

# **Washington: A Life Study Guide**

## **Washington: A Life by Ron Chernow**

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# Plot Summary

Washington: A Life is a comprehensive biography of George Washington. Ron Chernow, the author, has attempted to tell George Washington's complete and complicated life story in a remarkable single volume. Although many others have attempted to tell the story of Washington in the past, it has proved impossible to tell everything about the man in a single book. In Washington: A Life, Chernow does a beautiful job telling Washington's story with beautiful narration, close attention to detail, and a simplicity that allows him to successfully do it in one volume.

Washington was born to the second wife of a landholder in Virginia. Washington's father died when he was only eleven, depriving him of a desired education, a fact that left Washington self-conscious even as he served as the first president of the United States. Washington grew up with a single mother who was self-absorbed and needy, refusing Washington to join the Navy as he had wanted to do as a young boy.

Washington trained as a surveyor as a young man under the guidance of a local family with whom he remained close most of his life, the Fairfax family. This opportunity created in Washington a deep love for land. As he grew older, Washington looked to political office to help propel him to the life of a gentleman he coveted and desired for himself. When conflict erupted between French Canada and the British, Washington was one of the first to approach the French Canadians with demands from the British government. Later Washington was present at the first conflict in the French-Indian war.

Washington married after the war and settle on Mount Vernon, his brother's property that became Washington's with the death of his niece and her mother. In his marriage, Washington took into his home his wife's two children, but never had a child of his own. Instead, Washington experienced the grief of losing his two stepchildren and raised two of his wife's grandchildren and had a hand in the raising of multiple nieces and nephews.

With his experience in the French-Indian War and his political actions in Virginia, Washington was one of several Virginians who were directly involved in the uniting of the colonies against their British oppressors. Washington also received the honor of leading the Continental Army. Although afraid he was not experienced enough to accept such an honor, Washington proved himself more than capable when after eight years of war the British surrendered.

Content in middle-age to be a simple planter, Washington found his life unexpectedly altered by his heroism when he returned to Mount Vernon after the war. People from all over wanted to know and meet Washington, often descending on his home in droves. Therefore, when Washington was asked to become the first president, his desire to remain on his farm were outweighed by both his desire to cement his place in the history books and to live up to the expectations of his supporters.

Washington found the office of the president daunting and stayed much longer than he originally anticipated. However, Washington was instrumental in designing the expectations and the powers of the executive office of his new country.



# **Prelude: The Portrait Artist and Part 1, The Frontiersman: Chpaters 1-8**

## **Prelude: The Portrait Artist and Part 1, The Frontiersman: Chpaters 1-8 Summary and Analysis**

Ron Chernow is an award-winning author of five books. Chernow uses newly discovered and released papers belonging to Washington to write this novel.

The author imagines what it must have been like for Gilbert Stuart, the artist who created the portrait of Washington that is used on the one-dollar bill, to meet Washington and work with him. By this time Washington was president, but he continued to be a moody, elusive man.

Washington's father, Augustine, married Mary Johnson Bell after his first wife's death left him with three young children. Augustine and Mary went on to have five children of which George Washington was the eldest. The family moved a great deal in Washington's early life because his father owned multiple properties throughout Virginia. When Washington was eleven his father died, taking away young Washington's hopes of going to boarding school like his two elder half-brothers. Instead, Washington was self-taught.

As a young man, Washington spent a great deal of time at Mount Vernon with his eldest half-brother in an attempt to escape his demanding and critical mother. As a result of this relationship, Washington was introduced to a neighbor of Lawrence Washington, Colonel William Fairfax, who helped Washington pursue a career as a land surveyor after Washington's mother vetoed his attempts to become a member of the Royal Navy. In the spring of 1749, Washington was appointed surveyor of Culpeper County.

In 1753, Washington, as district adjutant, found himself embroiled in a disagreement between the British and French empires regarding land in the Ohio Country. Learning of these tensions, Washington volunteered to take a message to the French. When Washington finally reached Fort LeBoeuf, he gave their leader, Captain St. Pierre, a message demanding the French abandon their settlements on British soil. St. Pierre refused and gave Washington a sealed message for Governor Dinwiddie. After a difficult trip home, Washington immediately presented a report to Dinwiddie.

Now a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army, George Washington began to raise an army to march into the Ohio Country. In the spring of 1754, Washington began the march into the Ohio Country, his army plagued with low morale and desertions. On May 24, Washington learned of a French detachment that had crossed a river close to his troops. Expecting a raid, Washington set up a defensive position at Great Meadows, a place later to become known as Fort Necessity. On May 28, Washington led a raid on the French. The raid turned into a bloodbath with more than twenty French captured



and ten killed. When word that one of those killed, an Ensign carrying a diplomatic message, the world was outraged. The French claimed that it was a massacre. The British, however, considered the fight an overwhelming British victory.

Over the next month, Washington and his men fortified their defenses at Fort Necessity. On July 3, 1754, the French attacked. The French victory was overwhelming. In the aftermath, Washington met with a French interpreter who misinterpreted the article of capitulation, causing Washington to sign what was essentially a confession of assassination of the French diplomat at the previous raid. That fall, among plans to divide the Virginia Regiment into ten independent companies and to demote Washington to a colonel, he resigned from the army.

Major General Edward Braddock arrived in Virginia and asked Washington to be his aide-de-camp due to his frontier experience. After a short delay, Washington joined Braddock where he tried to impress upon the General improvisational techniques of the Indians and French, but Braddock failed to listen to his warnings. On July 9, Braddock would face the enemy for the first time and would suffer for underestimating the enemy tactics. During the slaughter of Braddock's men, Washington would prove himself heroic in battle. Braddock himself was injured during the battle. A few days later, Braddock died.

In the fall of 1755 Washington was made supreme commander of all military forces in Virginia. Washington immediately ran into difficulties, finding it impossible to commandeer horses and finding men willing to fight. As leader of the Virginia military, Washington wanted a royal commission, but would be repeatedly reminded of the lowly opinion the British had of American born soldiers.

With the death of Lawrence's wife and daughter, Washington found himself the owner of Mount Vernon. Washington immediately began to transform the small farm into the large plantation it would later become. With his new home, Washington found need for a wife. Despite his flirtation with Sally Fairfax, Washington began looking earnestly for a suitable bride. Washington began courting Martha Dandridge Custis, a young widow with two surviving children, in the spring of 1758. That fall, Washington wrote a letter to Sally Fairfax to announce his impending marriage to Martha and to end their flirtation. Sally would, however, remain a good friend to both George and Martha.

Washington ran for a seat in the Frederick County House of Burgesses and won. At the same time, Washington was embroiled in a disagreement as to how to approach Fort Duquesne, the French stronghold in the Ohio Valley. Washington was overruled and the initial attack ended in disaster for Washington whose soldiers were mistaken for the enemy as they approached another British party. In the end, Fort Duquesne was destroyed. A short time later, Washington retired from the military.

