

The U.S. Constitution

Focus

Winning the Revolutionary War took bravery and skill on the part of the American Patriots. After the war, the United States faced new kinds of problems. American leaders dealt with these problems in ways that helped our country become strong. Their greatest contribution was the **Constitution** of the United States. The Constitution is the framework for our government.

George Washington was the first President under the Constitution. He had helped the country win independence. Now he was to help the new nation get firmly on its feet.

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Reading for a Purpose

Look for these important words:

Key Words

- Constitution
- Articles of Confederation
- republic
- creditors
- debtors

- territory
- survey
- townships
- Northwest Ordinance
- compromise
- federal
- Preamble

People

- James Madison

Places

- Northwest Territory

Look for answers to these questions:

1. What problems did the United States face after the American Revolution?
2. Who is called the Father of the Constitution?
3. What form of government did the Constitution establish?
4. What did the writers of the Constitution hope to achieve?

1. THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

The Constitution did not become law until 1789. Before then, the United States was governed under rules of the **Articles of Confederation** (kuhn-fed.uh.RAY.shuhn). The Articles of Confederation gave most powers of government to the states. The states sent representatives to a congress. It was this congress that conducted the Revolutionary War.

By the end of the war George Washington had become the symbol of the new country. He was treated as a hero wherever he went. One general said this of Washington: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Some thought that Washington, not Congress, should run the country. Instead, Washington retired to his beloved Mount Vernon. For this, the

American people admired him even more. By retiring to private life, Washington showed that he believed in a **republic**. A republic is a form of government in which people elect representatives. These representatives, sitting in an assembly, make the laws and decisions.

The Nation Faces Problems

Washington had high hopes for the new nation. Soon, however, the government under the Articles of Confederation began to fall apart. War against Britain no longer held the states together. They began to quarrel and bicker with each other. They quarreled over boundary lines. They passed taxes on goods imported from neighboring states. New York had a tax on all farm

produce from New Jersey. Connecticut taxed goods coming from Massachusetts. Such taxes discouraged trade between the states. Business owners and merchants disliked the taxes, but Congress had no power to lift them.

Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress had no means of solving the nation's money problems. Congress could not pass taxes. Congress could only ask each state to pay its share toward running the government. Congress could not force the states to pay.

Congress could print paper money, but it printed too much paper money. The result was terrible inflation. A \$20 paper bill in 1779 was worth only 2¢ in 1782.

Congress had borrowed a great sum of money to pay for the war. It owed money to the suppliers of food, clothing, and military equipment. It owed money to the soldiers. For three years Congress could not even pay the salaries of its own members.

These money problems greatly upset all kinds of people. **Creditors**, the people who had loaned money, wanted to be paid back in gold or silver, not with worthless paper money. **Debtors**, the people who owed money, could not pay in gold or silver. They wanted to use paper money. Debtors were often jailed for not paying in gold or silver. Some groups of debtors attacked courthouses and local governments.

The young country faced other problems. Britain did not allow American trading ships in its ports. Spain was threatening to close the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans to American traders.

American statesmen tried to make trade agreements with England and

Spain. But these powerful nations had no respect for young America. In England John Adams was asked, "Do you represent one nation or thirteen?"

Governing the Ohio Valley

In this time of troubles, Congress made several decisions of lasting importance. Congress decided how to divide and how to govern America's western lands.



Britain had refused to allow settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. With independence, the frontier was opened. Settlers poured into the Ohio valley. The land north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River was called the Northwest Territory. A territory is an area of land belonging to a government.

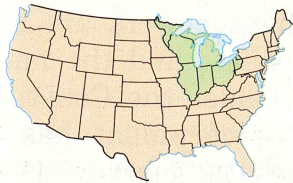
In 1785 Congress established a system to **survey** (suhr·VEY) the western lands. *To survey* means to make land measurements. The land was to be marked off in squares called **townships**. Each side of the township measured 6 miles (9.7 km). Each township, in turn, was divided into 36 squares, or sections. This survey system of townships and sections continues to be used in parts of the United States.

