

Chapter 12 – George Washington’s First Term

Time: December 1788- January 1789

The Election Of 1788



George Washington (1732-1799)

In December 1788, the United States is ready to hold its first elections under the new Constitution. Since each state sets its own time, the actual voting runs from December 15 to January 10, 1779.

All states select members of Congress, but three (New York, North Carolina and Rhode Island) do not participate in the presidential race. Of the ten that do, popular voting occurs in only six: Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey.

The right to vote for president is limited to men with property, with rules varying by state. The resulting popular vote count across the six states is only 43,782, or 1.3% of the nation’s total population.

Despite pleas to avoid partisan politics from the Independent candidate, George Washington, divisions between Federalist and Anti-Federalist are evident immediately.

Some Partisan Tendencies In The 1788P Election

Anti-Federalists	Federalists
Fear federal intrusion on states	Favor a strong central authority
Agricultural economy	Economy is diversifying
Protective of slavery	Not dependent on slavery
Minimize federal costs and taxes	Active funding and support of business
More prevalent in South	More prevalent in North

As expected, Washington is easily elected chosen as the nation’s first President. He receives almost 90% of all the popular votes cast, and is listed on all 69 of the “elector ballots.”

According to the Constitution, all “electors” name two choices for President, including one not from their own state – with whomever receives the second most votes becoming Vice President. This honor goes to John Adams by a wide margin.

Results Of The 1788 Presidential Election

Candidates	State	Party	Pop Vote	Tot EV	South	Border	North
George Washington	Virginia	Independent	39,624	69	22	9	38
John Adams	Mass	Federalist		34			
John Jay	New York	Federalist		9			
Robert Harrison	Maryland	Federalist		6			
John Rutledge	S Carolina	Federalist		6			
John Hancock	Mass	Federalist		4			
George Clinton	New York	Anti-Federalist		3			
All-Others (5)			4,158	7			
Total			43,782	138			
Needed To Win				35			

Note: South (VA, N Carolina, S Carolina, Georgia), Border (Delaware, Maryland), North (NH, Mass, NY, NJ, Penn, RI, Conn)

“Pro-Administration” candidates win the majority of seats in the first House of Representatives by a margin of 37 to 28, – with sizable wins in the North offsetting losses in the Southern and Border states.

House Of Representatives Election Of 1788

South	# Seats	Pro-Admin	Anti-Admin
Virginia	10	3	7
North Carolina	5	2	3
South Carolina	5	2	3
Georgia	3	0	3
South	23	7	16
Delaware	1	1	0
Maryland	6	2	4
Border	7	3	4
New Hampshire	3	2	1
Massachusetts	8	6	2
Rhode Island	1	1	0
Connecticut	5	5	0
New York	6	3	3
New Jersey	4	4	0
Pennsylvania	8	6	2
North	35	27	8
Total	65	37	28

State legislators are charged with picking their two Senators, and the outcome favors the Pro-Administration forces by 19-7.

Senate Elections In 1788

South	Pro-Admin	Anti-Admin
Virginia		2
North Carolina	2	
South Carolina	2	
Georgia		2
South	4	4
Delaware	1	1
Maryland	2	
Border	3	1
New Hampshire	1	1
Massachusetts	2	
Rhode Island	2	
Connecticut	2	
New York	2	
New Jersey	2	
Pennsylvania	1	1
North	12	2
Total	19	7

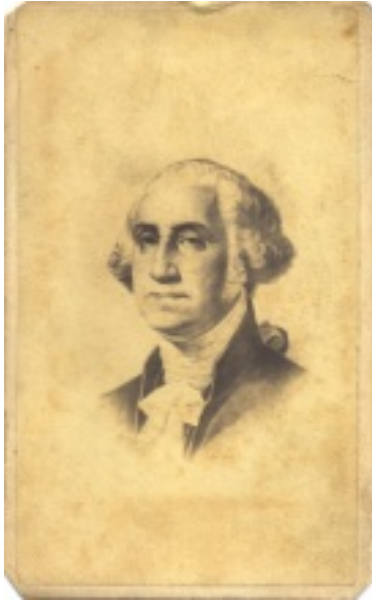
Of the 26 men selected to this upper chamber, 11 had been delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention.