In this section of the book, the author introduces Washington's family history and his early years of childhood as well as his service in the British Army. Washington was born to a family of men who traditionally died young, including his father and eldest half-



brother. This left Washington with the impression that he too would die as a young man, forcing him to live his life as though each day might be the last.

An important aspect of Washington's childhood was the early death of his father. Washington's father was a business man who created an instability in his family by moving them from farm to farm throughout Washington's childhood. While Washington's father did not seem to have a huge impact on his life, his death prevented Washington from going to boarding school like his two elder half-brothers. This is a situation that would remain a sense of inadequacy in Washington. Washington felt that his lack of education left him unprepared for his desired life as a gentleman. Despite being self-educated and very intelligent, Washington would spend the rest of his life feeling inadequate to those around him because of this lack of formal education.

This section of the book also shows a more human side of Washington, exposing an flirtation Washington had with a friend's wife. Washington would have a lifelong fascination with women, often noting in his diary the number of women who attended social functions that he also attended. However, this relationship appeared to go beyond just friendship, though there is no indication that it was even a relationship that was consummated. This relationship does, however, expose a human side of Washington, a side that was tempted by beauty and acted on emotions. It is a human side of Washington that was not always revealed as he desperately guarded his public persona.

The author points out in this section of the book that Washington wanted to join the Royal Navy, but that by doing that he might have changed his role in history. Instead, Washington became a brave soldier in the Army, a role that had a great deal to do with his appointment as leader of the Continental Army later in his life.



## Part 2, The Planter: Chapters 9-15

### Part 2, The Planter: Chapters 9-15 Summary and Analysis

George and Martha Washington married in January of 1759. Marriage to Martha brought with it a substantial estate belonging to the two Custis children that Washington would be executor of for the rest of his life.

Washington was a slave owner. When he married Martha, the slave population at Mount Vernon more than doubled. Washington saw himself as a kind slaveholder, providing slaves with good food, clothing, and housing, as well as urging his overseers to take special care with sick slaves.

Washington was a strong, athletic man who was often the center of attention with women. Washington was quite social. Washington was also an accomplished dancer.

As a wealthy plantation owner, Washington gained a certain standing in the community that was underscored by his seat in the House of Burgesses that he won again in the fall of 1760.

In 1765, the defray war costs, Parliament enacted the Stamp Act. This caused outrage in the House of Burgesses. On a personal level, Washington grew increasingly unhappy with his British creditors and their increasing pressure for him to pay off his debts. In 1767, the British enacted the Townshend Acts, placing duties on more goods sold to American colonist. As unhappiness grew on the part of the colonists, Washington threw his support behind a boycott of British goods. In the spring of 1769, Washington presented a plan to create a nonimportation association for Virginia. The acceptance of Washington's plan led to the royal governor disbanding the House of Burgesses.

Washington struggled with his home life, losing his stepdaughter Patsy Custis to epilepsy and struggling to give young Jacky Custis an education.

Even as the political atmosphere in Virginia calmed, the Boston Tea Party sent shockwaves through the colonies. The royal governor once again disbanded the House of Burgesses in Virginia, but Washington and more than twenty others met secretly and agreed to cease all imports. Washington then met with Colonel George Mason who presented him with twenty-four resolutions that they would present to the Fairfax County committee. The Fairfax Resolves would be adopted and Washington named head of a committee to charter future policy responses. In the fall of 1774, Washington was one of several Virginia delegates to attend the the First Continental Congress.

In this section of the book, the author gives the reader a deeper picture of George Washington as a man. Washington came into Mount Vernon when his brother's wife and daughter died. Washington looked to the small farm as a way of creating for himself the





appearance of a wealthy plantation owner, the gentleman he has always wanted to be. To aid him in this, Washington decided to marry Martha Custis, a young widow with two children. Washington would take over Martha's estate from her husband, making him a very wealthy man by appearances only because much of the money was set aside for Daniel Parke Custis' children. Washington would spend the rest of his life in the unenviable role as executor of the Custis estate. Not only this, but with the knowledge that he would one day inherit his father's estate, Jacky Custis was not motivated to earn an education; a fact that would annoy Washington who was envious of Jacky's opportunity to an education.

As a husband, Washington seemed to be content despite the fact that he and Martha never had children of their own. In fact, Washington would become surrogate father to many of Martha and his own relatives over time. The fact that Washington never had children with Martha will become important later in his life as the American people began looking for a president who would not expect his own son to take his place in his role as leader of the country.

Washington would soon become involved in the tensions that would lead to the Revolutionary War. As a member of the House of Burgesses, Washington would become involved in the political maneuvering that would surround the move toward independence. On a personal level, Washington would quickly become aware of the difficulties of relying on imports from Britain and find himself deeply in debt not only because of his own extravagant lifestyle, but because of the impossible taxes levied on the American colonists by the British in an attempt to pay off war debts.



## Part 3, The General: Chapters 16-26

### Part 3, The General: Chapters 16-26 Summary and Analysis

On June 14, the Congress took control of the troops in Boston and voted the next day to make Washington their leader.

Congress created the Continental Army on July 4. Washington struggled initially with a lack of munitions and with the attitudes of the northern officers. However, Washington did befriend immediately two northern generals who would play an important role in his future, Nathanael Greene and Henry Knox.

As leader of the Continental Army, Washington formed a council of war as mandated by the Congress. When Washington presented a plan for invading Boston in September of 1775, his plan was turned down by the cautious generals.

In mid-January, Henry Knox brought to camp much needed munitions taken from Fort Ticonderoga. With these, Washington was able in March to begin to send down a distracting volley of cannon fire while he moved his forces to Dorchester Heights. Here he was able to create a strong hold that made the British occupation of Boston untenable. The British decided to evacuate Boston. In the aftermath, Washington correctly predicted that the British would go to New York. Not long after his arrival, Washington's men uncovered a spy ring in New York.

Holding New York proved to be a difficult prospect for Washington and his men. As they faced desertions and low morale, a copy of the Declaration of Independence arrived. Washington ordered it read to all his men. Morale soared until mid-July when five British ships appeared off the coast and began firing on patriot strongholds.

As summer came to an end, the British geared up for battle, adding to their own force of more than twenty-thousand men, eight thousand Hessian mercenaries. On the night of August 26, the British began to move up Gowanus Road in Long Island. The British soldiers overwhelmed Washington's patriots, taking advantage of a gaping hole in their defenses along Jamaica Pass. Washington's men retreated and the Howes thought they might cut them off along the East River, but weather prevented this move. On August 29, Washington ordered the silent evacuation of his entire army across the East River. Washington and his men occupied Manhattan and decided to hold it, but within in five days would call a retreat as British forces moved up the Harlem River. On the night of September 14-15 five British ships dropped anchor in Kip's Bay, demolishing American defenses. Washington moved his men to Harlem.