In 1787 Congress passed the **Northwest Ordinance** (ORD·uhn·uhns). This law outlined the steps by which new states would be formed. It forbade slavery in the Northwest Territory. It also declared that one section of each township was to be used to support public schools.

The Northwest Ordinance was an excellent plan for America's growth. It was fair and forward-looking. Still, few people took Congress seriously.

THE OLD NORTHWEST

-  Northwest Territory, 1780s
-  Present state borders



A Rope of Sand

James Madison was a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation. In 1779 Madison had been elected to Congress from Virginia. Then 29 years old, he was its youngest member. He was to spend the rest of his life in public service. Madison became a student of government. He read everything he could find about ancient and modern governments.

Madison was disturbed by the weakness of the Articles of Confederation. Under the Articles of Confederation each state was almost a nation by itself. Congress had little power over the states. Madison said he feared Congress had become a "rope of sand."

Such leaders as George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson agreed with Madison. Madison began to argue for a stronger national government. Only a strong national government could keep the country from breaking apart, Madison said.

Others, including Patrick Henry, preferred the Articles of Confederation. They were afraid of a strong government. A rope of sand, they said, was better than a rod of iron.

A New Constitution

In 1787 Congress invited the states to a convention in Philadelphia to consider changing the Articles of Confederation. The delegates began to gather in Philadelphia in May 1787. Early to arrive was George Washington. By attending the convention, Washington was again letting Americans know that he supported the republican form of government.

In 1787 Washington was 55 years old. He arrived in Philadelphia in a great black coach pulled by six high-stepping horses. He promptly called on Benjamin Franklin, then 81 years old. At that time Franklin was governor of Pennsylvania.

The 55 delegates who came to the Constitutional Convention quickly reached a surprising decision. They decided not to try to patch up the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they agreed to write a new constitution. To do this, they worked hard six days a week for four months. George Washington served as president, or chairman, of the convention.

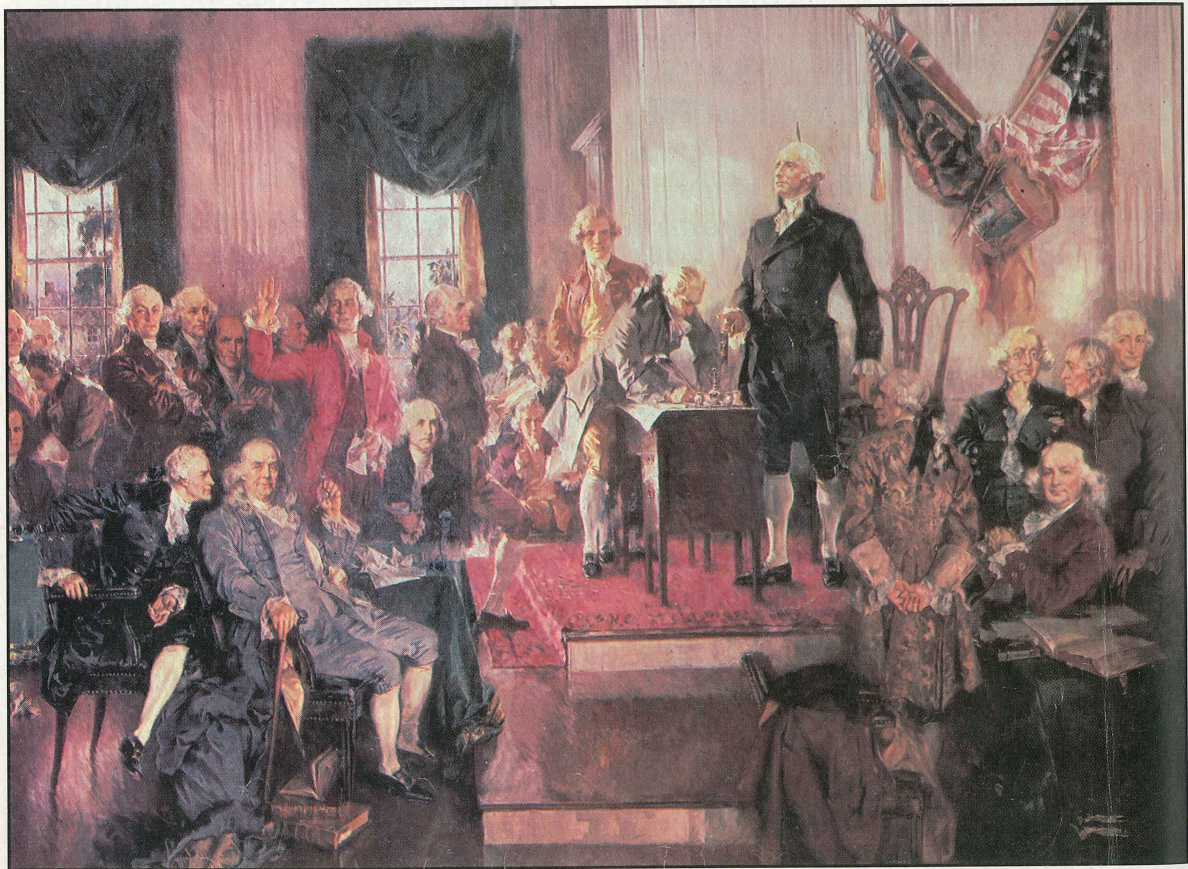
Of all the delegates to the convention, James Madison knew the most about government. For his strong leadership, Madison has been called Father of the Constitution.

