

The First President

Essential Question

What were the precedents that Washington established as the first president of the United States?

Reading Guide

Content Vocabulary

precedent (p. 253) bond (p. 256)

cabinet (p. 253) unconstitutional (p. 257)

national debt (p. 255) tariff (p. 257)

Academic Vocabulary

uniform (p. 255) accumulate (p. 256)

Key People and Events

Thomas Jefferson (p. 253)

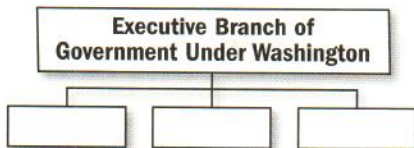
Alexander Hamilton (p. 253)

John Jay (p. 255)

Bill of Rights (p. 255)

Reading Strategy

Taking Notes As you read, use a diagram like the one below to organize the departments and their secretaries under Washington's authority.



American Diary

George Washington faced many challenges and had to make choices when he became the nation's first president. He understood that the destiny of the new nation was in the hands of the people. At his first inauguration, Washington said: "The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly . . . staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people."

—from Washington's First Inaugural Address



President Washington

Main Idea President Washington and the new Congress had to make many decisions about the structure of the new government.

History and You If you were founding our nation's government, what do you think would be most important? Read about the choices that Washington and the new Congress had to make.

On April 30, 1789, George Washington took the oath of office as the first president of the United States under the federal Constitution. (Several presidents served under the Articles of Confederation.) John Adams became vice president.

Washington knew that the **precedents**, or traditions, he established would shape the future of the United States. "No slip will pass unnoticed," he said. With Congress, Washington would create departments within the executive branch, set up the court system, and add the Bill of Rights to the Constitution.

The First Congress

During the summer of 1789, Congress set up three departments and two offices in the

executive branch of government. Washington chose prominent political figures to head them. The State Department, led by **Thomas Jefferson**, handled relations with other nations. The Department of the Treasury, led by **Alexander Hamilton**, handled financial matters. Henry Knox provided for the nation's defense as the secretary of the Department of War. To handle the government's legal affairs, Washington chose Edmund Randolph as attorney general. The office of postmaster general also was established.

The three department heads and the attorney general became known as the **cabinet**. However, Congress debated how much power the president should have over the cabinet. Senators were evenly divided in voting on the issue.

Vice President John Adams broke the tie. He voted to allow the president the authority to dismiss cabinet officers without Senate approval. This decision strengthened the president's position and it established his authority over the executive branch.

Judiciary Act of 1789

The first Congress also had to decide how to set up the nation's judicial system.

Primary Source Customs and Traditions

Washington's Precedents

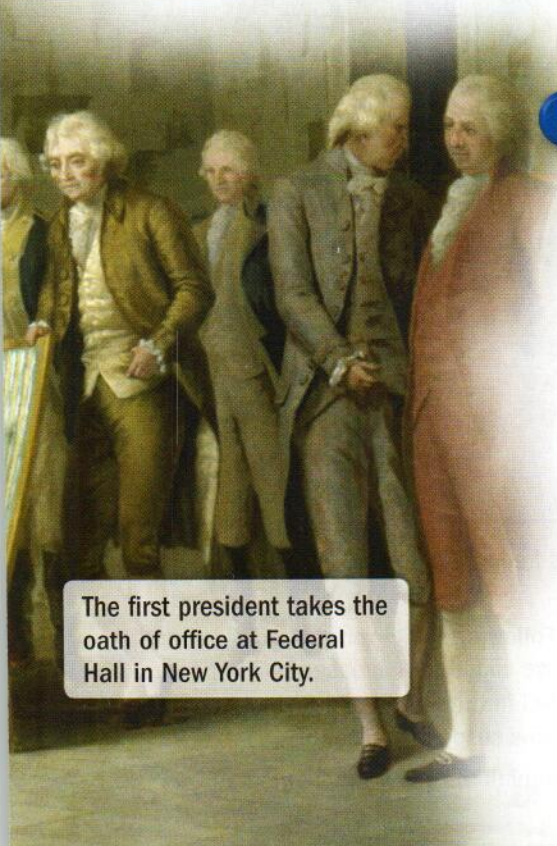
In a letter to James Madison, Washington noted that the actions of the new government would be "the first of every thing, in our situation." Washington knew that what he did as the first president would set the standard for later presidents. Washington did set many precedents for the presidency, including:

- ✓ the Inaugural Address
- ✓ two terms in office
- ✓ creation of the cabinet
- ✓ foreign policy of neutrality

—*The Writings of George Washington*



▲ President Bush's Inaugural Address



The first president takes the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York City.