With the arrival of more than a hundred British ships in the East River, Washington's men marched north toward White Plains with British and Hessian soldiers in quick pursuit. Another decisive defeat would take place on Chatterton's Hill as both armies



moved to dominate the Hudson River. Washington then turned his attention to two patriot held forts on the Hudson, Fort Washington and Fort Lee. On November 15, General William Howe sent a message to Greene demanding he relinquish Fort Washington or have it taken by force. The following day, Washington began a trip to the fort just as it came under siege. Washington took up a defensive position on the shore and watched the British decimate his fort, forcing his troops to surrender. On November 20, Washington learned that the British were quickly marching toward Fort Lee. Washington quickly ordered the evacuation of the fort.

With doubts and betrayal among his staff and overwhelming losses, Washington marched his troops into Pennsylvania. General Howe followed closely behind, with thoughts of taking Philadelphia, but decided instead to spend the winter in New York and renew his fight in the spring. Aware of a Hessian garrison in Trenton, Washington and his generals planned a nighttime crossing of the Delaware for a surprise attack. Washington's troops crossed without incident. After crossing the river, the soldiers marched nine miles before catching the Hessians unawares and defeating them in less than an hour. Another battle between the Continental Army and the Hessians would take place in Trenton on January 12, 1777 where Washington would rally his men against an overconfident Cornwallis. As Cornwallis backed off for the night, Washington moved his men to Princeton. The Battle of Princeton would be fought the following day, leading to another overwhelming American victory.

Washington and his army spent the winter in Morristown where Washington continued to battle with Congress over the need for more soldiers, more supplies, and the right to choose his own generals. During this time Washington turned his attention to organizing a spy ring as well as organizing his own group of aids which grew to include Captain Alexander Hamilton and the Marquis de Lafayette.

In the summer of 1777, the British made a move toward Philadelphia, so Washington moved his army quickly into the city. Washington took up a defense near Brandywine Creek, but was quickly pushed back to Chester. In an embarrassing defeat, Washington was pushed out of Philadelphia amid the word of another devastating defeat of Continental forces near Paoli. In October, Washington marched his men back toward Germantown where Howe had settled his army. In a strategic misstep, Washington wasted men and ammunition in attempting to take a British stronghold called Chew house, allowing Howe to regroup his men. Washington eventually pushed his men forward, but bad weather obscured the battlefield, leading to confusion and the unauthorized retreat of most of Washington's men in the defeat.

After the Battle of Saratoga, Washington became the victim of distrust within the Congress, leading to insubordination among his generals and rumors of conspiracies to replace him as leader of the Continental Army.

In this first half of part three, the reader learns of Washington's actions during the early part of the Revolutionary War. The reader is already aware that Washington was a distinguished soldier in the French and Indian War and the leader of the military in Virginia. However, there was never more at stake than during the Revolutionary War,



both for a new nation and for Washington personally. Washington took the role as leader of the Continental Army with humility, afraid he would not be able to live up to the expectations of his fellow countrymen. At first Washington shows strengths as a leader by pushing the British out of Boston, but suffers terrible defeats in New York. Later, Washington once again shows brilliance as a leader in crossing the Delaware and defeating the British both in Trenton and Princeton, but again suffers humiliating defeats in Pennsylvania.

The author of this book not only chronicles Washington's leadership skills during the Revolutionary War, but also examines the physical, mental, and logistical aspects of this war that worked against him. Washington did not always have the support of the people he was attempting to defend and win freedom for, most especially the people of New York and New Jersey who continued to support the British. Washington also lost most of his support in Congress with the loss of the capital, Philadelphia. Despite his overwhelming victories after crossing the Hudson, Washington would find himself defending his actions to a disappointed Congress as well as fighting off the backstabbing conspiracies of his own generals.



## Part 3, The General: Chapters 27-37

### Part 3, The General: Chapters 27-37 Summary and Analysis

Washington and his army settled the winter of 1777 in Valley Forge where the army faced multiple hardships, including a lack of food and clothing. In February, Benjamin Franklin achieved a pair of treaties with France, boosting morale in Valley Forge when word reached them in May.

General William Howe was replaced by General Henry Clinton after word of the French treaty with the Americans, creating a shift in the British strategy. That summer, the British retreated out of Philadelphia, allowing the Continental Army to cross the Delaware once more. At the Battle of Monmouth, General Charles Lee only halfheartedly attacked Clinton and Cornwallis, causing Washington to march his own troops into Lee's retreating men. Washington rallied the men and an equally matched battle waged all day until Washington decided to pull back and renew the attack in the morning. The British slipped away in the night and both sides claimed victory. Lee was later be court-martialed for his actions.

A short time after the Battle of Monmouth, the French reinforcements arrived. The coordination with the French would never be an easy one for Washington, however, as the bulk of their ships remained in the Caribbean and the French seemed to have their own.

The summer of 1779 would prove to be a quiet one and Washington would take his army into Morristown, New Jersey for a winter marked once again by a lack of supplies and an unwillingness of locals to provide needed supplies.

In the spring of 1780, Cornwallis and Clinton took a flotilla to North Carolina. At the same time, Washington turned his thoughts to a siege of New York. In the fall of 1780, Washington went to West Point to meet with its commander, Benedict Arnold. However, Arnold disappeared from his home and Washington later learned that he had been conspiring with British officials to allow them to capture West Point. Washington made many attempts to find and imprison Arnold, but was never successful.

In the winter of 1780, many of Washington's men had become disgruntled from lack of pay, lack of food, and lack of clothing. A group of men mutinied in Morristown and killed their officers. Mutinies spread, but Washington's officers quickly snuffed them out.

As the war raged on in the south, Washington continued to push for a siege of New York. However, this siege would never come to fruition.

While making it appear as though a siege on New York was imminent, Washington slipped away to Mount Vernon on his way to survey the battles taking place in the south.



Washington arrived just in time to help plan the Battle of Yorktown that would lead to the surrender of the British Army. At the same time the country was celebrating the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington suffered a personal blow in the death of his stepson, Jacky Custis.

Most of 1782 Washington spent in tying up loose ends such as dealing with pay for his soldiers, the fate of many British prisoners, and suffering through the pomp and circumstances of his role in the war.

In the spring of 1783, Washington found himself negotiating with the British for the return of slaves who deserted to the British in favor of freedom. Washington also looked to the future by joining the newly formed Society of the Cincinnati, an organization created to support families of soldiers, to maintain the freedom they fought for, and to keep a social network open for soldiers.

With the last of the treaties signed, Washington bid a tearful goodbye to his troops and officers and resigned from the Continental Army.

In this second half of the third part of the novel, the author chronicles the final years of the war. Washington found himself in command of an army that lacked money, food, and clothing. Many of the towns in which Washington's army were encamped refused to give up food and clothing that they could sell to the British for a profit. Washington found himself disgruntled by the poor attitude of the very people he and his soldiers were fighting for. At the same time, Washington found himself the victim of ambitious generals who did anything they could do to undermine Washington, even at the cost of defeat on the battlefield. Washington proved himself a strong leader despite treachery and survive these dark attempts to undermine him.