The delegates to the convention often disagreed with one another. The

constitution was written only because they were willing to **compromise** (KAHM•pruh•myz). To *compromise* means to give up some of what one wants in order to reach agreement.

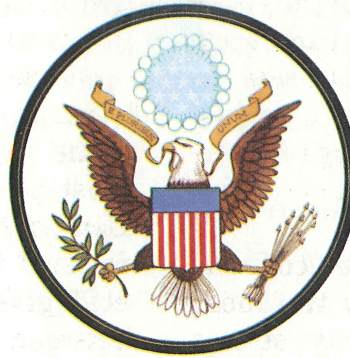
Some delegates wanted the national government to have most of the power. Some wanted the states to have the most power, as under the Articles of Confederation. The compromise was a **federal** form of government. In a federal government powers are shared between the states and the national government. Under the Constitution the national government has some powers and the state governments have other powers. Still other powers are

In this famous painting, George Washington directs the signing of the Constitution. Benjamin Franklin is seated, lower left. James Madison is seated at the table to Franklin's left. Alexander Hamilton is at his right.



THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES

The Great Seal was adopted by Congress in 1789. It appears on dollar bills and important government documents. On one side an eagle holds an olive branch and arrows. On the other side an unfinished pyramid suggests a strong nation not yet complete.



shared by the national and state governments.

The convention delegates thought about the problems the country faced under the Articles of Confederation. They agreed to give the national government the powers it needed to meet these problems. The national government was given strong powers to collect taxes and to regulate trade between states. It was also given the powers to raise an army and to deal with foreign nations.

The Constitution's Purpose

The first part of the Constitution is the **Preamble** (PRE-*am*-buhl), or introduction. The Preamble tells the purpose of the Constitution.

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The Preamble is short and dignified, but it may be hard for you to understand. What it means is this:

We the people of the United States have made the Constitution for the following reasons. We wish to bind together our people, our places, and our states in a better way. We wish to set up courts in which people can get fair treatment. We wish to make certain that there will be peace and order within the country. We wish to set up an army and navy so we can defend our country. We wish to be able to do what is necessary to make the lives of our people better. And finally, we wish to make certain that we and those who live after us remain a free people.

Reading Check

1. Name three problems faced by the United States under the Articles of Confederation.
2. Why is Madison called the Father of the Constitution?
3. What is a federal form of government?
4. According to the Preamble, what is the purpose of the Constitution?

