

## George Washington biographical introduction and timeline

In 1927 Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States, wrote:

'Washington was the directing spirit without which there would have been no independence, no Union, no Constitution and no Republic. His ways were the ways of truth. His influence grows. In wisdom of action, in purity of character he stands alone.'

Washington's exemplary virtues are cemented in American history. The construction of his character started early, and was started it seems by Washington himself. Aged about 16 Washington copied out the following 'rules of civility and decent behaviour' into his school book:

'Shew not yourself glad at the Misfortune of another though he were your enemy.'

'Labour to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Celestial fire Called Conscience.'

These two statements echo through Washington's extraordinary life and career.

- February 1732, George Washington was born on a modest Virginia plantation. As a teenager he trained as a surveyor and worked in the wilderness of the western frontier.
- In 1753, at only 21 Washington became involved in the conflict between the French and British for the Ohio Territory. He was used by Governor Dinwiddie to deliver a demand that the French abandon the region. Washington kept a journal of his adventures on the mission which Dinwiddie had published as 'The Journal of Major Washington' in 1754. The journal was widely read and helped establish Washington at the beginning of his military career.
- In 1754 Dinwiddie commissioned Washington a Lieutenant Colonel, and in 1755 he was given command of the Virginia Militia. He served in the French and Indian War on the British side until 1758.
- In 1759 Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis a wealthy young widow who brought land and about 100 slaves to their marriage.
- In 1761 Washington fully inherited his family's Mount Vernon estate after the death of his brother Lawrence's widow.
- Washington gradually began to oppose British control and influence over his personal finances and those of the colonies. By 1769 he was organizing protests against Britain and a boycott of British goods.

- In the autumn of 1774 the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and Washington served as a delegate from Virginia.
- In June 1775, a few months after fighting had broken out between the Americans and the British, the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia elected Washington as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He was now fighting against the British.
- In 1781, with help from the French, Washington victoriously attacked the British at Yorktown. His boldness and heroism gained him international regard.
- At the end of the Revolutionary war in 1783 Washington resigned his commission and returned to civilian life at Mount Vernon. He became famous for his willingness to relinquish his military power.
- Washington was unanimously elected first president of the United States in 1789. He appointed the first presidential cabinet and designated the site for the nation's new capital.
- In 1797, after serving two terms in office Washington retired. Aged 67, after being caught out in a storm in the winter of 1799 Washington caught a serious throat infection and died on 14 December. He was buried at Mount Vernon.