Critical Thinking

Analyzing Why are precedents important?

Bill of Rights

Ratified December 15, 1791, the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution state specific guarantees of individual freedoms. These rights and protections help Americans define the meaning of liberty. Examples are given below.



▲ The Bill of Rights

I Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or **abridging** the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a **redress** of grievances.

I: The First Amendment combines the five separate freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition, or formally requesting changes of the government.

IV The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no **Warrants** shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

IV: The Fourth Amendment protects Americans against “unreasonable searches and seizures.” No soldier, government agent, or police officer can search your home or take your property without probable, or a valid, cause.

VI In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

VI: In the United States of America, the government cannot imprison people without announcing a charge, keep them imprisoned without a trial, hold a trial in secret, or stop them from seeing a lawyer.

X The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

X: This amendment is meant to prevent the federal government from abusing its power by going beyond what the Constitution allows.

VOCABULARY

abridging (uh-BRIHJ-ing): reducing
redress (rih-DREHS): fair adjustment
warrants (WAWR-uhnts): documents granting authorization

Critical Thinking

- 1. Differentiating** How is freedom of speech different from freedom of the press?
- 2. Making Connections** Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many have called for increased police powers. Do you think the rights listed in the Fourth and Sixth Amendments should apply to Americans suspected of terrorism?
- 3. Evaluating** Why do you think the Tenth Amendment is important?

Disagreements arose between those favoring a **uniform**, or standard, national legal system and those favoring state courts. The two groups reached a compromise in the Judiciary Act of 1789 with which Congress established a federal court system with 13 district courts and three circuit courts to serve the nation. State laws remained, but the federal courts had the power to reverse state decisions.


The Supreme Court would be the final authority on many issues. President Washington nominated **John Jay** to lead the Supreme Court as chief justice. The Senate approved Jay's nomination. With the Judiciary Act, Congress took the first steps toward creating a strong and independent national judiciary.

The Bill of Rights

Americans had long feared strong central governments. They fought a revolution to get rid of one and did not want to replace it with another. Many people insisted that the Constitution needed to include guarantees of civil liberties. Some states supported the Constitution on the condition that a bill of rights be added in the near future to guarantee personal liberties.

To fulfill promises to these states, James Madison introduced a set of amendments during the first session of Congress. Congress passed 12 amendments, and the states ratified 10 of them. In December 1791, these 10 amendments, the **Bill of Rights**, were added to the Constitution.

The Bill of Rights limits the powers of government. Its purpose is to protect the rights of individual liberty, such as freedom of speech, and the rights of persons accused of crimes, including trial by jury. With the Tenth Amendment, Madison hoped to use the states as an important line of defense against a too-powerful national government.

 (See the Appendix for the Bill of Rights.)

 **Reading Check** **Identifying** What did the Judiciary Act do?

The New Country's Economy

Main Idea The new country's economy developed under the guidance of Alexander Hamilton.

History and You Have you ever borrowed money from a family member or one of your friends? By doing so, you acquired a debt and had to figure out how to pay it back. Hamilton faced a similar challenge with the nation's debt.

President Washington rarely proposed laws and almost always approved the bills that Congress passed. The first president concentrated mainly on foreign affairs and military matters. Washington left the government's economic policies to his dynamic secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton. When Washington appointed him to the position, Hamilton was only 34 years old. Yet he had bold plans and definite policies to deal with the country's finances.

The new nation faced serious financial problems. The **national debt**—the amount of money owed by the nation's government—was growing. Hamilton tried to find a way to improve the government's financial reputation and strengthen the nation at the same time.

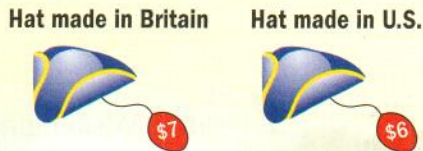
Hamilton's Plan

Days after he took office, Hamilton was asked by the House of Representatives to prepare a plan for the "adequate support of public credit." This meant that the United States needed a way to borrow money for its government, its industrial development, and its commercial activity. How good the government's credit would be in the future depended on how well it could pay back the money it currently owed.

