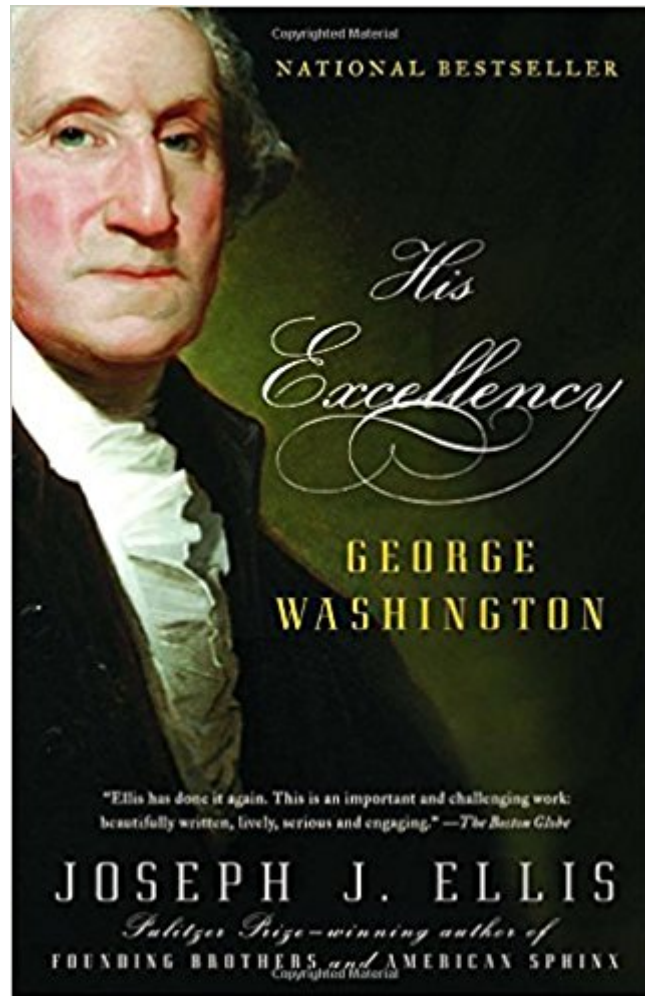




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# His Excellency: George Washington



## Synopsis

National Bestseller To this landmark biography of our first president, Joseph J. Ellis brings the exacting scholarship, shrewd analysis, and lyric prose that have made him one of the premier historians of the Revolutionary era. Training his lens on a figure who sometimes seems as remote as his effigy on Mount Rushmore, Ellis assesses George Washington as a military and political leader and a man whose "statue-like solidity" concealed volcanic energies and emotions. Here is the impetuous young officer whose miraculous survival in combat half-convinced him that he could not be killed. Here is the free-spending landowner whose debts to English merchants instilled him with a prickly resentment of imperial power. We see the general who lost more battles than he won and the reluctant president who tried to float above the partisan feuding of his cabinet. His Excellency is a magnificent work, indispensable to an understanding not only of its subject but also of the nation he brought into being.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As commander of the Continental army, George Washington united the American colonies, defeated the British army, and became the world's most famous man. But how much do Americans really know about their first president? Today, as Pulitzer Prize-winner Joseph J. Ellis says in this crackling biography, Americans see their first president on dollar bills, quarters, and Mount Rushmore, but only as "an icon--distant, cold, intimidating." In truth, Washington was a deeply emotional man, but one who prized and practiced self-control (an attribute reinforced during his

years on the battlefield). Washington first gained recognition as a 21-year-old emissary for the governor of Virginia, braving savage conditions to confront encroaching French forces. As the de facto leader of the American Revolution, he not only won the country's independence, but helped shape its political personality and "topple the monarchical and aristocratic dynasties of the Old World." When the Congress unanimously elected him president, Washington accepted reluctantly, driven by his belief that the union's very viability depended on a powerful central government. In fact, keeping the country together in the face of regional allegiances and the rise of political parties may be his greatest presidential achievement. Based on Washington's personal letters and papers, His Excellency is smart and accessible--not to mention relatively brief, in comparison to other encyclopedic presidential tomes. Ellis's short, succinct sentences speak volumes, allowing readers to glimpse the man behind the myth. --Andy Boynton .com Exclusive Content Curious about George? .com reveals a few facts about the legendary first president of the United States.

Washington bust by Jean Antoine Houdon. Courtesy of the Mt. Vernon Ladies' Assoc.

1. The famous tale about Washington chopping down the cherry tree ("Father, I cannot tell a lie") is a complete fabrication.
2. George Washington never threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River--in fact, to do so from the shore of his Mount Vernon home would have been physically impossible.
3. George Washington did not wear wooden teeth. His poorly fitting false teeth were in fact made of cow's teeth, human teeth, and elephant ivory set in a lead base.
4. Early in his life, Washington was himself a slave owner. His opinions changed after he commanded a multiracial army in the Revolutionary War. He eventually came to recognize slavery as "a massive American anomaly."
5. In 1759, having resigned as Virginia's military commander to become a planter, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis. Washington's marriage to the colony's wealthiest widow dramatically changed his life, catapulting him into Virginia aristocracy.
6. Scholars have discredited suggestions that Washington's marriage to Martha lacked passion, as well as the provocative implications of the well-worn phrase "George Washington slept here."
7. Washington held his first public office when he was 17 years old, as surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia.
8. At age 20, despite no prior military experience, Washington was appointed an adjutant in the Virginia militia, in which he oversaw several militia companies, and was assigned the rank of major.
9. As a Virginia aristocrat, Washington ordered all his coats, shirts, pants, and shoes from London. However, most likely due to the misleading instructions he gave his tailor, the suits almost never fit. Perhaps this is why he appears in an old military uniform in his 1772 portrait.
10. In 1751, during a trip to Barbados with his half-brother Lawrence, Washington was stricken with smallpox and permanently scarred. Fortunately, this early exposure made him immune to the disease that would

