

President Washington

One of the last acts of the Congress of the Confederation was to arrange for the first presidential election, setting March 4, 1789, as the date that the new government would come into being. One name was on everyone's lips for the new chief of state – George Washington. He was unanimously chosen president and took the oath of office at his inauguration on April 30, 1789. In words spoken by every president since, Washington pledged to execute the duties of the presidency faithfully and, to the best of his ability, to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

When Washington took office, the new Constitution enjoyed neither tradition nor the full backing of organized public opinion. The new government had to create its own machinery and legislate a system of taxation that would support it. Until a judiciary could be established, laws could not be enforced. The army was small. The navy had ceased to exist.

Congress quickly created the departments of State and Treasury, with Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton as their respective secretaries. Departments of War and Justice were also created. Since Washington preferred to make decisions only

after consulting those men whose judgment he valued, the American presidential Cabinet



came into existence, consisting of the heads of all the departments that Congress might create. Simultaneously, Congress provided for a federal judiciary – a Supreme Court, with one chief justice and five associate justices, three circuit courts, and 13 district courts.

Meanwhile, the country was growing steadily and immigration from Europe was increasing. Americans were moving westward: New Englanders and Pennsylvanians into Ohio; Virginians and Carolinians into Kentucky and Tennessee. Good farms were to be had for small sums; labor was in strong demand. The rich valley stretches of upper New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia soon became great wheat-growing areas.

Although many items were still homemade, the Industrial Revolution was dawning in the United States. Massachusetts and Rhode Island were laying the foundation of important textile industries; Connecticut was beginning to turn out tinware and clocks; New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania were producing paper, glass, and iron.

Shipping had grown to such an extent that on the seas the United States was second only to Britain. Even before 1790, American ships were traveling to China to sell furs and bring back tea, spices, and silk.

At this critical juncture in the country's growth, Washington's wise leadership was crucial. He organized a national government, developed policies for settlement of territories previously held by Britain and Spain, stabilized the northwestern frontier, and oversaw the admission of three new states: Vermont (1791), Kentucky (1792), and Tennessee (1796). Finally, in his Farewell Address, he warned the nation to "steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world." This advice influenced American attitudes toward the rest of the world for generations to come.

1. Who served as the first President of the United States?

2. Who served as the first Secretary of State?

3. Who served as the first Secretary of the Treasury?

4. The ____ consists of the heads of all the departments created by Congress.

- a. Cabinet
- b. Senate
- c. State Department
- d. Supreme Court

5. What major historical period was beginning at the same time that the United States came into existence?

- a. Enlightenment
- b. Industrial Revolution
- c. Renaissance
- d. Scientific Revolution

6. Which new state was **not** admitted during Washington's presidency?

- a. Kentucky
- b. Ohio
- c. Tennessee
- d. Vermont

7. In his ____ Address, George Washington warned the nation to "steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world."

- a. Farewell
- b. Inaugural
- c. Resignation
- d. State of the Union