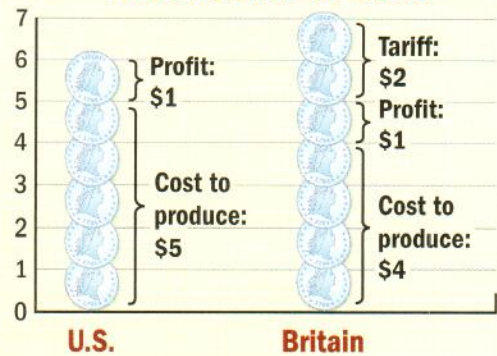
In 1790 Hamilton made his proposal. He said the new government should pay off the millions of dollars in debts owed by the Confederation government to other countries and to individual American citizens. The states fought for the nation's independence, Hamilton argued, so the national government should pay for the cost of their help.

Economics & History

Protective Tariffs In the late 1700s, American industries lacked the experience to make goods efficiently. As a result, their production costs were higher than those of their foreign competitors. A protective tariff would raise the price of imported products, helping American companies compete.



Breakdown of Cost



▲ A British-made hat would cost \$5 in Britain. The same hat made in America is \$6. With a \$2 tariff, Americans pay \$7 for the imported British hat but only \$6 for the American-made hat.

Critical Thinking

- Drawing Conclusions** Which hat would sell more with the tariff? Why?
- Speculating** How might the issue of tariffs impact U.S. relations with Britain?

Hamilton also believed that federal payment of state debts would give the states a strong interest in the success of the national government.

Opposition to the Plan

Congress agreed to pay money owed to other nations. However, Hamilton's plan to pay off the debt to American citizens unleashed a storm of protest. When borrowing money during the American Revolution, the government issued **bonds**. These are paper notes promising to repay the money in a certain length of time. While waiting for the payment, many of the original bond owners—shopkeepers, farmers, and soldiers—sold the bonds for less than their value. They were purchased by speculators, people who risk money in order to make a larger profit. Hamilton proposed that these bonds be paid off at their original value.

Opponents believed that Hamilton's plan would make speculators rich. They said his plan was "established at the expense of national justice, gratitude, and humanity." The original bond owners also felt betrayed by the government. They lost money on their bonds while new bond owners profited.

Even stronger opposition came from the Southern states, which **accumulated**, or collected, much less debt than the Northern states. Southern states complained that they would have to pay more than their share under Hamilton's plan.

Compromise Results in a Capital

To win support for his plan, Hamilton worked out a compromise with Southern leaders. If they voted for his plan to pay off the state debts, he would, in return, support locating the new nation's capital in the South.

A special district would be laid out between Virginia and Maryland along the banks of the Potomac River. This district became Washington, D.C. While workers prepared the new city, the nation's capital was moved from New York to Philadelphia.

The Fight Over the Bank

To help build a strong national economy, Hamilton also asked Congress to create a national bank—the Bank of the United States. Both private investors and the national government would own the Bank's stock, or shares of ownership.

In 1792 only eight other banks existed in the nation, all of them established by the states. Madison and Jefferson opposed a national bank, believing it would benefit the wealthy. They also charged that the Bank was **unconstitutional**—or inconsistent with the Constitution. Hamilton agreed that the Constitution did not specifically say a bank could be created. However, he argued, Congress still had the power to do so. Washington agreed, and a national bank was created.

Tariffs and Taxes

Hamilton believed that agricultural America would benefit from more manufacturing. He proposed a **tariff**—a tax on imports—to protect new American industries from foreign competition. The South, having little industry, opposed such tariffs. Hamilton, however, won support in Congress for low tariffs, which raised money rather than protected industry.

Hamilton's plan also called for national taxes to help the government pay off the national debt. At Hamilton's request, Congress approved a variety of taxes, including one on whiskey distilled in the United States.

Hamilton also planned to give the national government new financial powers. Opponents, such as Jefferson and Madison, however, feared a strong national government run by the wealthy. Their vision of America was very different.

 **Reading Check** **Summarizing** Summarize Hamilton's plan for building the nation's economy.

Section 1 Review

History ONLINE
Study Central™ To review this section, go to glencoe.com.

Vocabulary

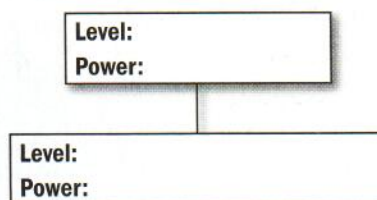
1. Use each term in a sentence to help explain its meaning:
precedent, cabinet, uniform, national debt, bond, accumulate, unconstitutional, tariff.

Main Ideas

2. **Discussing** How did the first Congress support President Washington in establishing the executive branch?
3. **Summarizing** Why did Madison and Jefferson disagree with Hamilton's proposal for a national bank? What was the outcome?

Critical Thinking

4. **Diagramming** Use a diagram like the one below to show the court system established by the Judiciary Act of 1789. List the two levels and explain their powers.



