

Lesson 11

Searching for Stability

OVERVIEW

By 1789, the American people were searching for stability. They had experienced a successful revolution and just made a significant change in their frame of government. Anxiety was mixed with excitement, for it was still uncertain if the large new republic could survive and, if it did, what kind of nation it would become.

The second video segment of this lesson presents “the state of the nation” in 1789. Revisiting the six geographical locations featured in this course gives a sense of what was happening, both within the new nation and in regions beyond the national boundaries at that time. Then the video goes on to examine how the actions taken to address the most pressing political and economic issues of the time shaped the destiny of the nation.

Politically, a whole new structure of government had to be implemented. Who better than George Washington to direct this process? Once again he assumed power, bringing his leadership and integrity to the new role of president of the United States. Surrounded by domestic and foreign conflicts, Washington provided a monumental stabilizing foundation to the national political scene. And then, once again, he gave up power. Without question, George Washington and his legacy have shaped America.

Economically, recurring questions swirled around debts, taxes, and financial stability. To address these concerns, President Washington turned to Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the treasury. Hamilton proceeded to put forward a plan that would stabilize the economy and move the nation toward his vision of an urban capitalist society. Hamilton and his plan attracted spirited opposition, but he prevailed, shaping the American economy both in the short-term and for generations afterward.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

Text: Roark, et al., *The American Promise*, Chapter 8, “The New Nation Takes Form,” pp. 254–269.

Video: “Searching for Stability” from the series *Shaping America*.

Documents:
“Jefferson Versus Hamilton on the Bank” found at the end of this lesson.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson describes the state of the nation in 1789 and how actions taken by George Washington and Alexander Hamilton helped shape America. Upon completing this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Describe the state of the nation in 1789 and in the years immediately following.
2. Analyze how President George Washington provided political stability to the new nation.
3. Analyze Alexander Hamilton's economic plan and his vision for America.

LESSON FOCUS POINTS

The following questions are designed to help you get the most benefit from the sources selected for this lesson. For reference purposes, the titles for the video segments are: (1) Introduction, (2) "The State of the Nation," (3) "Hamilton's Republic," (4) Short-take: "The Whiskey Rebellion," (5) "Washington's Legacy," and (6) Summary Analysis: "The Vision That Prevailed."

1. How did Alexander Hamilton's and Thomas Jefferson's visions for America differ? (video segment 1)
2. How and why did President George Washington and his appointments to his first cabinet provide some hope for stability at the outset of the Washington administration? (textbook, pp. 254–258; video segment 1)
3. How and why did voting qualifications change in the 1790s? To what extent was the role of women changing at that time? (textbook, pp. 258–260)
4. How and why were commercial agriculture, transportation, and commercial banking changing in the 1790s? How did these changes affect the American people? (textbook, pp. 260–262)
5. How would you characterize life in New York City and Charleston at this time? Describe the key features of St. Louis, Sante Fe, San Francisco, and the Willamette Valley. (video segment 2)
6. Why was Alexander Hamilton uniquely qualified to deal with the national economy in 1789? (video segment 3)
7. What did Hamilton propose to do with the national and state debts? Why did he make these proposals? Why did Jefferson and Madison oppose Hamilton's proposals? (textbook, pp. 263–266; video segment 3)

8. How did Washington, D.C., become the federal capital? (textbook, pp. 264–265; video segment 3)
9. What taxes did Hamilton recommend that Congress impose? Why did he take this approach? (textbook, pp. 266–267; video segment 3)
10. Why did Hamilton propose the creation of a national bank? Why did Madison and Jefferson oppose this measure? How did the discussions surrounding this issue illustrate differing interpretations of the Constitution? What was the political fallout from all of this? (textbook, p. 267; document; video segment 3)
11. Why did the Whiskey Rebellion take place? How did Hamilton and Washington deal with it? What did this rebellion illustrate? (textbook, pp. 267–268; video segment 4)
12. Why is George Washington considered one of the greatest presidents of the United States? What was his legacy to America? (video segment 5)
13. In summary, what were the effects of Hamilton’s economic plan? How did it shape America? How has Hamilton’s vision shaped modern America? (textbook, pp. 263–269; video segment 6)