Reading for a Purpose

Look for these important words:

Key Words

- legislative
- executive
- judicial
- House of Representatives
- Senate
- President
- Supreme Court
- constitutional
- checks and balances
- veto
- amendments
- democracy
- majority

Look for answers to these questions:

1. How is our government set up?
2. What do we mean by checks and balances in the Constitution?
3. Why is the Constitution a remarkable document?
4. What do we mean by *democracy*?

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT

The new Constitution called for three branches of government. These were the **legislative** (LEJ·uh·slay·tiv), the **executive** (ek·ZEK·yuh·tiv), and the **judicial** (joo·DISH·uhl) branches. The legislative, or lawmaking, branch was the Congress. It was divided into two houses—the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**. The legislative branch was given the power to pass taxes and make laws.

A **President** would head the executive, or management, branch. The President's main duties were to carry out the laws and head the armed forces.

The judicial branch would be the system of courts, headed by the **Supreme Court**. The President would appoint justices, or judges, to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court would have power to decide whether laws were **constitutional** (kahn·stuh·TOO·shuhn·ul). *Constitutional* means lawful according to our Constitution.

The framers of the Constitution were afraid to give to any part of government too much power. Therefore, they established a system of **checks and balances**. Each branch of the government would have controls on the power of the other branches.

For example, only Congress can make laws. After Congress has voted for a law, the President shows his approval by signing the law. If the President disapproves of the proposed law, he can **veto**, or refuse, it. The Supreme Court can decide if laws are constitutional or not. If not, then the law ceases to exist.

The States Compromise

A major disagreement at the convention was between small and large states. Small states like Delaware and New Jersey wanted to have an equal voice with the large states. They were

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afraid that large states like Pennsylvania and New York would have more power because they had more people.

The large states and small states then compromised. Each state would have two senators, so all states would have equal representation in the Senate. In contrast, the number of members in the House of Representatives would depend on the population of each state.

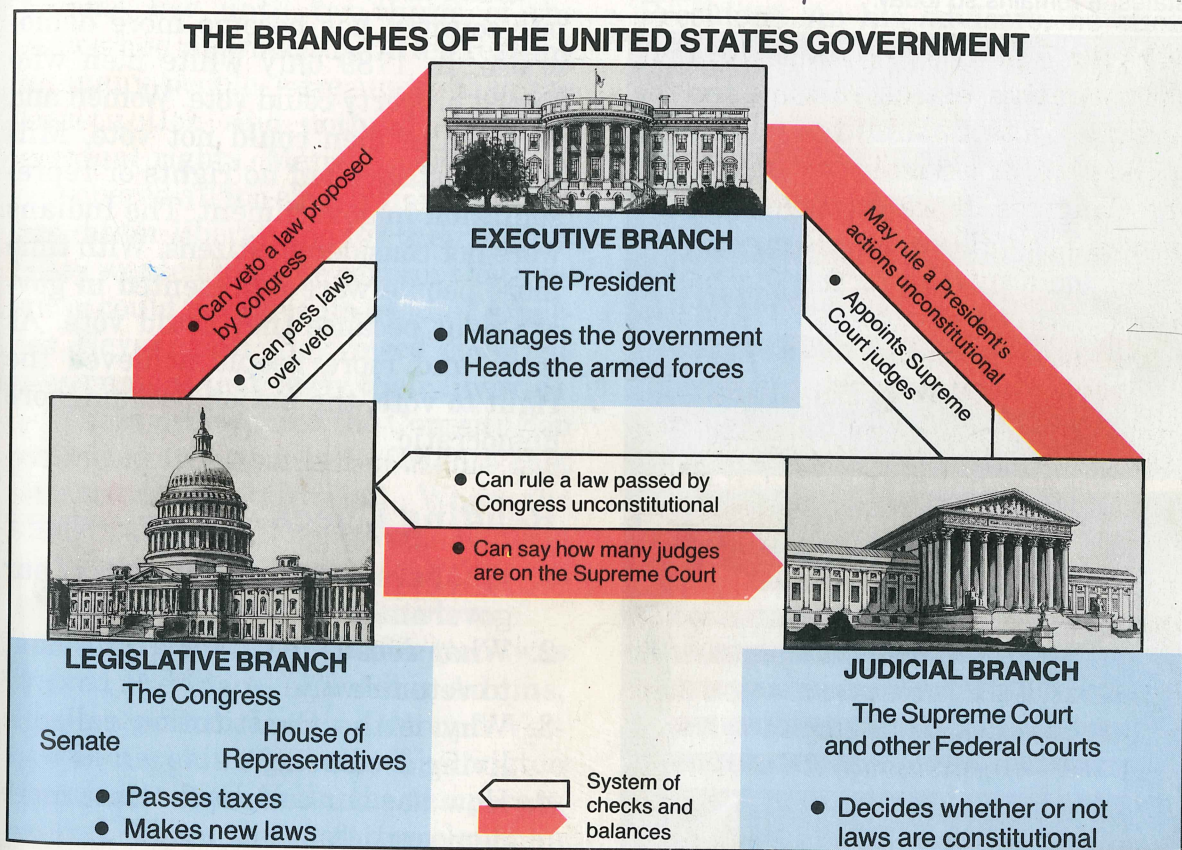
The delegates also disagreed on how people would be elected to Congress. All the delegates believed in a republican form of government. Even so, some were suspicious of letting the people have too much direct influence. They remembered the mobs of angry debtors who had attacked the courts. Others had more faith in the people.

