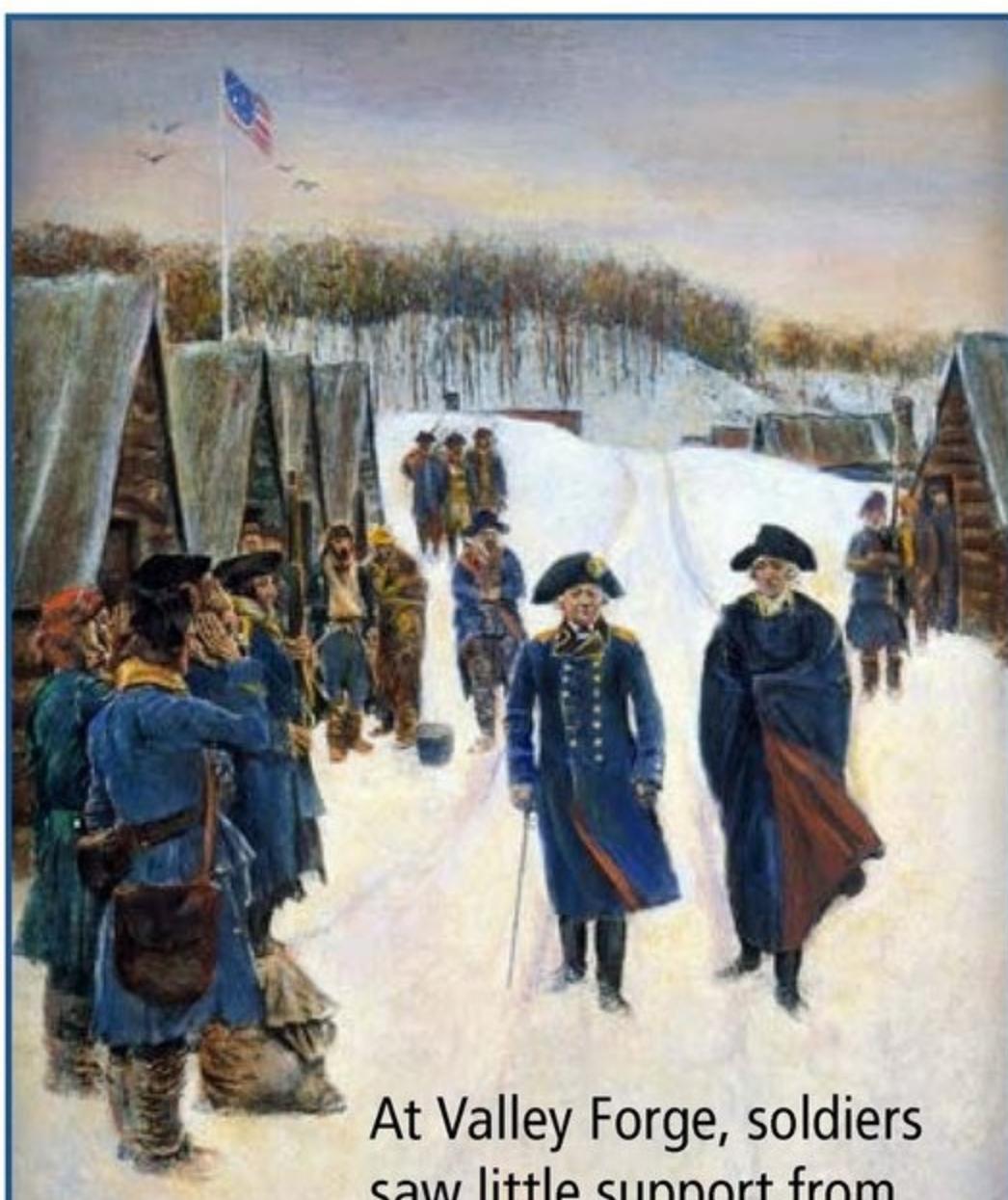
New York, killing and capturing thousands of Washington's men. Washington faced another assault from General Howe in September and was compelled to retreat north to White Plains.

