At 22 George Washington Wanted to Be a British Officer. What Turned Him Into a Revolutionary?

THE WAR THAT MADE AMERICA

Narrated and hosted by Graham Greene

George Washington crossing the Delaware is one of the iconic images of American history, but he was already a mature man in his forties by the start of the American Revolution. What prepared a Virginia planter to lead the Continental Army to victory against the mightiest military force of the 18th century?

The answer lies in the French and Indian War, a violent conflict that convulsed the North American continent more than twenty years earlier. At 22, a brave and ambitious young man named George Washington found himself at the epicenter of a struggle that would ultimately change the destiny of a continent and define his own understanding of his place in world.

It started in 1754 with a chaotic skirmish in the morning mists of the Pennsylvania wilderness and turned into an epic war for empire between the two mighty European powers of France and Britain. Caught in between were Indian nations with their own vital interests to defend. Also caught between were colonial settlers, including women and children, living on the merciless frontlines.

*The War That Made America*, a four-hour dramatic documentary brings to life the French and Indian War, a vastly important but poorly understood chapter in our nation’s history that set the American colonies – and George Washington – on a completely unexpected path to Revolution. Filmed in wide screen High Definition, the series pushes the envelope of the dramatic documentary genre with a large cast, full-scale battle scenes and computer generated special effects.

Presented by Pittsburgh public broadcaster WQED Multimedia, *The War That Made America* is the first PBS documentary to introduce television viewers to the early military career of George Washington, which began on a dangerous frontier where tensions festering between French traders, British colonial settlers, and Indian nations finally erupted. It was here that France and England found a new battleground for their centuries old rivalry. However, in their war for
empire, the European superpowers had a third power to contend with – Indian nations well aware that they could tip the balance of power by forming strategic alliances.

Narrated and hosted by Graham Greene, an Academy-Award nominee for "Dances With Wolves" and an Oneida Indian whose ancestors fought in this war, *The War That Made America* provides a compelling portrayal of the fierce military tactics, delicate diplomacy and harsh realities of life during this period in colonial history. Complex politics, culture shock, the tremendous physical challenges of rugged terrain, and the high stakes of empire are all part of the story. It unfolds from the Forks of the Ohio, where Pittsburgh stands today, to the Virginia backcountry, the fortifications at Ticonderoga in New York, the western outposts of Michigan, and north into Canada where the British beat back the French.

The television series is the result of a unique collaboration between WQED Multimedia, Pittsburgh’s public television station, and French and Indian War 250, Inc. a public-private partnership leading the national commemoration of the 250th anniversary commemoration of the war. For WQED, the French and Indian War is their regional history, which had profound importance on the development of the nation. “Our goal for *The War That Made America* is to significantly reframe how early American history is understood,” says Deborah Acklin, Executive Vice President and General Manager at WQED Multimedia.

Overshadowed by the Revolutionary War that followed two decades later, it was the French and Indian War that rooted America’s destiny as an independent English-speaking nation. Historians argue that it was truly the war that made America by evicting the French from North America, while disrupting and largely decimating the native population. It also created unanticipated political and economic tensions between colonial settlers, including George Washington, and the Crown. In 1754, Washington and most other provincials were contented subjects of Britain. As the series reveals, Washington and his peers became increasingly conscious during the war years that their status might be permanently limited, their policy priorities overruled, and their financial prosperity vulnerable to the larger interests of the Empire. The British won the French and Indian War, but the fruits of their victory contained the seeds of the Revolutionary War.

To tackle the challenge of illuminating a complicated historical story, *The War That Made America* synthesizes the historical accuracy of a documentary with the techniques and narrative power of feature film. Written, produced and directed by Eric Stange and Ben Loeterman, the
filmmakers mined a rich trove of journals, documents and other accounts from the period as a basis for dramatic scenes in the documentary, even finding first-person accounts as the basis for dialogue between the historical players. The film was shot on location in southwestern Pennsylvania where key portions of the history actually occurred. To provide an authentic visual context for the unfolding historical story, props and costumes – including horse tack, cannons, wampum and regional differences in Indian clothing – were exhaustively researched for the film. A massive fortification was built, using colonial building techniques, and 18th century interiors, from Indian dwellings to Virginia drawing rooms, were carefully recreated. Consultants in dialect, comportment and military choreography were on set to help the actors to refine their performances in accordance with 18th century reality.

