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THE STRUGGLE FOR A CONTINENT: THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

The prize [the Mississippi basin] contended for was a noble one; a territory in its central watershed of more than a million square miles, and with its tributary areas of no less than two and a half millions. It is perhaps as fertile a space for its size as the globe shows and capable of supporting two hundred millions of people.—*Justin Winsor.*

78. The French Capture Fort Duquesne.—The presence of the French forts on the Allegheny River thoroughly alarmed the people of Virginia, the colony that had the strongest claim on the Ohio country. It was seen clearly enough that if the French should gain possession of the "Forks of the Ohio"—the junction of the Allegheny and Monongahela—the Virginians would be shut out of the Ohio valley completely, for these Forks were the natural gateway to the West. So in 1753 the governor of Virginia, Dinwiddie, sent a message to the commander of the fort at Lebeuf informing him that the French were trespassing upon English property and that they must abandon the newly built forts. The bearer of the message was *George Washington*. This greatest of all Americans was born at Pope's Creek, Northumberland County, Virginia, February 22, 1732. In 1743 Augustine Washington, the father of George, suddenly died, leaving a widow and five children. The Washington family owned plenty of land but had very little money, and it was desirable that George should begin as soon as possible to earn his own living. He was taken from school at the age of sixteen, when his education consisted of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He also possessed a little knowledge of surveying. The glimpses which we get of George's school life show him to have been a sober-minded, industrious youth. His copy-books were models of neatness and accuracy. In one of his note-books is a list of rules of conduct. One of the rules is