The war played itself out beyond Washington's control, leaving him unable to retake New York and win back some of the respect lost when he lost the city in the first place. However, Washington was present for the Battle of Yorktown that resulted in the defeat of the British. Even as Washington became the hero of all Americans, he suffered multiple personal blows, including the death of his stepson and the continuing angst that existed between him and his mother. The author shows the reader in this section of the novel that Washington was not only a strong, successful leader of the Continental Army, but he was also a human being who was not immune to the normal difficulties that all people often face in life.



## Part 4, The Statesman: Chapters 38-45

### Part 4, The Statesman: Chapters 38-45 Summary and Analysis

Washington returned home after eight years to a plantation in great need of renovations. At the same time, Washington was inundated with visitors who wanted to meet the American hero, placing a huge burden on his already struggling finances.

While struggling financially, Washington decided to tour his properties in the Ohio Valley to collect rent and evict squatters.

Washington remained good friends with Lafayette. The one bone of contention between the two men was the fact that Washington continued to own slaves despite his insistence that he no longer believed in the antiquated system.

Washington found himself in the middle of a controversy as the president of the Society of Cincinnati when it came out that membership included a hereditary clause, smacking of a monarchy. Washington found himself quickly distancing himself from the society in an attempt to keep from appearing anti-republican.

Along with preservation of his war papers, Washington agreed to sit for several portraits after the war as an attempt to preserve his image for posterity. Also during this time period there began a string of rebellions in Massachusetts, making it clear the Articles of the Confederation needed to be rewritten.

In late 1786, Washington learned that he would represent Virginia at a convention in Philadelphia. At the Constitutional Convention, Washington was appointed president.

As president of the Constitutional Convention, Washington was not deeply involved in the committees that created the Constitution, but guided the often heated discussions.

As the Constitution was reviewed by each state and awaited ratification, Washington was touted as the first president. Washington at first hesitated at the idea, afraid of how taking the role of first president would fit with the image he so carefully crafted during the Revolutionary War. Highly ambitious, however, Washington allowed himself to be talked into the job.

This part of the book explores Washington's life after the Revolutionary War. Washington returned home to a plantation that had been somewhat neglected in Washington's absence. Washington, who struggled all his life with financial problems, returned home to a plantation that needed extensive renovations. Not only this, but Washington always had an eye on the impression he would leave on future generations. To Washington this required that he live by a certain standard that gave off the impression of great wealth. For this reason, Washington often lived beyond his means,

leaving him chronically in debt. Ironically, Washington would have to borrow money just to attend his own inauguration as First President of the United States.

In the aftermath of the war, Washington was ready to settle down to the privacy of private citizenship, but soon discovered that his celebrity would make that impossible. Washington's home was inundated with visitors that put a toll on his finances as well as forcing him to socialize with practical strangers, something that placed a great toll on his patience and sense of self. However, Washington, again with an eye to posterity, put up with the guests and presented them with an image that he hoped would be kind to him in future history books.





## Part 5, The President: Chapters 46-63

### Part 5, The President: Chapters 46-63 Summary and Analysis

Washington was alerted of his unanimous win as president by Charles Thompson and immediately set out for New York. Although the Constitution said nothing about an inaugural speech, Washington chose to make one to Congress shortly after accepting the oath of office.

Part of being president was the need to socialize with the people. To deal with his discomfort with strangers, Washington confined these meetings to a weekly levee he would hold in his home each Tuesday. On Fridays, Mrs. Washington would hold a similar reception for the ladies that Washington would attend as well.

Within a few months of taking the oath of office, Washington became ill with a tumor on his leg that had to be excised by a local surgeon. As Washington lay ill, his mother died.

Washington spent a great deal of 1789 making appointments. For his cabinet, Washington appointed Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Knox as Secretary of War, and Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State. Washington also appointed judges to the Supreme Court, with John Jay as the chief justice. Also early in his presidency, Washington assisted James Madison in getting passed by Congress the Bill of Rights.

After his illness, Washington decided to tour the northern states in order to gauge for himself public opinion as well as to help aid in restoring his good health.

In January of 1790, Washington gave his first state of the union address. A short time later, Hamilton would deliver the Report on Public Credit, a plan that included Hamilton's assertion that the federal government should take on the state debt incurred by the war. In a surprising turn of events, James Madison stood in opposition to the plan. The plan also caused an uproar in states that had already paid off most of their debt, including Virginia. That same spring, Washington became gravely ill and nearly died.

When the Residence Act was passed in 1790 making Philadelphia the temporary capital and selecting the Potomac River area as the permanent capital, Washington was given the right to select a specific location along the Potomac River as the permanent capital. Washington chose a location close to Mount Vernon, causing many to criticize his motives. As the capital was moving to Philadelphia, Hamilton announced his idea for an excise tax on whiskey to strengthen public credit.

In December of 1790, Hamilton presented a bill for a central bank whose charter he based on the Bank of England. The bank bill passed surprisingly easily and Washington



was urged to veto it. Shortly after signing the bill, Washington went on a tour of the south to gauge public opinion in regards to the whiskey tax.

In the early years of Washington's presidency the French Revolution began. Many Americans felt that the American government should get involved to support the rebels, but Washington maintained a watchful stance. At the same time, Washington was involved in the designing and construction of the new capital as well as designing a policy in dealing with the Indians in western territories.

Jefferson and Madison created a party known as the republicans who argued that Hamilton's Federalists supported a monarchy in America. As Washington continued to support Hamilton's policies even amongst questionable acts involving the federal bank system, republicans began to publish attacks against Washington in newspapers. About this same time, Washington began thinking about retiring from public office. However, Jefferson and Madison strongly urged Washington to remain in office.

As Washington's second term in office began Hamilton was placed under investigation by Congress. Although cleared of all charges, this episode increased tensions between Hamilton and Jeffersonians. At the same time, atrocities continued to pile up in France. Washington made the decision to issue a neutrality proclamation as France declared war on England to prevent America from being forced to choose between the two powers. At the same time, France sent a new French minister to America, Edmond-Charles Genet. Genet created a great deal of trouble in America. Finally Genet was recalled to France to face trial for his crimes, but Washington gave him asylum in America.

In the summer of 1793 a yellow fever broke out in the capital, causing the government to abandon the city. Washington spent some time at Mount Vernon during this time before calling Congress into session in a temporary location.

As war continued to wage between France and England, Washington found himself forced to send an envoy, John Jay, to England to stop the seizing of American ships and the imprisonment of American citizens who were thought to be British deserters. At the same time, Washington found himself forced to deal with his Indian policy. The overwhelming problem Washington had to deal with in the summer of 1794, however, was a rebellion in Virginia and Pennsylvania against the whiskey tax. As Washington prepared to confront the rebels, Henry Knox returned home to deal with a personal matter, therefore Washington took Hamilton with him.