Again a compromise was reached. Members of the House of Representatives would be elected directly by the people. The senators would be elected by state legislative bodies. That part of the Constitution has since been changed. Senators today are elected directly by the people.

A Living Document

Not everyone was satisfied with the new Constitution. Some of the delegates refused to sign it. Most followed the lead of Benjamin Franklin. "I consent . . . to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best," he said.

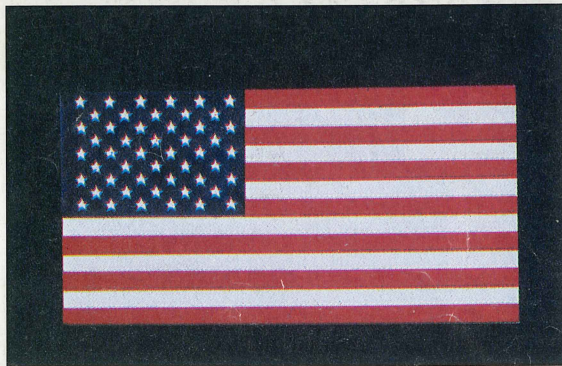
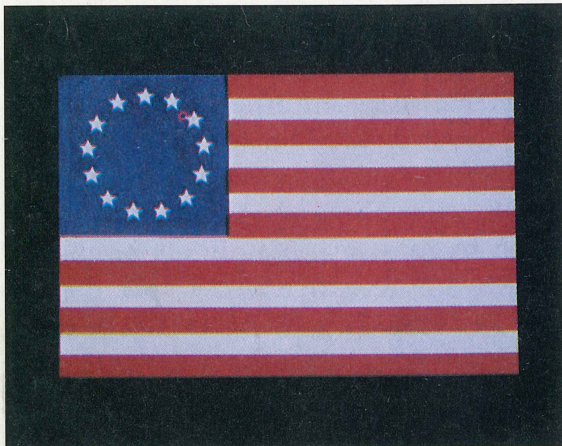
The Constitution as hammered together by the convention in 1787 is



remarkable. It has been the framework of our government for 200 years. It has been a model for the constitutions of other nations. As the law of the land, it has served the nation well. Over the years there have been **amendments**, or additions, to the Constitution. These have reflected the will of new generations of Americans.

Under the Constitution the 13 United States have become 50 United States. The population has grown from 4 million to 234 million. Americans have gone from horse-and-buggy days to the space age. The Constitution has given us a strong form of government and yet allowed change. For that reason we call it a living document.

The Constitution was the foundation of our government when there were but 13 states. It remains so today.