The Continental Army continued to suffer defeats as Washington and his soldiers retreated further, first into New Jersey and then west into Pennsylvania. The enemy pursued, finally stopping in Trenton, New Jersey, to set up camp.

On a pitch-black Christmas night in 1776, Washington led his men across the Delaware River into Trenton, catching the enemy by surprise. Washington and his men managed to drive the British back to New York.

Then, in a series of battles at Saratoga in 1777, about 180 miles (290 km) north of New York City, the British suffered a resounding defeat. Saratoga became a turning point for the colonists. The French, who had been keeping an eye on the American colonists' efforts against the British, and who wanted revenge for their defeat in the French and Indian War, joined American forces against the British.

George Washington, meanwhile, was to endure yet another test of his leadership near Philadelphia, then the **seat** of colonial government. His men



At Valley Forge, soldiers saw little support from the government, resulting in a lack of supplies and near starvation.

fought the British through the summer and fall of 1777. Washington and his men then retreated to nearby Valley Forge for the winter. It was a harsh winter, though—food and supplies were scarce, and three thousand men deserted Washington's army.

When the British positioned soldiers at a new **front** in the southern colonies in early 1781, Washington saw an opportunity. Supported by French troops and their navy, he marched his men south into Virginia, meeting the enemy at Yorktown. It was there on October 19, 1781, that the British, outnumbered and completely surrounded, finally surrendered. The colonists had won their war for independence, and it was George Washington who led them to victory.

A Plan for Government

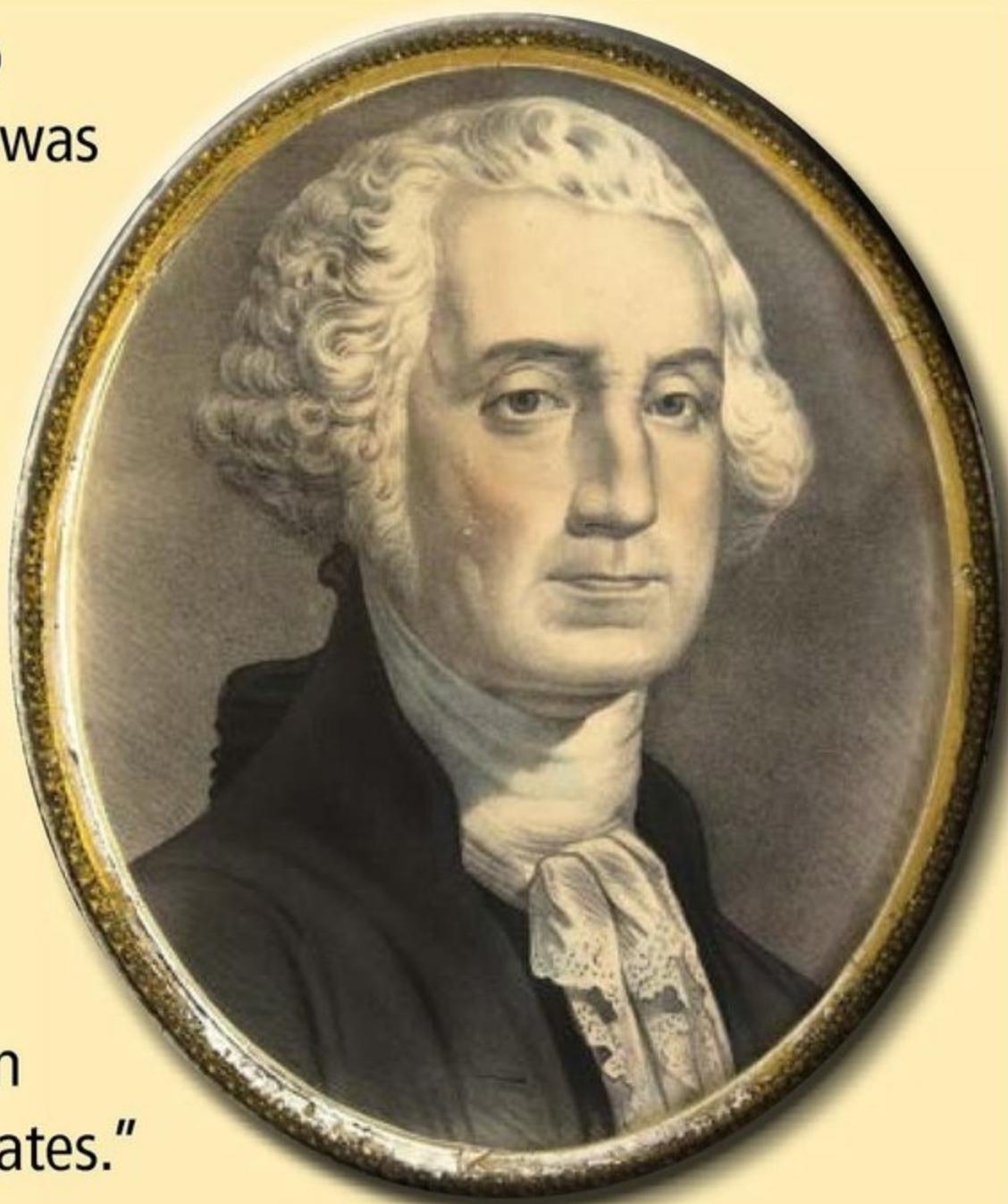
In the years following the end of the war, Washington watched carefully as the United States struggled to get on its feet. He supported