Senators Who Also Served At The 1787 Convention

South	Convention Members
Virginia	None
North Carolina	None
South Carolina	Pierce Butler
Georgia	William Few
Delaware	Richard Bassett, George Read
Maryland	None
New Hampshire	John Langdon
Massachusetts	Caleb Strong
Rhode Island	None
Connecticut	Oliver Ellsworth, William Johnson
New York	Rufus King
New Jersey	William Patterson
Pennsylvania	Robert Morris

Time: February 22, 1732- December 14 1799

President George Washington: Personal Profile



President George Washington (1732-1799)

America's first President is born on February 22, 1732 at his parent's Pope's Creek Estate, situated in northeast Virginia along the Potomac River.

Washington's father, a plantation owner, dies when he is only eleven – and he is raised by his mother and his devoted half-brother, Lawrence, 14 years his senior.

Lawrence, a military man for years, has married into the prominent Fairfax family, owners of vast tracts of land throughout Virginia. Along with his father-in-law, he is also a partner in The Ohio Company, which is dedicated to acquiring acreage west of the Appalachians and opening new British settlements there.

In many ways, Washington will follow in his brother's footsteps as he matures.

His formal education is sparse, but largely through Lawrence he is surrounded by “the best families” and quickly masters the social graces. He is also a very physical man, drawn to horseback riding and hard work on the farm.

Through Lawrence's connections, Washington is appointed Surveyor for Culpepper County at age seventeen, in 1749. His earnings are substantial and they go into buying land in the Shenandoah Valley, the first of many such purchases.

In July, 1752, Lawrence dies after a long battle with tuberculosis at Mt. Vernon.

At age twenty, Washington comes fully into his own – inheriting Lawrence's estate and also succeeding him in the Virginia militia, where he is assigned the rank of Major, by Governor Robert Dinwiddie.

His active military service begins in 1753, just as Britain and France are about to fight the Seven Year's War (1756-63) for worldwide dominion. The North American theater of this war opens in the “Ohio Country” around Pittsburgh, a strategic linchpin connecting French settlements in Quebec with those on the Mississippi -- and also the target of The Ohio Company's planned expansion to the west.

When Governor Dinwiddie, also a partner in The Ohio Company, sends Washington to clear out the intruders, it sparks the French and Indian War (1754-63).

Ironically then, Washington will learn about warfare while serving in the British Army.

As Colonel of the Virginia Regiment, his experience consists mainly of minor battles fought against assorted Indian tribes. But along the way he masters military organization, recruiting, training, tactics, discipline and logistics.

When the war ends, the crown promises him 20,000 acres of land in Ohio in reward for his service – but then reneges after King George III decides against opening new settlements. While the deal is eventually completed, Washington will never forget the British sleight. (He will die owning just over 41,000 acres, or 64 square miles, of frontier land.)

In 1759 he weds the widow, Mary Custis, whose inheritance immediately makes him one of the richest men in the colonies. In quick order Washington doubles the size of his Mt. Vernon estate, buys more slaves, switches his main crop from tobacco to wheat, and settles into the roles of businessman and social host to all the leading families in Virginia and beyond.

This is a pleasing life for Washington, and he lives it outside of the growing unrest that is forming toward the crown.

While he has been a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses since 1758, it is not until 1769 that he speaks up in opposition to Britain's bullying tactics – in this case the Townshend Act imposing duties on “necessities” such as glass, paper, lead and tea that were available only through English shipping.

His proposal is incendiary in character – calling for Virginia to boycott British goods until the act is repealed.

When Parliament responds to the December 1773 Boston Tea Party with the “Intolerable Acts” of April 1774 (closing the port of Boston, banning free assembly, etc.), Washington chairs the session calling for the First Continental Congress to meet in Philadelphia.