5. **Contrasting** Discuss the arguments of those in favor of and against Hamilton's plan to improve the economy.

6. **Expository Writing** Do you think the first Congress was right in giving the president the authority to dismiss cabinet members without the approval of the Senate? Write a paragraph explaining your point of view.

Answer the Essential Question

7. What were the precedents that Washington established as the first president of the United States?

Choosing the Location of Washington, D.C.

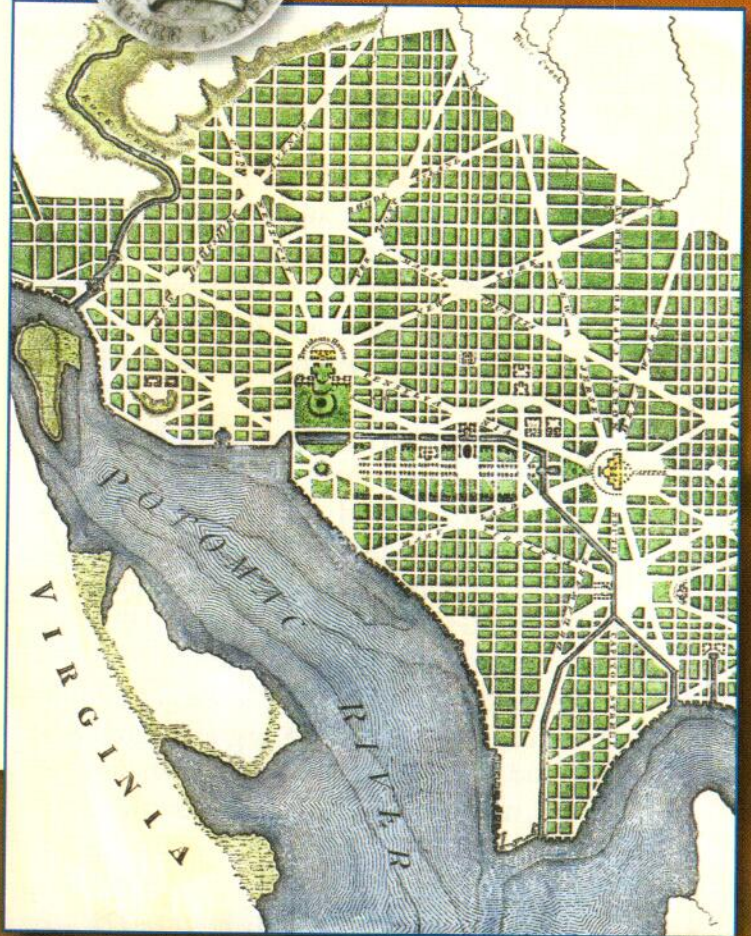
Before 1790 the United States had no permanent capital city. Early Congresses met in various cities. A political compromise established the nation's capital along the Potomac River.

How Did Geography Affect the Early Development of Washington, D.C.?

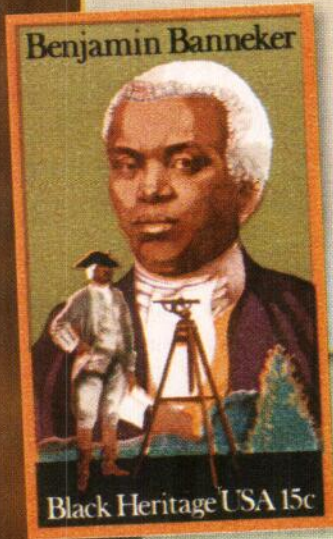
The city's site was selected by George Washington. He may have chosen it for its natural scenery or his belief that the Potomac would become a great navigable waterway. Unfortunately, debris and silt were deposited in the shallow tidal areas around the developing city. Ships could not travel the length of the river. The stagnant water created unhealthy conditions and a rotten smell.



French architect Pierre L'Enfant designed the plan for the city of Washington, D.C., in 1791.



▲ **Map of Washington, D.C., 1791** L'Enfant's basic plan included wide avenues and major streets radiating out from traffic circles. Modern Washington, D.C., still retains many of the elements of L'Enfant's plan.



◀ **Mathematician and inventor Benjamin Banneker** was hired in 1791 to help survey the land for the new national capital. In addition to his other talents, Banneker was also a farmer and a publisher of a well-known yearly almanac.

◀ **The City's Location** Straddling the Potomac River, Washington, D.C., was laid out on land handed over to the federal government from both Maryland and Virginia. The Virginia land was given back to Virginia in 1846. Thus, all of the city's current area was originally part of Maryland.