the establishment of a federal government for the young nation. “An **indissoluble** Union of the States under a Federal Head,” was needed, wrote Washington.

Washington’s fellow Virginian James Madison urged Washington to come to Philadelphia for a meeting at which a formal plan for the new government would be written. This meeting, called the Constitutional Convention, took place during the brutally hot summer of 1787. Washington and the other delegates—soon to be known as the nation’s Founding Fathers—worked, compromised, and cajoled their way to a new United States Constitution.

What to Call the President

The question of how to address the new president was no small matter. After all, blood had been spilled in the effort to break away from the British king, so “His Elective Majesty” and “His Mightiness” simply would not do. James Madison, horrified by these and other suggestions, urged the government to settle on “President of the United States.”



In February 1789, George Washington, who had served as the convention's president, was unanimously elected the first president of the United States. His personal fortitude and military achievements won over the delegates. Washington himself was not enthusiastic, writing that he had no wish "beyond that of living and dying an honest man on my own farm." Nevertheless, in April of that year, he made the journey from Mount Vernon to New York City, where he was inaugurated in front of a jubilant crowd.

Do You Know?

Washington's presidency naturally produced numerous "firsts." Here are some of those that are still with us today.

- At his inauguration, Washington read an inaugural address to Congress. Today presidents deliver it before an assembled crowd.
- Washington gave the first State of the Union address in 1790. Today it is usually delivered each year in February.
- Washington established who would be in the president's cabinet.
- Washington served only two terms, a precedent that endured until 1940 and became law in 1951.



President Barack Obama gives his inaugural address in 2013.

President Washington pledged allegiance to the Constitution, which called for the establishment of an executive branch led by the president, a legislative branch comprised of the Congress, and a judicial branch made up of the Supreme Court. He listened to others' opinions about the issues before the nation but was unafraid to make a decision and stand by it. Washington's mind, Thomas Jefferson said, was "sure in conclusion."

One of the most important achievements of Washington's first term was a deal struck between two members of his **cabinet**, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. As Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton was in the process of establishing a strong national bank. The federal government should, in Hamilton's view, settle the war debts owed by individual states. He needed Jefferson, the Secretary of State and leader of the political opposition, to agree. Jefferson did, but in exchange he asked Hamilton to agree to locate the nation's capital in a southern state. A compromise was reached, and today Washington, D.C., is sandwiched between Maryland and Virginia.

