George Washington was the first president of the United States. But it is lesser known that his choices framed the United States we live in today, and created a republic that has lasted for over 200 years, longer than any republic in history.

The life George Washington is similar to the American Dream. He started out in a family with moderate income from their plantation, and grew to a framer of a new nation. Unhappy with his level of education, he became self taught by, reading, studying and experiential learning. As a young man, he spent a lot of time in the outdoors, first as a surveyor, where he gained scout skills, and then in the British Army. He was known as the most experienced Colonist in combat.

He inherited the family plantation, Mount Vernon, married, and lived as a farmer for many years. He was very involved plant hybids, and invented new crops and new ways to farm. He was also considered the best horseman in the Colonies, and his famous white horse was named Nelson.

He was elected to the House of Burgesses in Virginia where he gained a reputation for common sense, fair dealing, and good character. From the House of Burgesses, he was chosen to attend the First Continental Congress. His reputation as a solider, his charisma, and his character were among the reasons he was chosen to command the Continental Army.

Washington and his army met one defeat after another. In one of the most daring acts in military history, Washington led his troops across the Delaware river on Christmas night, taking the British by surprise and winning the battle. Washington used his outdoor skills and scout knowledge to confuse and frustrate the British who were accustomed to only one type of battle. He and his army however endured terrible hardships and were stuck at Valley Forge over the winter, in which many of his men died. Washington kept his army together however, and paid the men out of his own pocket when their pay was months in arrears.

The British maintained control of New York and suspected Washington would fight them there. Deciding it was an impossible task, Washington again took them by surprise by attacking British General Cornwallis in Virginia instead. His resounding victory put an end to the Revolutionary War.

To the world's amazement, the small Revolutionary forces had defeated a great world power with more soldiers, more money, and more training. Washington's military tactics were imitated by armies all over the world.

His officers begged him to become King of the new country they had crafted. Had he chosen differently, our nation would likely be quite different today. He refused on grounds that this country should have no King, and soon retired from public life to return to his plantation. His actions, and the good character he had shown, made him a hero throughout the world.

He began rebuilding and maintaining Mount Vernon which had suffered in his absence. But he could not help but watch as the new nation began to have problems almost immediately. Washington finally decided to go to Philadelphia himself to help.

Washington was in favor of a Constitution, and his mere presence lent support and dignity to the idea. It was difficult to create and more difficult to adopt, even in his home state, adoption of the Constitution was passed by one vote.

After the narrow victory of adopting the Constitution, Washington attempted to step out of public life again. However, the first presidential election was held soon after, and every elector voted for Washington. He remains the only president to be elected unanimously.

Washington served as President for two terms, setting the precedent that the President should only serve two terms. He organized the executive branch. As a consequence of his choices, he established our nation's traditions as he went along. He gathered the best minds in the nation, including those opposed to each other's ideas, such

as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. He wanted to hear all voices.

When his second term was up, Washington could not be convinced to accept a third term, because he thought it was not the right thing to do. Again Washington had put the good of his country above himself. His character is the lens through which we judge every President that followed him. He retired to Mount Vernon.

His official funeral was held in Washington, but people grieved all over the country. He was described by cavalry office Henry Lee as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." Perhaps it was his military victories and his time as President that made him a hero. But it was his character that made him a legend.