As the Revolution plays out, he emerges as the calm and steady presence holding the colonists together, converting the rag-tag militias into a real army, and eventually winning America's freedom from Britain.

After his role in calling for and chairing the 1787 Constitutional Convention, it is clear to all that his destiny lies in serving as the new nation's first Executive leader.

Washington's “bearing” is noted by all in his presence. An English observer writes: “there is a remarkable air of dignity about him.” A Frenchman: “he carries himself freely and with a sort of military grace.” The patriot, Benjamin Rush, says that his deportment is such “that you would distinguish him to be a general and a soldier from among 10,000 people; there is not a king in Europe that would not look like a valet by his side.” Even the sharp tongued Abigail Adams, wife of the new Vice President, is drawn to his graceful demeanor and confidence.

Time: 1674 and Forward

Sidebar: Washington's Mount Vernon Plantation



George Washington's Mt. Vernon Plantation –
Slave Quarters Left of House

Washington inherits Mt. Vernon in 1752, at age twenty – and expands it from 2,000 acres to over 8,000 acres after he weds the very wealthy widow, Martha Custis, in 1759.

The hub of the plantation is a 2½ story mansion with 20 rooms, and 12 outbuildings, including slave quarters which, at their peak, house about 317 blacks, who work in the fields, serve in the residence, or handle duties such as carpentry, shoe-making, weaving, milling and gardening.

Washington treats Mt. Vernon like a business, dividing the property into 5 separate farms, each run by an overseer, and each using the latest methods of mulching and annual crop rotation to maximize their output. Over time he experiments with 60 different crops and also runs a sizable fishing operation, with a catch taken from the Potomac, then cleaned, salted and shipped across the colonies and even abroad.

Mt. Vernon is not a cotton plantation.

Its main crop is tobacco up until about 1765, when Washington decides to concentrate on wheat – a move that eliminates his dependence on English “factors” to complete his sales transactions.

But like other plantation barons, Washington discovers that in addition to the tobacco or wheat or cotton in his fields, he has a “second crop” that is incredibly valuable – the crop of slaves to be breed and sold in the open market.

Like Jefferson, Washington is expanding his inventory of slaves all the way up until his death in 1799, when the count tops out at 317.

Number of Slaves Owned by Washington

1743	1760	1770	1774	1799
10	49	87	135	317

And he is also selling slaves along the way, as in this 1766 request to a sea-going trader:

With this letter comes a Negro (Tom) which I beg the favor of you to sell...for whatever he will fetch. This fellow is a rogue...but exceedingly healthy, strong and good at the Hoe..keep him handcuffed till you get to sea.

Washington is not known to be harsh with his slaves, and is fairly unique among his class by writing a detailed will guaranteeing that each is to be freed and educated upon his death. Still, while alive, his overall attitudes are typical of plantation owners of his era – the blacks are his property and a major source of his total wealth.

As the economist Robert Ransom points out, the presence of even 15-25 slaves on a plantation signals a 60-fold increase in wealth vis a vis the average small farm in the region.

Relative Wealth of Southern Plantations

Slave Labor	%	Value Then	Value in 2010 \$
No slave	67	\$ 2,362	\$ 58,000
A few slaves	31	9,634	237,000
Plantations	2	154,785	3,808,000

Note: Ransom p. 63 (for 1860)

This puts plantation owners like Washington among the economic elites of America, the Southern version of industrial tycoons emerging in New England.

Time: 1789-1793

Overview Of Washington's First Term



Washington's inaugural takes place in the capital, New York City, at Federal Hall, which will serve as the initial home of the U.S. Congress. The oath of office is administered on the balcony in front of a cheering crowd, and he then delivers a brief address in the Senate chamber. Like all presidents over the next 75 years, Washington's annual pay is set at \$25,000.

Washington in Masonic Garb (1732-1799)

Several critical challenges face the new President as he assumes power:

- On the domestic front, he needs to create from scratch a strong Federal government structure capable of fixing the many shortcomings that have plagued the Confederation years.
- In foreign affairs, his number one priority lies in assuring the nation’s security against the potential military threats on each of its borders.
- Above all else, he must insure that the “sovereign states” he governs begin to behave as one unified entity, avoiding divisive factions, moving America toward the destiny he sees for it.