In 1792, citizens reelected Washington. His second term would be much more challenging than his first. One challenge was the Whiskey Rebellion.

The federal government was taxing whiskey makers, and many felt the law discriminated against them and their economic rights. Some protesters went so far as to physically threaten the tax inspectors. President Washington, concerned by the growing unrest, ordered state militiamen to end the revolt.

Washington faced other difficult choices in his second term as well. France and England were again at war, and the United States was in danger of being drawn into the conflict. Washington declared the United States neutral. He sent Supreme Court Justice John Jay to Britain to negotiate a treaty that would prevent a new war. Many people perceived the terms of the deal as pro-British and were outraged. Washington was severely criticized by both the public and the press.

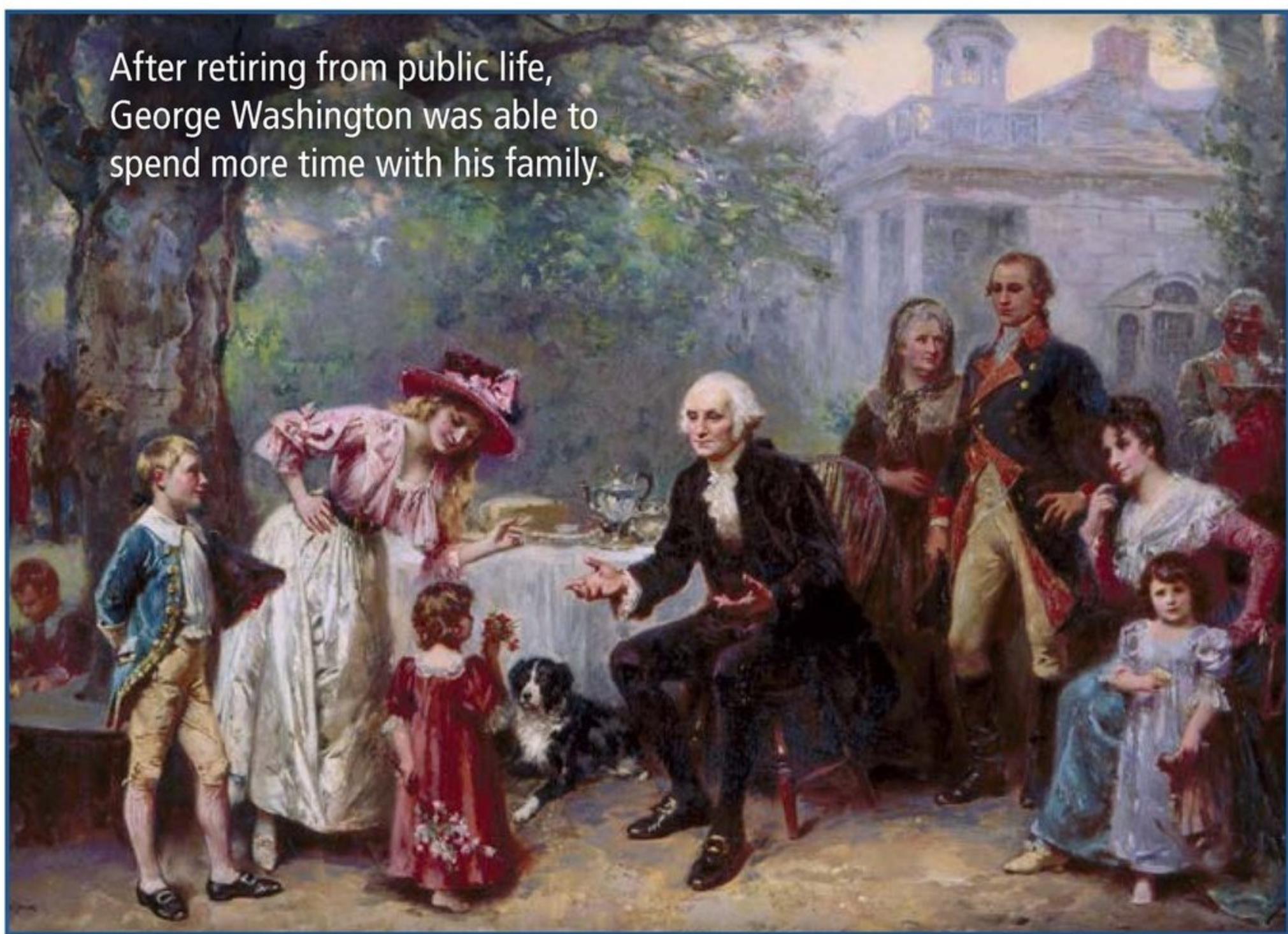
As always, Washington held firm in his views, but he felt the heat of disapproval from a public that had long adored him. Setting a precedent that almost all future presidents would follow until it became law in 1951, Washington ended his presidency after two terms.