The Meaning of Democracy

Our form of government under the Constitution remains a republic. We continue to elect representatives to make laws and decisions. The United States is also a **democracy**. *Democracy* is an ancient Greek word meaning "rule by the people." People in a democratic nation like ours can make many choices about their lives. They have many rights and freedoms.

Democracy depends on respecting the wishes of the **majority**, or greatest number. Democracy can be found working all over the United States. In class meetings, in school government, in town meetings, you can find democracy. Whenever and wherever people decide something by voting, democracy is working.

Since the Constitution was written, our country has become more democratic. In 1789 only white men who owned property could vote. Women and poor white men could not vote. Millions of slaves had no rights or representation in government. The Indians were not considered citizens. With time more people were represented in government because they could vote. As more and more people achieved the right to vote, the nation became more democratic.

Reading Check

1. What are the three branches of our government?
2. What does it mean for a President to veto a law?
3. Why is the Constitution called a living document?
4. How has our country become more democratic?

Reading for a Purpose

Look for these important words:

Key Words

- Bill of Rights
- Cabinet
- Federalists
- Republicans

People

- John Adams
- Thomas Jefferson
- Alexander Hamilton

Places

- District of Columbia
- Washington

Look for answers to these questions:

1. What is the Bill of Rights? Why did Americans think it necessary?
2. Who were the first men to serve in the government? What were their jobs?
3. In what ways did some of these men disagree about what was best for the nation?

3. A NEW GOVERNMENT BEGINS

The new Constitution could not become law until two-thirds of the states had approved it. After reading it, many people were upset that the Constitution said nothing about individual rights. Many Americans remembered all too clearly how they had fought for liberty and for their rights. They wanted to make certain that tyranny could not raise its head in America. Never again, they vowed, could the government take away their liberties.

Those who wanted the Constitution promised to add a bill of rights that protected the individual. When the Constitution was approved, Madison wrote the **Bill of Rights**, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

In 1789 George Washington was elected President, and **John Adams**, vice president. Leaving Mount Vernon in his shining coach, Washington traveled to New York, the temporary capital. There the most popular man

