

George Washington: The Precedent President

<p>The United States was a small nation when Washington took office, consisting of 4 million people, and there was no precedent for how the new president should conduct domestic or foreign business.</p> <p>As President Washington wrote in a letter to James Madison, “The first of everything in our situation will serve to establish a precedent.” A precedent is an action or decision that later serves as an example for others. Understanding that his actions would likely determine how future presidents were expected to govern, Washington worked hard to set an example of fairness and integrity.</p>	<p>Which word from this paragraph means “in the country/at home”?</p> <p>Which word from this paragraph means “abroad/out of country”?</p> <p>Highlight what a “precedent” is.</p> <p>What kind of precedent (example) did Washington hope to set?</p>
<p>Creation of the Cabinet (1789)</p> <p>The first Congress created departments in the executive branch for different areas of national policy. Washington met with the department heads, or cabinet members, who gave him advice. Washington chose his cabinet members carefully. He picked Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury and Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state. Henry Knox served as secretary of war, and Edmund Randolph was chosen as attorney general.</p>	<p>Circle one: Foreign Domestic</p> <p>Highlight what the cabinet members did for Washington.</p> <p>List departments and secretaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - - -
<p>French Revolution</p> <p>Meanwhile, the nation was caught up in a debate over events in France. In 1789, the French people rebelled against their king in an effort to create a government similar to the United States. The leaders of the French Revolution dreamed of building a nation based on “liberty, equality, and fraternity [brotherhood].” Three years later, France became a republic and declared “a war of all peoples against all kings.”</p> <p>While many Americans were thrilled by the French Revolution, others were shocked by the bloodshed...some 20,000 men, women, and children were killed.</p> <p>Then, France and Great Britain went to war. Washington, worried about getting involved in conflict, proclaimed that the United States would not take sides with either, and would instead remain neutral. France was frustrated by Washington’s decision, as only a decade before France had assisted the United States in a similar conflict.</p>	<p>Circle one: Foreign Domestic</p> <p>Highlight why the French people rebelled against their leader.</p> <p>How did Washington respond to the war between France and Great Britain? Why?</p> <p>Why did France likely believe Washington’s decision was unfair?</p>

Hamilton's Financial Plan

A major problem facing the first federal government was how to deal with the financial chaos created by the American Revolution. States had huge war debts. Almost all areas of the economy looked dismal throughout the 1780s. Economic hard times were a major factor creating the sense of crisis that produced the stronger central government under the new Constitution.

George Washington chose the talented Alexander Hamilton, who had served with him throughout the Revolutionary War, to take on the challenge of directing federal economic policy as the secretary of the treasury. Hamilton is a fascinating character whose ambition fueled his tremendous success as a "self-made" man. Born in the West Indies to a single mother who was a shopkeeper, he learned his first economic principles from her. From these modest origins, Hamilton would become the biggest supporter of a free enterprise economy in the early United States.

During 1790 and 1791, Hamilton embarked on an ambitious plan of economic nationalism. He intended the plan to solve the economic problems that had troubled the United States since the American Revolution and to provide the means to defend the new republic. Hamilton's Financial Plan involved paying off the national debt and raising taxes to create revenue for the new national government. Lastly, Hamilton worked to stabilize the banking system by creating a national bank and uniform national currency.

Circle one: Foreign Domestic

What was a problem the new national government was facing? Also, highlight your evidence.

Who did President Washington appoint (choose) as his treasury secretary?

Highlight the details of Hamilton's Financial Plan. Then list the details here:

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Whiskey Rebellion

In 1790, the new national government of the United States was attempting to establish itself. Because the government had assumed the debts owed by the colonies during the Revolution, the government was deep in debt. In 1791, both houses of Congress approved a bill that put a tax on all distilled spirits, especially whiskey. Loud protests from all districts of the new nation soon followed. These protests were loudest in the western areas of Pennsylvania.

The corn farmers of western Pennsylvania played a major role in the "Whiskey Rebellion." It was the violent reaction of the people in this area that compelled President George Washington to call 12,950 federal troops to suppress the rebellion in 1794. The Whiskey Rebellion was the only time in history that a sitting president (a president currently in office) personally led troops into the field. This rebellion was the first true threat to federal authority under the new Constitution, and Washington's powerful response demonstrated the strength of the new government.

Circle one: Foreign Domestic

Residents of what state were most frustrated by the tax on Whiskey?

Who led the troops in stopping the rebellion?

What did this response show to the people of this country?

Creation of Political Parties

During the debate over ratification of the U.S. Constitution in the 1780s, differences began to appear among some of the nation's political leaders. In the 1790s, treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton and secretary of state Thomas Jefferson were both part of President Washington's Cabinet. They struggled to cooperate because they disagreed about how strong the national government should be. It was due to this disagreement that the nation's first political parties formed...the Democratic-Republicans and the Federalists. Watching the two groups argue lead Washington to warn against political parties in the United States.

Circle one: Foreign Domestic

Which two people created the country's first political parties?

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What did they disagree on?

What were the first two political parties called?

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Did Americans listen to Washington's warning about not having political parties?

Two Term Limit

After Washington served two terms, Americans wanted him to continue to serve as President. He decided to retire, though, because he was worried that if a President served for too long he would become like a king.

Circle one: Foreign Domestic

Which group of Founding Fathers would agree with Washington?