Washington spoke with representatives of the whiskey rebels first, then sent his troops in. The rebels immediately dispersed. In the aftermath of the rebellion, Washington showed a great deal of displeasure in Knox, causing Knox to resign from his role as secretary of war.

John Jay reached a treaty with the British, later known as the Jay Treaty, that included some highly controversial concessions to the British that angered a great deal of people. Although the treaty passed both houses of the Congress, the American people



voiced great outrage, causing Washington to delay in signing it. At the same time, Washington found himself in a difficult situation when Lafayette's son came to America as well as struggling to fill vacant secretary posts as Hamilton had also resigned.

In the aftermath of the Jay Treaty, Washington was crucified in the press, often in essays written by people who were once some of his strongest supporters, such as Madison, Monroe, and Jefferson.

Determined not to run for president again, Washington had Hamilton help him write a farewell address that would be published in several newspapers in the fall of 1796.

In March of 1797, Washington attended Adams's before leaving Philadelphia for retirement at Mount Vernon.

In this section of the novel, the author analyzes Washington's eight years as the first president of the United States. As the first president, Washington had the opportunity to do what no one else would be able to do, to set precedent in the ceremonies and duties of the president. From the moment of his taking the oath of office, Washington was conscious of the impact of his every action. Washington created the tradition of the inauguration speech, the tradition of giving the state of the union in a speech, and defining many of the vague powers of the executive branch of the government. At the same time, Washington made many enemies among republicans who saw his relationship with the controversial Hamilton and his refusal to aid France over England as an attempt to instate a monarchy in America.

Even as the author analyzes Washington's years as president, he also examines his personal life at a stressful time in his life. Washington never stopped dreaming of the potential of Mount Vernon, nor did he ever stop struggling financially in creating the image of the wealthy planter he so carefully cultivated all his life. The author takes special note of the struggles Washington had with his slaves during this time period, often contradicting himself as he voiced doubts about the tradition of slavery but continued to keep slaves, often indulging in subterfuge to keep his slaves from achieving freedom. In this way the author points out the many strengths and failures that made Washington human even as he was creating an image that would leave him an idol on a pedestal in many American homes for generations to come.



## Part 6, The Legacy: Chapters 64-67

### Part 6, The Legacy: Chapters 64-67 Summary and Analysis

Hamilton and Washington often discussed the growing tensions with France in the aftermath of the XYZ Affair, pledging to lead an army together should it come to that. Therefore, when Adams approached Washington to lead a new federal army, Washington insisted on having Hamilton as his second in command. Adams openly protested this choice, causing a battle of wits between the two men before Adams finally backed down.

With the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts and the public scandal surrounding Hamilton, the Federalists began to lose some of their credibility by 1799. Even though he had sworn he would never move more than twenty-five miles from Mount Vernon again, party leaders began to ask Washington to run for a third term as president. Washington refused.

Washington had always struggled with slavery, aware that it was an antiquated institution, but unsure of how to maintain such a large plantation without slaves. In the final months of his life, Washington painstakingly wrote out a new will by hand. Washington gave his slaves their freedom upon his wife's death in his will.

Washington became ill in mid-December of 1799, struggling to breathe. After three doctors did all they knew for him, Washington passed away late in the afternoon of December 14, 1799. Washington was entombed in a communal tomb at Mount Vernon and joined a few years later by Martha.

In this final section of the book, the author tells his readers how Washington became a strong supporter of the Federalist party in his final years of life, having a final falling out with Thomas Jefferson upon the latter's public criticism of Washington's years as president. Washington was always a man who was deeply loyal to those who he considered his friends and in this instance Washington found himself unable to remain friends with Jefferson upon the other man's doubts of his intelligence and public criticism of Washington as a soldier and a politician. At the same time, Washington remained intensely close to Hamilton, fighting for him with President Adams, despite Hamilton's own scandal regarding an extramarital affair.

At the end of his life, not only did Washington make known his strong political beliefs, beliefs that he kept closely guarded during his years as president in order to keep from appearing united with one party over another, but he also continued to struggle with his own feelings toward slavery. Washington had always thought holding a man in bondage against his will was wrong, but Washington could not conceive of another source of labor that would be of benefit on large plantations like his own Mount Vernon. Washington also struggled with the social implications of freeing large numbers of



slaves into society. This is a struggle that was not uncommon among the founding fathers and generations to follow. However, unlike the other founding fathers, Washington freed all of his slaves in his will upon the death of his wife. Once again, showing complexity in his dealing with slavery, Washington created an act of overwhelming benevolence, but placed his wife in such a dangerous situation that she ended up freeing the slaves a year after his death to prevent them from causing her bodily harm. Washington was nothing if not a bundle of contradictions.



# Characters

## George Washington

George Washington was the son of a landowner in Virginia. Washington's father died when Washington was only eleven, leaving him the oldest of his father's second set of children. Washington's mother was a difficult woman with whom he would have an adversarial relationship with his entire life. In fact, Washington's mother prevented him from joining the navy as a young man, putting him on a path to the army that would define his career.

Washington trained as a surveyor as a young man and would nourish a lifelong love of land. Washington would come to own a great deal of land in Virginia as well as the Ohio valley. With the death of his older brother and his child, Washington would come to inherit a group of five farms known collectively as Mount Vernon. It would be here that Washington would build his life with wife, Martha, and various stepchildren and other young relatives.

Washington was among a small group of delegates selected to participate in the Continental Congresses that took place in the early 1770s. When war with Britain proved to be inevitable, Washington was made the leader of the Continental Army. While he was unsure of his own abilities, Washington would prove to be a capable leader, eventually ending an eight year war successfully.

Washington would return home to Mount Vernon after the war only to find that his life irrevocably changed. Life for Washington would never be the same. Therefore it was no surprised when he was asked to be the first President of the United States. Washington agreed to take the presidency only until the Constitution could take hold in the country, but would end up remaining for two terms and asked to serve a third.

## Martha Dandridge Custis Washington

Martha Dandridge Custis was a young widow when George Washington was introduced to her. Martha had recently suffered the deaths of two of her children and her husband. Marriage to a widow, especially a wealthy widow like Martha Custis, was a common custom at the time Washington met Martha, especially with his political ambitions. Although Washington was possibly in love with another woman at the time, he settled into marriage with Martha quite happily. In fact, it would be a marriage that would last multiple decades and appeared to all who knew them that it was a happy marriage.

Martha was close to her husband and during the eight years during which he led the Continental Army, Martha would often take the long, hard trips to be with him and his army. Martha's presence would often boost the morale of the troops. Later, when Washington finally came home to Mount Vernon, Martha was content to have him there. Therefore, when Washington made the decision to become president, Martha was



unhappy with his choice. However, Martha followed him to New York and fulfilled her duties as first lady.