wipe out colonial troops during the Revolutionary War. Timeline Important dates in George Washington's life. Engraving of Mount Vernon, 1804. Courtesy of the Mt. Vernon Ladies' Assoc. 1732: George Washington is born at his father's estate in Westmoreland County, Virginia. 1743: George's father, Augustine Washington, dies. 1752: At age 20, despite the fact that he has never served in the military, Washington is appointed adjutant in the Virginia militia, with the rank of major. 1753: As an emissary to Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie, he travels to the Ohio River Valley to confront French forces--the first of a series of encounters that would lead to the French and Indian War. 1755: Washington is appointed commander-in-chief of Virginia's militia. 1759: He marries wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis. 1774: Washington is elected to the First Continental Congress. 1775: He is unanimously elected by the Continental Congress as its army's commander-in-chief. Start of the American Revolution. 1776: On Christmas Day, Washington leads his army across the Delaware River and launches a successful attack against Hessian troops in Trenton, New Jersey. 1781: With the French, he defeats British troops in Yorktown, Virginia, precipitating the end of the war. 1783: The Revolutionary War officially ends. 1788: The Constitution is ratified. 1789: Washington is elected president. 1797: He fulfills his last term as president. 1799: Washington dies on December 14, sparking a period of national mourning. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this follow-up to his bestselling *Founding Brothers*, Ellis offers a magisterial account of the life and times of George Washington, celebrating the heroic image of the president whom peers like Jefferson and Madison recognized as "their unquestioned superior" while acknowledging his all-too-human qualities. Ellis recreates the cultural and political context into which Washington strode to provide leadership to the incipient American republic. But more importantly, the letters and other documents Ellis draws on bring the aloof legend alive "as a young soldier who sought to rise through the ranks of the British army during the French and Indian War, convinced he knew the wilderness terrain better than his commanding officers; as a Virginia plantation owner (thanks to his marriage) who watched over his accounts with a ruthless eye; as the commander of an outmatched rebel army who, after losing many of his major battles, still managed to catch the British in an indefensible position. Following Washington from the battlefield to the presidency, Ellis elegantly points out how he steered a group of bickering states toward national unity; Ellis also elaborates on Washington's complex stances on issues like slavery and expansion into Native American territory. The Washington who emerges from these pages is similar to the one portrayed in a biographical study by James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn published earlier this year, but Ellis's richer

version leaves readers with a deeper sense of the man's humanity. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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Well-written biography that incorporates documents only recently released. Will challenge some of your perspectives on this great man, and reinforce others. I enjoyed this book very much.

This phenomenal work was first introduced to us at Colonial Williamsburg in a CD format. I bought the audio version on a magical family vacation in October 2005. We shared it with a favorite eighth grade history teacher and we needed it for my youngest son's high school junior theme for Honors US History at K-12 International Academy. The paper my son wrote about the Alien and Sedition Acts found excellent support in this biography. We have read the biography and discovered that we had either forgotten many of the details from the audio version or else they are provided as an unabridged account in the book format. Ellis provides a portrait of Washington that is not always favorable. His scholarship is exceptional and as a family we have been able to research passages that piqued our interest and we were able to draw our own conclusions. This was an essential secondary source for the recent project and will be a source for many others, as we have a whole family of history students! I love Flexner's works better than *His Excellency*, but this book offered details about Washington's life that we cannot examine as we do not own *Forging of A Nation*.

Ellis does an excellent job in his research of our most famous Founding Father. What I took away most from this book was Washington's constant fixation on what people would think about him in the future. He was overly-conscious of how his words and actions might be interpreted and went to great lengths to ensure that they would be held in high regard. His line of thinking was that the manner in which a person would be regarded was solely dictated by posterity. Washington was also troubled by the contradiction of fighting for liberty and being a slave owner. Although he treated his slaves with fairness, he was very much troubled with his ownership of them. But in his last will, Washington freed all his slaves and even dictated that the young and older slaves were cared for properly. I do recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in our First President

Required reading for my graduate school American History class. Had some good information about the president but it is more of a people's or popular history, not the kind of hard history you would get from an academic press. I would suggest it more for general reading than for historians or

academically inclined individuals.

With minimal background in history from my high school days, this book showed me the more complete human side of a truly great but reluctant American Hero. GW had many failings in his early life which shows how you can turn it around in your later years. It is fascinating how he continually internally debated the issue of slavery but punted the "problem" downstream for the unified good of the country at a very critical time. The man, who could have been king, had much more concern for the ultimate good and survival of the UNITED states. The debate between Federal control and states' rights that exists today was much more severe then; it was a miracle that the USA is still here. And if you are truly sick of the current negative political scene, this book will show you that it was just as bad or even worse in the beginning among our Founding Brothers, which should provide you with hope that we can still overcome again.

This was not my first book by Joseph Ellis. He brings the same clarity of writing and non-fiction "readability" to this book as he has done with others. As other reviews have pointed out, this isn't the longest book or the most definitive account of Washington's life. It does however cover career from his military days through his presidency pretty thoroughly considering the relative brevity of this book. In my opinion, this would be a great college-level, or even upper-high school level, introductory book for those who have not read anything about George Washington. Ellis has a way of pointing out these Revolutionary Era figures' positives and flaws and setting them against the context of the era in which they lived. This book is no exception, and he does a fairly nice job of 'humanizing' Washington. I would definitely recommend this book.

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