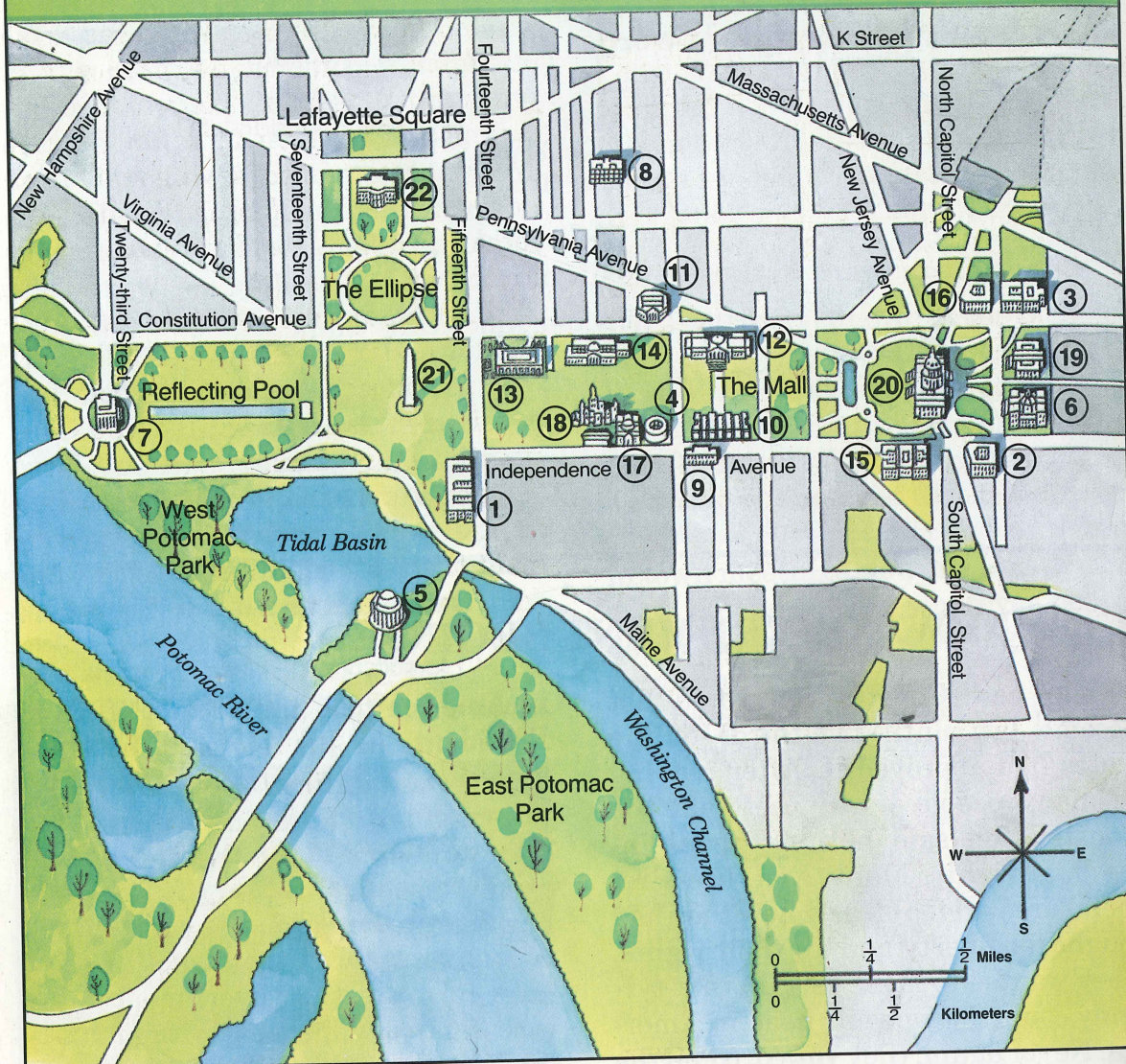
in America took the oath of office as President. As his advisers, he chose **Thomas Jefferson** and **Alexander Hamilton**. Jefferson would be secretary of state and Hamilton would be secretary of the treasury. Such advisers later became known as the **Cabinet**.

Congress faced the task of passing laws to make the government work. "We are in a wilderness without a single footstep to guide us," said James Madison.

Hamilton and Jefferson

Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson often argued about what each thought was best for the United States. Washington respected and listened to both men. Hamilton thought that the country should encourage manufacturing and the growth of cities. Jefferson thought that the country should continue to depend on agriculture. Like

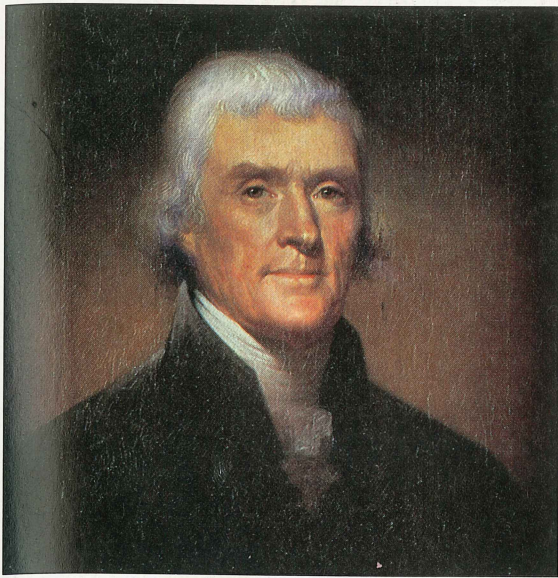
OUR NATION'S CAPITAL



WASHINGTON, D.C.