## Lawrence Wshington

Lawrence Washington was George Washington's older, half brother. Lawrence was an officer in the navy. Upon their father's death, Lawrence was given a small farm near the Potomac River that he dubbed Mount Vernon after a favorite commander in the navy. One of Lawrence's neighbors was the Fairfax family. Though Lawrence, Washington befriended the Fairfaxes and would share a lifelong friendship with George William Fairfax and his wife, Sally. Also through the elder Fairfax Washington would receive training as a land surveyor.

Lawrence married and had a daughter, but soon began to suffer the effects of tuberculosis. Multiple trips springs failed to cure Lawrence and he died a young man. Upon his death, Lawrence left Mount Vernon to his wife and child, but should they die, Washington would inherit Mount Vernon. This eventually came to pass and Washington would turn Mount Vernon into a large and thriving plantation.

## Sarah 'Sally' Cary Fairfax

Sally Fairfax was the young, beautiful wife of Washington's friend, George William Fairfax. For many years during Sally's marriage to George William and before Washington's marriage to Martha, the two appear to have developed a strong friendship. Washington and Sally often exchanged letters. These letters occasionally mentioned conversations that imply a certain intimacy between the two. Later, in the months before Washington was to marry Martha, he wrote a letter to Sally that goes further in suggesting something of a love affair between the two. However, it is unclear if the affair was ever consummated or not. After his marriage to Martha, Sally and George William remained close friends of the couple, often going to Mount Vernon to socialize. This implies that there was nothing consummated in Washington's relationship with Sally.

## John Adams

John Adams was a delegate at the Continental Congress and one of the first to suggest Washington as the leader of the Continental Army. Adams was a strong supporter of Washington at the beginning of the war, but his support of Washington would change over the years. When Washington was chosen as the first presidential candidate, Adams aspired to be president as well. When Adams learned that Hamilton had influenced the vote of a few delegates, Adams became enraged at his manipulation of the process despite gaining enough votes to be elected vice president.

During Washington's two terms as president, Adams served as vice president. However, Adams and Washington had few dealings because Adams took his role as leader of the



Congress seriously and Washington saw the legislative and executive arms of the government as two separate entities, therefore he rarely included Adams as a part of his cabinet. When Washington left at the end of his second term, Adams was elected to the presidency. Although Adams considered himself a part of the Federalist party, he disliked Hamilton. Therefore, when Adams appointed Washington as the head of a new federal army and Washington insisted on Hamilton as his second in command, Adams and Washington had a disagreement that would continue until Adams relented.

## **Benedict Arnold**

Benedict Arnold was a general in the Continental Army. Arnold was in command at West Point 1780 when he began to conspire with the British. Arnold was unhappy that he had been passed over for promotion. As a result, Arnold had agreed to weaken the defenses at West Point to allow the British to easily overtake it. Washington surprised Arnold with a visit to West Point causing Arnold to disappear hours before the British attack on the point, escaping to the British lines. Washington attempted several times to take Arnold prisoner, but was never successful.

## **Alexander Hamilton**

Alexander Hamilton was a young man during the Revolutionary War who became a member of Washington's private staff. Washington took a special interest in Hamilton and they became good friends. However, after a brief argument, Hamilton quit Washington's employ. When Washington became president, he appointed Hamilton Secretary of the Treasury. As secretary of the treasury, Hamilton initiated a federal bank, created an excise tax on whiskey, and encouraged the federal government to assume the state's debts from the war. All these policies would be highly controversial, as well as Hamilton's dealings with the British on Washington's behalf. This would cause a split between Hamilton and Jefferson, as well as many of Jefferson's followers, such as Monroe and Madison. This led to two political parties, the Federalists and the Republicans, that would begin a feud that would color Washington's final years as president.

## **Marquis de Lafayette**

The Marquis de Lafayette was a young, idealistic French man who wanted to join the fight in America because he saw it as a righteous cause. When Lafayette landed in America, he became a part of Washington's staff. The two men became great friends during the war and would continue to be friends after the war. In fact, Washington would often consult Lafayette on questions of etiquette and his legacy. The only issue on which Lafayette and Washington never saw eye to eye on was slavery. Lafayette thought that slavery should be abolished and went as far as to offer to go into a business with Washington that would be free of slave labor. Washington, although he





believed that slavery was an institution that should be abolished, could not bring himself to free his slaves because he could not see any other way to run his large plantation.

During Washington's terms as president, Lafayette became a source of uncertainty and indecision for Washington. Lafayette was arrested and held as an enemy of France's new government during the final years of the French Revolution. When Lafayette's wife begged Washington for help in getting her husband freed, he could not go against his own neutrality proclamation and could only provide her money for her personal use. Years later when Lafayette's son came to America, Washington was unsure of how it would look should he invite the boy to visit with him. In the end, however, Washington arranged to have young Lafayette stay at his home until his father's release from an Austrian jail after five years of imprisonment.

## **Martha 'Patsy' Parke Custis**

Patsy Custis was Martha Washington's daughter. When Washington married Martha, he became stepfather to her two living children, Patsy and Jacky. While Jacky was a difficult child, Patsy was a quiet, timid young woman whom Washington came to think of as his own child. However, Patsy suffered from epilepsy and would succumb to some undiagnosed ailment shortly after an epileptic episode when she was only seventeen years old.

## **William Lee**

William Lee was a slave owned by Washington. Lee was a loyal valet to Washington who traveled with him during the Revolutionary War. During the few years that Washington lived at Mount Vernon after the war, Lee was injured and broke both knees in separate accidents. Despite his inability to continue to serve Washington, William Lee was taken to New York to be a member of Washington's household as he served as president. The relationship between Washington and Lee was remarkable for the time period.



# Objects/Places

## War Papers

Washington generated a great deal of paperwork during the Revolutionary War. Washington had these papers copied and preserved in bound books for use later in the writing of biographies and other historical volumes.

## Portraits

With the understanding that he would be a historical figure to future generations, Washington sat for multiple portraits from the time he became leader of the Continental Army until his death.

## Spectacles

As Washington aged, his eyesight began to suffer. Toward the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington began to wear spectacles to enhance his ability to read. These spectacles are featured in a popular anecdote about Washington and his speech to a group of disgruntled officers in the Continental Army toward the end of the war.

## Teeth

Washington had notoriously bad teeth throughout his adulthood. It is documented that Washington had multiple pairs of dentures made for him out of the teeth of slaves he had purchased. These dentures were often ill-fitting and affected the way in which Washington spoke.

## Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon was a small farm inherited by Lawrence Washington after the death of his father. Lawrence named his home Mount Vernon after a commander in the navy. Later, after Lawrence's death and the death of his wife and child, Washington inherited the farm. Washington would expand Mount Vernon to include five farms.