Before leaving the office of president, Washington had one final message for the American people. In his Farewell Address, he spoke about issues he felt would impact the nation

for years to come. Washington warned against making alliances with European nations that could draw the nation into future conflicts. He also cautioned—perhaps surprisingly, for a military man—that having too large an army could become “particularly hostile to republican liberty.”

Washington retired to his beloved Mount Vernon in early 1797, where he resumed his passion for farming. On December 12, 1799, Washington complained of a sore throat and took to his bed, exhausted. Doctors treated him but to no avail. He died two days later at the age of sixty-seven.

After retiring from public life, George Washington was able to spend more time with his family.



Father of His Country

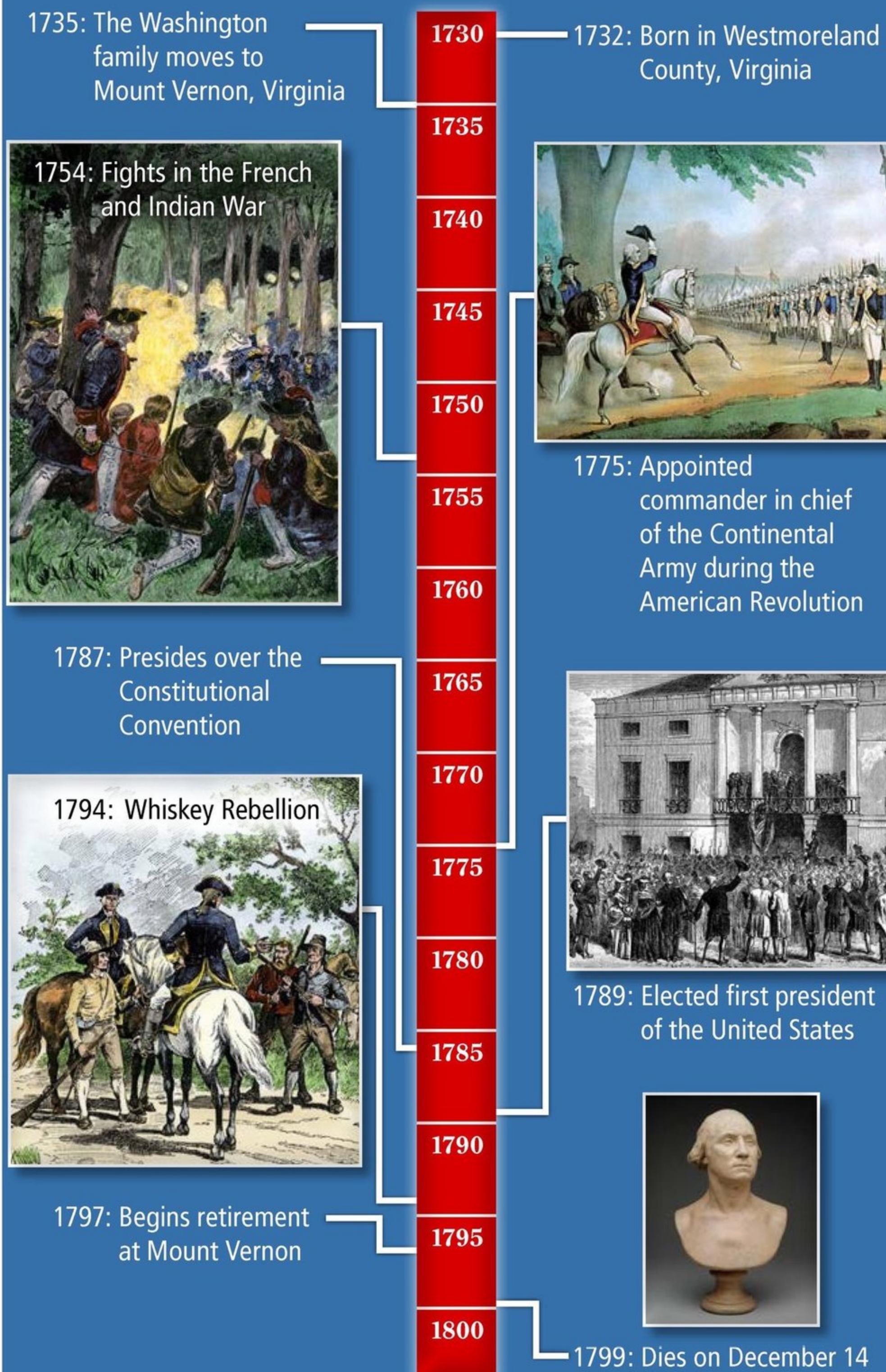
The impact of George Washington's life and presidency is still felt today. Not only was he America's first president—setting numerous important precedents—but his personal character set the tone for how the world expected the American president to be, both stylistically and temperamentally. Many of the attributes he developed as a military officer, including courage, confidence, discipline, and an active, take-charge energy, served him well as president. Many presidents who followed have aspired to demonstrate those qualities in their own administrations.

Military officer and Congressman Henry Lee, one of Washington's contemporaries, characterized him as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." People admired Washington in his day, just as people admire him to this day. George Washington was truly the Father of His Country.



