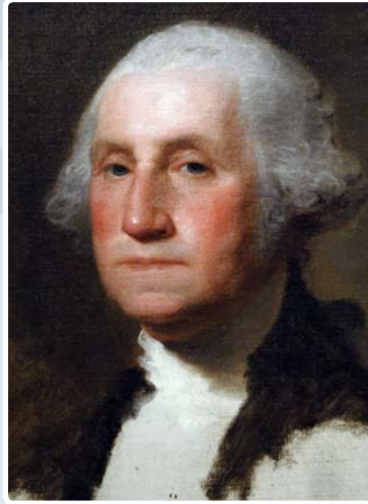


# George Washington

## A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Our intrepid reporter Terry interviewed President George Washington about the early government in the United States. George Washington served as the commander of the Continental Army and as the first president of the United States.



**Terry:** It is such an honor to talk with you today. I'm interested to learn about your impressions of the early United States.

**Washington:** I'm happy to be here and share what I know.

**Terry:** What governed the colonies when they were fighting the Revolutionary War?

**Washington:** We had a representative democracy. This form of government meant that people elected representatives to the Continental Congress. This group created the Articles of Confederation, which gave them the responsibility for governing.

**Terry:** How did this compare to the government the colonists lived under before the revolution?

**Washington:** Before the Revolutionary War, the colonists were governed by rules created by Great Britain's monarchy and parliament. No representatives from the colonies were part of the parliament, nor were they allowed to be involved in the creation of laws.

**Terry:** That all changed after the revolution, right?

**Washington:** Yes, after the colonists won the Revolutionary War, the Articles of Confederation formed the basis for the Constitution of the United States. This Constitution established a government in which the citizens have the power, not the rulers or government, through their ability to elect their own representatives.

In fact, should a representative severely disappoint voters, there is a procedure for voters to remove that representative from office. Voters can sign a petition for a recall election. When enough voters sign the petition, voters can withdraw that representative through a direct vote before his or her term has ended.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Washington was the only president to win a unanimous vote of the **Electoral College**.

The Constitution also created three branches of government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branch. Each branch has at least one power that checks another branch, so that no single branch can be too powerful.

The executive branch is run by the president and includes the cabinet that carries out the functions of government. As president, I also was commander-in-chief of the U.S. Armed Forces. The legislative branch includes the Senate and the House of Representatives. Its main functions include writing laws and taxing and spending money to enable the government to function. The judicial branch settles disputes between the people and their government.

**Terry:** How did you use your power as commander-in-chief after you were elected president?

**Washington:** During my presidency, I had to defeat a rebellion over taxes Congress had set. The Constitution had given Congress the power to tax citizens in order to support the government. One of the taxes was on whiskey. Many farmers west of the Appalachian Mountains opposed this tax. They converted their grain to whiskey because whiskey

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Upon Washington's retirement, **King George III** said that Washington's decision to relinquish power made him "the greatest character of the age."

could be traded for supplies, and more easily moved to the markets on the East Coast than the original grain. The opposition turned violent, and I was concerned that this rebellion might result in chaos. To support the decision of the legislative branch, I used my power as commander-in-chief to order the farmers to pay the tax and go home. They did when they realized that I had ordered 13,000 militiamen to march west. That showed the people the government they created gives them liberty and support, but it also has authority.

**Terry:** Was there ever a time when you thought the new country should have a monarch?

**Washington:** I once received a letter telling me that because Congress was so ineffective that I should become king of the United States. That seemed to me a terrible idea. After all, the colonists had just fought a war over a document that declared that all men are created equal. In a representative democracy, the power rests with the people, not with a single person or small group.

