

# Washington Leads a New Nation

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. In 1789 George Washington became the first president of the United States.
2. Congress and the president organized the executive and judicial branches of government.
3. Americans had high expectations of their new government.

### The Big Idea

President Washington and members of Congress established a new national government.

### Key Terms and People

George Washington, p. 196

electoral college, p. 196

Martha Washington, p. 196

precedent, p. 197

Judiciary Act of 1789, p. 198



**HSS 8.1** Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

## If YOU were there...

You are a seamstress in New York City in 1789. You've joined the excited crowd in the streets for inauguration day. Church bells are ringing, and people are cheering. Even though you were just a young child during the Revolution, Washington is your hero. Now you watch as he takes the oath of office. You are proud to see that he is wearing a suit of American-made cloth.

**What would you think America's future would be like under President Washington?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** George Washington was more than just a popular war hero. People naturally looked to him as a national leader. He had taken part in the Continental Congresses and in creating the Constitution. He helped establish and strengthen the new national government.

## The First President

Americans believed in **George Washington**. They saw him as an honest leader and a hero of the Revolution. Many believed he should be the first U.S. president. Washington had been looking forward to retirement and a quiet life on his Virginia farm. When he hesitated at becoming a candidate for the presidency, his friends convinced him to run. Fellow politician Gouverneur Morris told him, "Should the idea prevail [win] that you would not accept the presidency, it should prove fatal . . . to the new government." Morris concluded confidently, "Of all men, you are the best fitted to fill that office."

In January 1789 each of the 11 states that had passed the Constitution sent electors to choose the first president. These delegates formed a group called the **electoral college**—a body of electors who represent each state's vote in choosing the president. The electoral college selected Washington unanimously, and John Adams became his vice president.

Washington's wife, First Lady **Martha Washington**, entertained guests and attended social events with her husband. She described the

scene to her niece: "I have not had one half-hour to myself since the day of my arrival." She ran the presidential household with style.

Other women, such as author Judith Sargent Murray, believed that women needed to play a greater role in the new nation than Martha Washington did. Murray, Abigail Adams, and others believed in Republican Motherhood, the idea that women played an important role in teaching their children to be good citizens.

Some promoters of Republican Motherhood did not expect women to participate in politics or business. Other people, however, hoped that Republican Motherhood would lead to greater opportunities for women. They hoped more women would receive an education. Only a few families were willing to provide much education for their daughters, and adult women rarely had the time or money to get an education later in life. Most women in the early republic faced long days managing their households and working hard inside or outside the home to support their families.

**READING CHECK** Analyzing Why was Washington selected to be president?

## Organizing the Government

Hard work also lay ahead for members of the new government. The new federal government had to create policies and procedures that would determine the future of the country. As President Washington noted 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.

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 advised him. For two of his most important cabinet positions, Washington chose 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 Samuel Osgood was chosen as postmaster general. Hamilton was a gifted economic planner, and Jefferson had served as ambassador to France. Knox had helped Washington run the Continental Army, and Osgood had government experience.



### The First Cabinet

Washington's cabinet members often met and conferred on political matters and debated important issues with one another. Each of the men chosen had experience that made him a wise choice to advise the nation's first president. By 1792 cabinet meetings were a common practice.

#### ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS

How do you think a modern cabinet meeting might look different from the one shown here?

- 1 Henry Knox, secretary of war
- 2 Thomas Jefferson, secretary of state
- 3 Edmund Randolph, attorney general
- 4 Alexander Hamilton, secretary of the treasury
- 5 George Washington, president

Today we know that presidents have cabinet meetings with their top advisers. This practice started during Washington's presidency and was common by 1792.

To set up the federal court system and the courts' location, Congress passed the **Judiciary Act of 1789**. This act created three levels of federal courts and defined their powers and relationship to the state courts. It set up federal district courts and circuit courts of appeals. The president nominated candidates for federal judgeships. Those candidates then had to be approved or rejected by the Senate. Washington wrote about the importance of these duties:

“I have always been persuaded that the stability and success of the national government . . . would depend in a considerable degree on the interpretation and execution of its laws. In my opinion, therefore, it is important that the judiciary system should not only be independent in its operations, but as perfect as possible in its formation.”

—George Washington, quoted in *The Real George Washington*, edited by Parry et al.

The basic parts of the federal government were now in place. Leaders began to face the challenges of the new nation. Hard work lay ahead.