*The War That Made America*, which cast only Native Americans to play the parts of their 18th century tribal ancestors, incorporates recent scholarship that has emphasized the critical power that leaders of Indian nations exerted during the prolonged conflict. Motivated by their own strategic agenda, the Indians played the two European adversaries against each other hoping to preserve control of their land and protect their economic interests in trade. The dramatic documentary presents unique insights into the cultural protocol of Indian diplomacy including wampum, the significance of shifting Indian alliances, the often-decisive factor of Indian warriors’ skill in battle and their different cultural perspectives on warfare and prisoners.

The documentary begins as the *Declaration of Independence* is read to the Continental Army on the eve of the American Revolution. General George Washington reflects on his first military experiences more than twenty years before when he was an inexperienced officer, fighting for the British to gain control of the western territories of Pennsylvania and beyond for colonial expansion. As a young man, Washington thought glory and reward might come from a military career, and he aspired to become a British officer. Unfortunately, he got off to an inauspicious start. Inexperienced and in over his head, Washington is in command during the early skirmishes between French and British forces on the frontier, including the battle of Fort Necessity, which is the only surrender Washington was ever forced to concede. The notoriety of these events, widely reported in Europe, focused attention on the provincial frontier. Britain reacts by sending a large force, under the command of General Edward Braddock, to evict the French. What seems a simple campaign in the war rooms of London soon proves to be a very different matter.
Victory is never predictable as the French and Indian War unfolds in the remaining hours of *The War That Made America*. Far from home, French and British officers alike find themselves inexperienced in surviving the wild geography of North America. Moreover, they are unaccustomed to the independent attitudes of the colonials and, not least, the seemingly barbaric customs of the Indians. However, as the war rages and European diseases sweep through the native population, the ability of the Indian nations to affect the outcome begins to diminish. The precarious balance of competing European powers that has served as the Indians’ leverage is upset as Britain force turns the tide. Strengthened and enriched by wartime trade, the colonials look westward, coveting the lands of the Indian frontier for their own.

*The War That Made America* is the hub of a comprehensive multimedia project that includes a companion book and a soundtrack CD. *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War*, published by Viking, was written by historian Fred Anderson, who is considered the world’s leading authority on the war and served as a principal advisor on the film. Brian Keane’s score for the film has also been adapted with additional original music as a companion CD. *The War That Made America* soundtrack, produced, orchestrated and arranged by Brian Keane, is distributed by Valley Entertainment. The project also has a significant curriculum component, coordinated with educational initiatives of French and Indian War 250, Inc., to provide educators with a variety of resources to support classroom instruction.

*The War That Made America* is a co-production of War That Made America Productions LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of WQED Multimedia, and French and Indian War 250, Inc. in association with Spy Pond Productions, Inc. and Ben Loeterman Productions, Inc. Executive producers: Deborah Acklin for War That Made America Productions LLC and Laura Fisher for French and Indian War 250, Inc.; Written, produced and directed by: Eric Stange of Spypond Productions, Inc. and Ben Loeterman of Ben Loeterman Productions, Inc.


**WQED Pittsburgh**, honored with the 2007 and 2006 Mid-Atlantic Emmy® Award for Station Excellence, was founded in 1954 as the nation’s first community-supported broadcaster. WQED creates, produces and distributes quality programs, products and services to engage, inform, educate and entertain the public within its community and around the world. WQED Pittsburgh is one of the first broadcasters in the country to be fully high-definition (HD) in its studio and field production capabilities. It is the parent company of WQED-TV (PBS); WQED-DT; WQED: The Neighborhood Channel; WQED-HD; WQEX-TV (A ShopNBC affiliate); WQED-FM 89.3/Pittsburgh; WQEJ-FM 89.7/Johnstown; a publishing division that includes PITTSBURGH MAGAZINE; local and national television and radio productions; WQED Interactive ([www.wqed.org](http://www.wqed.org)); and The WQED Education Department.

###