Presidents (from left to right) George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln are sculpted into Mount Rushmore.

The Life of George Washington



Glossary

cabinet (<i>n.</i>)	a group of advisers to a president or other leader of a country (p. 15)
chancellor (<i>n.</i>)	a head of state; a legal official of a government (p. 4)
delegates (<i>n.</i>)	chosen or elected people who represent and act on behalf of others (p. 9)
front (<i>n.</i>)	the battlefield where direct fighting with the enemy occurs (p. 12)
inaugurated (<i>v.</i>)	admitted into office with a formal ceremony (p. 4)
indissoluble (<i>adj.</i>)	unable to be ruined, destroyed, or broken (p. 13)
militia (<i>n.</i>)	an army made up of ordinary citizens instead of trained soldiers (p. 6)
punitive (<i>adj.</i>)	harsh and unfair; intended to punish (p. 9)
seat (<i>n.</i>)	the central location of a specific activity or authority (p. 11)
surrogate (<i>n.</i>)	someone or something that takes the place of another (p. 5)
tenure (<i>n.</i>)	the length of time an official position is held (p. 10)
tuberculosis (<i>n.</i>)	a bacterial disease that mostly affects the lungs (p. 5)

George Washington

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Connections

Writing

Do you think George Washington was more influential as a military leader or a political leader? Why? Write an essay using examples from the text and outside resources to support your answer.

Social Studies

Research five important battles in George Washington's military career. Create a map and label the location and outcome of each of these battles.

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