## Constitution

Washington was president of the committee formed to revise the Articles of the Confederation, a committee that eventually wrote and signed the Constitution of the United States.



## **Declaration of Independence**

The Declaration of Independence was a document presented to the King of England that declared the American colonies' decision to exert their independence from British rule.

## **Continental Army**

The Continental Army was the army formed in the American colonies to fight in the Revolutionary War against the British. George Washington was the leader of the Continental Army and successfully led them to victory against the British.

## **Revolutionary War**

The Revolutionary War was fought 1775-1783. The war was between the American colonists and the British. The Americans were fighting for their freedom from British rule. The Americans successfully won the war, gaining their independence.

## **New York**

New York was an important strategically location during the Revolutionary War that Washington regretfully lost to British control. However, when the British surrendered, Washington entered New York amid much fanfare. Years later, Washington would take the oath of office in New York and serve as president there until the capital was moved to Philadelphia for ten years in anticipation of the creation of a new capital in the Potomac Valley.

## **Virginia**

Virginia is where Mount Vernon is located. Washington would spend most of his lifetime in Virginia with the exception of his time with the Continental Army and his terms in office as president.

## **Ohio Valley**

Washington spent a great deal of time in the Ohio Valley as a young man, serving in the army there during the French-Indian War. Later, Washington would come to own a great deal of land in this area that he would rent out to farmers.



# Themes

## Ambition

Although Washington was a humble man, he had great ambition from the time he was a child. Washington wanted to be an educated gentleman and was sorely disappointed when the death of his father when he was only eleven removed the possibility for him to go to a proper school. Washington would be self-taught and an intelligent man who could hold his own with the most educated people of his time. However, Washington's lack of a formal education would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Washington wanted a military career because he saw that as the best way to become a respected gentleman. Washington's mother stopped him from joining the navy, but he would later join the army and begin a career that would eventually lead him to lead the Continental Army and to the presidency. Washington also fell in love with the land around his home in Virginia and in the Ohio Valley where he spent a great deal of time during the French-Indian War. Washington would quickly acquire a great deal of land in this area after the war both from direct purchase and from land grants given to him and his officers for their service in the French-Indian War.

As Washington's reputation grew, he began to pursue public office. In time Washington's reputation had grown to the point that when unhappiness with the British led to a meeting of delegates from all the colonies was organized, Washington was among the delegates sent from Virginia. In time Washington would be named the leader of the Continental Army when the Continental Congress sent a Declaration of Independence to Britain and began to anticipate war.

Washington's time as leader of the Continental Army created a public persona that would change Washington's life forever. Washington suddenly became a national hero before there was even a nation. Over the next few years after the war, Washington would find himself inundated with visitors wanting to be close to the famous army hero. At the same time, Washington became involved in discussions about the new freedoms this country had won and the need for there to be a centralized government. Washington knew that when a centralized government was formed, it would be easy to turn it into a monarchy. Washington and his confidants did not want this, therefore when Washington's name was thrown around as a possible first president, he hesitated to take it not because of a lack of ambition, but because he did not want to appear too eager. In the end, however, Washington's burning desire to be remembered as a gentleman who changed a nation, led him to accept the job. Washington had achieved beyond his own dreams and took the job both with fear of being inadequate and an eye on future posterity. This makes ambition a theme of both Washington's life and this biography.



## Self Esteem

Although Washington was a highly ambitious man, he was also a humble man who did not want to appear too eager. Washington often hesitated when offered roles that would elevate his status in society and in the history books, reluctant to appear as though he had not thought things through too well or that he was qualified for something he knew he was not.

Washington did not have the education that he felt a man of his stature ought to have had. This was something that often bothered Washington, undermining his sense of self-worth. Each time Washington accepted a prestigious appointment, from leader of the Continental Army to President of the United States, he told his constituents in his acceptance speech or inauguration speech that he felt he was unqualified for the job and apologized for any mistakes he might make. This might have seemed like an attempt at appearing humble, but Washington truly did worry that he was not good enough to live up to expectations.

While Washington was a powerful and intelligent man, his own sense of self-esteem left him feeling inadequate a great deal of the time. In personal relationships, Washington would often ask the advice of those he trusted to help him make decisions such as the choice to take the office of the president. Washington never failed to meet expectations, but his self-doubts created in him a humbleness that was endearing and quite possibly created the man who preceded cautiously in all things, making him the Father of our Country.

## Family

Family was important to Washington, but that did not mean he often got along with all members of his family. Washington's mother was a self-consuming and selfish woman who made demands on her eldest child that often changed the course of his life. It was Washington's mother who did not allow him to join the navy as a young man, forcing him into the army. It was also Washington's mother who made disparaging remarks about him in public during his time with the Continental Army and the years afterward that forced him to confront her directly. Washington never had a close relationship with her mother and would in fact remain in an adversarial role with her most of his life.

Washington was close to his siblings, specifically his elder half-brother, Lawrence. It would be through Lawrence that Washington would meet the Fairfaxes, the wealthy family that would help school Washington in his attempts to become a gentleman and make it possible for him to learn to be a land surveyor. Washington would also inherit a farm from Lawrence that would be known as Mount Vernon and would come to encompass five farms.

When Washington married Martha Custis, he also took on the responsibility of her two children. While Washington found Martha's son, Jacky, difficult, he allowed him to join the Continental Army. In the final months of the war, Jacky would grow ill and die,



leaving his two youngest children in the care of Martha and George Washington. Martha also brought to the marriage a young daughter, Patsy, whom Washington was quite fond of, but who would also die at a young age of complications to epilepsy.

Washington would never have any children of his own, but Martha and his home would become something of a stopover for many children, nieces and nephews, and other relatives. It seemed Mount Vernon was never void of children for several years after the Revolutionary War. It was this state of childlessness that would later make Washington a prime candidate to become the first President of the United States. As a childless man, the people did not have to worry that Washington's presidency would turn into some kind of monarchy with his children taking the throne in his stead.

# Style

## Perspective

The writer of this book has written several other biographies in his career, most notably a biography of Alexander Hamilton, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury. This book is the author's most ambitious project, a comprehensive biography of the Father of the United States that can be read in a single volume. To write this book, the author made use of papers recently discovered, reviewed, and released by the University of Virginia to create this vivid and comprehensive biography of a beloved Founding Father.

The author's perspective is one of a scholar and historian who is attempting to tell the story not only of an American institution but also of a person who was once just a normal man like anyone else. The author uses Washington's own words in his extensive papers and letters to tell a story that is comprehensive, but brief enough to appear in a single volume. The author presents Washington as a man, as a military officer, as a farmer, a husband, and as a unique politician. The author's perspective as a historian and a humanitarian offers a unique look at a much studied figure that creates a more rounded picture of a man.