Index to Buildings and Monuments

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| 1. Bureau of Engraving and Printing | 12. National Gallery of Art |
| 2. Cannon House Office Building | 13. National Museum of American History |
| 3. Dirksen and Hart Senate Office Buildings | 14. National Museum of Natural History |
| 4. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden | 15. Rayburn House Office Building |
| 5. Jefferson Memorial | 16. Russell Senate Office Building |
| 6. Library of Congress | 17. Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building |
| 7. Lincoln Memorial | 18. Smithsonian Institution building (offices) |
| 8. Martin Luther King Memorial Library | (Smithsonian museums: 4, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17) |
| 9. National Aeronautics and Space Administration | 19. Supreme Court Building |
| 10. National Air and Space Museum | 20. United States Capitol |
| 11. National Archives | 21. Washington Monument |
| | 22. White House |



Thomas Jefferson was an important leader during Washington's Presidency.

many of his day, Jefferson felt that farmers were a better sort than city dwellers. Hamilton wanted a strong national government. Jefferson favored as little government as possible.

From the disagreements of Hamilton and Jefferson were born political parties. The supporters of Hamilton's ideas called themselves **Federalists**. The supporters of Jefferson's ideas called themselves **Republicans**. Political parties are not part of the Constitution. They have, however, become important to the way our government works.

Sometimes Hamilton and Jefferson had to compromise so that laws could get passed. In one compromise, it was agreed that the national capital would be built in the South. It would not be part of any state. Created from land given by Virginia and Maryland, the site would be called the **District of Columbia**. George Washington himself chose the site for the capital city. It would carry his name, **Washington**.

Adams Becomes President

George Washington served as President for two terms, each term four years long. Many people wanted him to remain President for a third term. Washington refused, saying two terms were enough. In refusing, Washington set an example for future American Presidents.

Washington retired to Mount Vernon for a well-deserved rest. When he left, the nation was on its feet. The government established by the Constitution was working.

John Adams followed Washington as the next President. The government then moved to Washington, D.C. John and Abigail Adams were the first to live in the newly built White House.

At that time the White House was called the President's Palace. When the Adamses moved in, the now-lovely East Room was unfinished. There Mrs. Adams hung the family wash to dry. She complained that she had trouble getting enough firewood. Thirteen fireplaces, all going at the same time, were necessary to keep out the damp cold of the Washington winter. Despite the problems, Mrs. Adams was hopeful. "This House is built for ages to come," she wrote. The same could be said of the Constitution.

Reading Check

1. Why did people want a bill of rights added to the Constitution?
2. What is the Cabinet?
3. What was the beginning of the first political parties in the United States?
4. Who were the first and second Presidents under the Constitution?

CHAPTER 12 REVIEW

REVIEWING WORDS

Read each sentence. Then replace the underlined words in each sentence with the correct word or phrase from this list. Write the new sentences on your paper.

Bill of Rights	executive
checks and balances	judicial
compromise	legislative
Constitution	republic
democracy	Senate

The form of the United States government is a (1) government in which people elect representatives to make laws and decisions. The United States is also a (2) government by the people. The laws of the nation are based on the (3) framework of government approved in 1789. The organization of our government was based on (4) people giving up some of what they wanted. The government was divided into three parts: the (5) lawmaking branch, the (6) courts branch, and the (7) management branch. The lawmaking branch is divided into two houses: the House of Representatives and the (8) house in which each state has two votes. Important to our system of government are (9) ways each part has controls on other parts. Individual liberties are protected in the (10) first ten amendments.

REVIEWING FACTS

1. What decisions did Congress make about the Northwest Territory?
2. Name at least four powers the Constitution gives to the national government.

3. According to the Preamble, what is the purpose of the Constitution?
4. Describe the main purpose of each of the three branches of government.
5. How did Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton differ about what was best for the country?

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Why did James Madison call the Articles of Confederation "a rope of sand"? Why did others say they preferred a rope of sand to a rod of iron?
2. In what ways did the Constitution make the national government stronger than it had been under the Articles of Confederation?
3. In what ways is the Constitution a document of compromises? Have you ever compromised on the playground or at home?

PRACTICING SKILLS

Understanding the Bill of Rights Answer these questions.

1. What is the purpose of the Bill of Rights?
2. What amendment says that people cannot be searched without good reason?
3. What amendment guarantees freedom of speech?
4. What amendment says that a person has the right to trial by jury?