He begins by setting up the infrastructure needed to run a federal government, including the “cabinet system” that places senior officials at the head of various departments. Washington’s cabinet is limited to five men.

Washington’s First Cabinet: 1789

Position	Name	Home State
Vice-President	John Adams	Massachusetts
Secretary of State	Thomas Jefferson	Virginia
Secretary of Treasury	Alexander Hamilton	New York
Secretary of War	Henry Knox	Massachusetts
Attorney General	Edmund Randolph	Virginia

As Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson’s brief is to play off the European powers against each other, in order to keep America out of further wars. Jefferson has just returned from four years as Ambassador to France, and is a renowned Francophile all his life. He supports the “people’s revolution” already under way there, and is forever suspicious of British intentions.

Alexander Hamilton’s job is to create a vibrant and forward looking economy, get the nation out of debt, and set up a stable banking system that protects the value of the currency, both domestically and in foreign markets.

Henry Knox, famed for transporting the cannon of Ft. Ticonderoga to Dorchester Heights in 1776, is charged with building a capable army, should it be needed.

Finally, Edmund Randolph, author of the “Virginia Plan,” who refused to sign the Constitution in Philadelphia and then worked hard to ratify it in Virginia, is asked to oversee the Federal judicial system, as Attorney General.

But Washington’s focus during this first term is on domestic policy, especially around creating the foundations for economic growth and for running the government.

The burden for setting up the required policies and mechanisms falls on the President’s right hand man, Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury.

Washington's First Term: Key Events

1789	Milestones
January 10	Voting ends in first general election
March 4	New York chosen as site of capital
April 1	New government goes into effect
April 6	Quorum met in House of Representatives
April 30	Washington and Adams are inaugurated
July 4	First Protective Tariff (5-15%) passed by Congress
July 14	Bastille Day – French Revolution begins
1790	
March 26	Naturalization Law (for citizenship) is passed
May 29	Rhode Island is last to ratify the 1787 Constitution
July 16	The District of Columbia chosen as the permanent capital
August 4	Federal government assumes all debts from war with Britain
September 25	Congress passes 12 Amendments For Ratification
December 6	Capital moves from New York to Philadelphia
December 13	Hamilton calls for a federal Bank of the United States (BUS)
1791	
February 2	North Carolina Ratifies Constitution + Amendments
February 15	Jefferson protests BUS on the basis of the 10 th Amendment
February 25	Washington signs bill to create the BUS
March 3	First Internal Revenue Bill (including tax on spirits) is passed
March 4	Vermont admitted to the Union (#14)
May 29	The Supreme Court meets for the first time
November 4	Miami Indians defeat US force of 1400 in Ohio
1792	
January 12	Thomas Pinckney named first Ambassador to England
March 1	Rhode Island Ratifies Constitution + Amendments
May 8	The Militia Act requires all white males 18-45 to sign up
May 17	The Buttonwood Agreement initiates the NY Stock Exchange
June 1	Kentucky admitted to the Union (#15)
August 21	First protests against the Whiskey Tax, in Pittsburg
October 2	Washington tries to end the Jefferson-Hamilton feud
October 13	Cornerstone laid at site of the future White House
December 5	Second presidential election ends with Washington the winner
1793	
January 21	Louis XVI is guillotined during the Reign of Terror in France
February 1	France declares war on Britain, Spain and the Netherlands
February 12	Congress passes a Fugitive Slave Act mandating return of run-aways
February 18	<i>Chisolm v Georgia</i> decided by the Supreme Court; later overturned

Estimates of economic activity during Washington's first term signal the start of rapid expansion for America.

Key Economic Overview – Washington's First Term

	1790	1791	1792	1793
Total GDP (\$000)	189	206	225	251
% Change	---	9%	9%	12%
Per Capita GDP	48	51	54	58