HISTORICAL EXPERTS INTERVIEWED

Joyce Appleby, Professor of History, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
Robert Archibald, President, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, MO
Carol Berkin, Professor of History, City University of New York, New York City, NY
Richard Brookhiser, Senior Editor, *National Review*, New York City, NY
Alphonso Brown, Owner/Operator, Gullah Tours, Charleston, SC
Charles Fracchia, President, San Francisco Historical Society, San Francisco, CA
John Steele Gordon, Economic Historian, North Salem, NY
Frances Levine, Ph.D., Division Head of Arts and Sciences, Santa Fe Community College, Santa Fe, NM
Chet Orloff, Director, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR
Jonathan Poston, Director of Museums and Preservation Initiatives, Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston, SC
Mike Wallace, Co-author of *Gotham*, John Jay College, New York City, NY

PRACTICE TEST

The following items will help you evaluate your understanding of this lesson. Use the Answer Key at the end of the lesson to check your answers or to locate material related to each question.

Multiple choice: Choose the BEST answer.

1. Among Washington's first duties as a president was _____.
 - A. selecting cabinet members to serve him
 - B. asking Congress for a judiciary bill
 - C. deciding on the number and the names of cabinet offices
 - D. choosing a chief justice of the Supreme Court
2. According to republican ideals of the late eighteenth century, the most important role of women and mothers was _____.
 - A. teaching virtuous sons
 - B. running an orderly household
 - C. volunteering for church activities
 - D. obeying their husbands
3. In the 1790s, road building and commercial stagecoach travel failed to progress south of the Potomac River like it did in New England and the Middle Atlantic states because _____.
 - A. they envisioned the coming of railroads
 - B. passenger demand was low
 - C. Southerners didn't have the money to build roads and fund stagecoach companies
 - D. elite Southerners were opposed to improvements
4. Even though a wealthy elite dominated Charleston, South Carolina, by 1790 _____.
 - A. African Americans were playing key roles in the community
 - B. backcountry farmers controlled state politics
 - C. Indian peoples in the region posed a threat to the city
 - D. the rich were reluctant to display their wealth
5. As president, George Washington _____.
 - A. was a brilliant thinker and strong political strategist
 - B. was congenial and outgoing
 - C. was virtuous, aloof, resolute, and dignified
 - D. did not like pomp and ceremony
6. Alexander Hamilton's vision for America differed from Thomas Jefferson's in the respect that _____.
 - A. Jefferson wanted to foster manufacturing
 - B. Hamilton admired the British model
 - C. Jefferson favored a hierarchical system
 - D. Hamilton encouraged rural development

7. Which of Hamilton's economic programs was attacked as unconstitutional by Thomas Jefferson?
 - A. Creation of a national bank
 - B. Federal assumption of state debts
 - C. Placement of an excise tax on whiskey
 - D. Passage of protective tariffs

Short Answer: Your answers should be one or two paragraphs long and specifically address the points indicated.

8. What problems faced Alexander Hamilton as he took the office of secretary of the treasury?
9. Why was Washington, D.C., an area not controlled by any state, chosen as the location of the permanent federal capital?
10. How can the Whiskey Rebellion be seen as more than just a revolt of unhappy farmers?

Essay Questions: Your answers should be several paragraphs long and express a clear understanding of the points indicated.

11. Why is George Washington considered to be one of the United States' greatest presidents? In your answer, be sure to consider the times, his personal qualities, and his legacy. How and why does Washington live on in the American memory?
12. Describe and explain Alexander Hamilton's three-part economic program for the new nation, and analyze the success of each of the three components. To what extent do you think Hamilton's vision of America has prevailed?

ANSWER KEY

	Learning Answer Objectives	Focus Points	References
1.	A LO 2.....	FP 2.....	pp. 254–258; video segment 1
2.	A LO 1.....	FP 3.....	pp. 258–260
3.	B..... LO 1.....	FP 4.....	pp. 260–262
4.	A LO 1.....	FP 5.....	video segment 2
5.	C..... LO 2.....	FP 2, 12.....	pp. 254–258; video segments 1, 5
6.	B..... LO 3.....	FP 1.....	video segment 1
7.	A LO 3.....	FP 10.....	p. 267; document; video segment 3