## Tone

The tone of the book is scholarly, but also includes humor and criticism. The author presents his story of Washington in such a way that the reader becomes more aware of the man rather than the myth handed down through many generations of storytellers. Washington was not just a soldier who showed great courage on the battlefield, an indecisive leader, or the father of a country. Washington was a man who knew his actions would be written down and studied for many years to come and he carefully cultivated the image he wanted to appear in the history books. This author manages to peek behind those carefully created images to show the reader the real man.

In this book, the author tells a story that breaks some of the myths told in the history books for generations. To do this, the author uses a tone that is strong and knowledgeable, but also injects some humor into his story when he attempts to show the more human side of the first president. At the same time, the author comes to the story of Washington with his own preconceived ideas of some of the major issues that impacted Washington's life, including opinions in regards to slavery. When touching on these areas of the story, the author's tone changes somewhat, giving the reader the decided belief that the author disagrees with Washington's behaviors and attitudes even though they often reflect the attitudes and behaviors common to men of Washington's stature and rank in his lifetime.

## Structure

The book is divided into six different sections. Each section of the book covers a specific time period in Washington's life, beginning with his early life as a child and young surveyor, moving into his years as an army officer during the French and Indian War as well as his later political career. The last few parts of the book cover Washington's years as leader of the Continental Army, his two terms as the first president of the United States, and finally his last few years of life.

The book is told in a linear style, studying Washington's life from the beginning to the end, with an eye to the events that shaped Washington as a person and as a legacy. The author does not just take a close look at the political events, war-time acts, or presidential policies that Washington was directly involved in, but also takes a close look at his life as a whole, including his relationships, his loves and losses, and his personal beliefs in things such as religion, politics, and slavery. The author attempts to provide a well-rounded story of a legacy that leaves the reader feeling as though they have read about a man and not a legacy.





## Quotes

"Although many contemporaries were fooled by Washington's aura of cool command, those who knew him best shared Stuart's view of a sensitive, complex figure, full of pent-up passion." (Prelude: The Portrait Artist, p. xix).

"At the same time, Lawrence retained clear affection for Admiral Vernon and, in a burst of Anglophilia, would rename the Little Hunting Creek estate Mount Vernon, hanging the admiral's portrait in an honored place there." (Part 1, The Frontiersman: Chapter 1, p. 9).

"By the end, despite four bullets having torn through his hat and uniform, he managed to emerge unscathed." (Part 1, The Frontiersman: Chapter 5, p. 59).

"Whatever the periodic tensions caused by Jacky's lax behavior, the marriage of George and Martha Washington proceeded happily, and they seemed united by strong desire and mutual need. Almost all observers found them exceedingly well matched." (Part 2, The Planter: Chapter 9, p. 101).

"George Washington was sobered and dismayed by the shocking news; there was nothing bloodthirsty in his nature." (Part 3, The General: Chapter 16, p. 181).

"Washington was not surprised that thousands of New Jersey residents rushed to take the loyalty oath offered by the British and scrapped the cause of independence as a foolish pipe dream." (Part 3, The General: Chapter 23, pg. 269).

"Not until midsummer would France be officially at war with England, and in the meantime the Continental Army fended as best it could against a newly alarmed British Empire." (Part 3, The General: Chapter 27, p. 336).

"Washington's desire to socialize with literary personalities likely arose from his belief that writers crowned those who won fame and ended up in history's pantheon." (Part 4, The Statesman: Chapter 38, p. 471).

"In late 1786 George Washington's life was again thrown into turmoil when Madison informed him that the Virginia legislature planned to name him head of the state's seven-man delegation at the forthcoming convention in Philadelphia." Part 4, The Statesman: Chapter 43, p. 520).

"It was an extraordinary admission: Washington needed money to attend his own inauguration as president." (Part 4, The Statesman: Chapter 45, p. 554).

"Once he decided to serve a second term, George Washington was reelected by a unanimous 132 votes in the Electoral College. If one counted his selection as commander in chief, president of the Constitutional Convention, and president in his first term, he had compiled a string of four straight unanimous victories." (Part 5, The President: Chapter 56, p. 684).



"As always, Washington fretted over possible misinterpretations of his motives, speculating that people might whisper he was leaving office because of his 'fallen popularity and despair of being re-elected.'" (Part 5, The President: Chapter 62, p. 753).

"Finally, after many detours, many wanderings, and many triumphs, George and Martha Washington had come home to rest at Mount Vernon for good." (Part 6, The Legend: Chapter 67, p. 817).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Lawrence Washington? What impact did he have on young George's life? Where did the name Mount Vernon come from? Why did Lawrence leave this farm to young George? What did George do with this farm? What did George learn from Lawrence? How did he use this knowledge? Why does the author place so much emphasis on George's relationship with Lawrence?

Who is Sally Fairfax? What type of relationship is implied through the letters that survive between a young George Washington and Sally Fairfax? Why did Washington write to Sally Fairfax before he married Martha? What does this letter imply about Washington's feelings toward Sally? How did this relationship impact Washington's later life? Why does the author mention letters Washington would later write to his young relatives? How did this relationship impact the advice Washington would give to young relatives late in his life?

Who is Martha Dandridge Custis? How did she come to be married to Daniel Parke Custis? What was the result of this marriage? How did Martha come to know George Washington? What kind of relationship did they have? How does the author come by this knowledge? How did marriage to Martha impact Washington's life at the time? How did Martha help to keep up the morale of the troops during the Revolutionary War? How did Martha later impact Washington's terms as president?

What was Washington's relationship like with his mother? How did this impact his own relationship with his stepchildren and adopted children? What kind of a father was Washington? What kind of a man was Washington? How did his own childhood impact Washington's attitudes and ambitions as an adult? Why does the author suggest that Washington was never close to his mother, that he never truly liked his own mother? Why would the author suggest this?

Who was Alexander Hamilton? What role did he play in the Revolutionary War? What role did Hamilton play in Washington's life during the war? Why did Hamilton and Washington have a falling out during the war? Why did Washington later choose Hamilton as secretary of the treasury during his first term as president? How did this decision impact Washington's terms as president? Why was there so much controversy surrounding Hamilton during Washington's time in office?

Who was Thomas Jefferson? Why did Jefferson not want Washington to have dealings with the British during his terms as president? Why did Jefferson oppose Washington's neutrality proclamation? What political party rose up around Jefferson? For what reason? Why did Jefferson think that Washington was Hamilton's puppet? What did Jefferson think Hamilton was up to with his policies as secretary of the treasury? What caused Jefferson's final falling out with Washington?

What were Washington's feelings toward slavery? Why does the author of this book point out so many of Washington's policies and dealings with slavery? What might have



happened if Washington had abolished slavery as the first president of the United States? Could he? Why did Washington refuse to separate slave families? Was this common at the time? Why did Washington force injured and lame slaves to work? Why did Washington fool slaves into leaving Philadelphia before they could live there for six months straight? What opinion does the writer have of these actions on Washington's part? Are these assessments objective? How did Washington finally free his slaves?