

young population on average. In 1790 almost half of all white Americans were under the age of sixteen.

**A NEW GOVERNMENT** The men who drafted the Constitution knew that many questions were left unanswered, and they feared that putting the new frame of government into practice would pose unexpected challenges. On the appointed date, March 4, 1789, the new Congress of the United States, meeting in New York City, could muster only eight senators and thirteen representatives. A month passed before both chambers gathered a quorum. Only then could the temporary presiding officer of the Senate count the ballots and certify the foregone conclusion that George Washington, with sixty-nine votes, was the unanimous choice of the Electoral College for president. John Adams, with thirty-four votes, the second-highest number, became vice president.

Washington was a reluctant president. He greeted the news of his election with "a heart filled with distress" because he imagined "the ten thousand embarrassments, perplexities and troubles to which I must again be exposed." He told a friend as he prepared to assume office in New York that he felt like a "culprit who is going to the place of his execution." Yet Washington felt compelled to serve because he had been "summoned by my country." A self-made man with little formal education, he brought to his new office a remarkable capacity for moderation and mediation that helped keep the infant republic from disintegrating. In his inaugural address, Washington appealed for national unity, pleading with the new Congress to abandon "local prejudices" and "party animosities" in order to create the "national" outlook necessary for the fledgling republic to thrive. Within a few months the new president would see his hopes dashed. Personal rivalries, sectional tensions, and partisan conflict characterized political life in the 1790s.

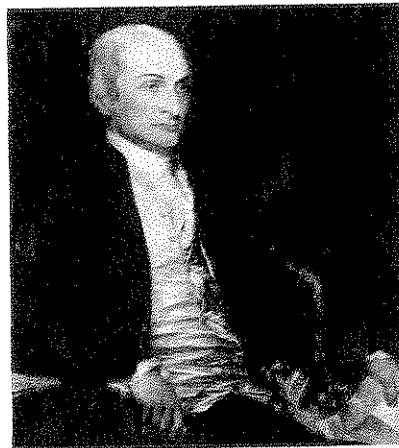
**THE GOVERNMENT'S STRUCTURE** President Washington had a larger staff at his Mount Vernon estate than he did as president. During the summer of 1789, Congress created executive departments corresponding to those formed under the Confederation. To head the Department of State, Washington named Thomas Jefferson, recently back from his diplomatic duties in France. To head the Department of the Treasury, Washington picked his devoted wartime aide, Alexander Hamilton, now a prominent lawyer in New York. The new position of attorney general was occupied by Edmund Randolph, former governor of Virginia.

Almost from the beginning, Washington routinely called these men to sit as a group to discuss matters of policy. This was the origin of the president's

cabinet, an advisory body for which the Constitution made no formal provision. The office of vice president also took on what would become its typical character. "The Vice-Presidency," John Adams wrote his wife, Abigail, is the most "insignificant office . . . ever . . . contrived."

The structure of the court system, like that of the executive departments, was left to Congress, except for a chief justice and the Supreme Court. Congress determined to set the membership of the highest court at six—the chief justice and five associates—and it created thirteen federal district courts. From these, appeals might go to one of three circuit courts, composed of two Supreme Court justices and the district judge, who met twice a year in each district. Members of the Supreme Court, therefore, became itinerant judges riding the circuit during a good part of the year. All federal cases originated in a district court and, if appealed on issues of procedure or legal interpretation, went to the circuit courts and from there to the Supreme Court.

Washington named John Jay as the first chief justice of the Supreme Court, and he served until 1795. Born in New York City in 1745, Jay graduated from King's College (now Columbia University). His distinction as a lawyer led New York to send him as its representative to the First and Second Continental Congresses. After serving as president of the Continental Congress in 1778–1779, Jay became the American minister in Spain. While in Europe he helped John Adams and Benjamin Franklin negotiate the Treaty of Paris in 1783. After the Revolution, Jay served as secretary of foreign affairs. He joined Madison and Hamilton as co-author of the *The Federalist* and became one of the most effective champions of the Constitution.



**John Jay**

Chief justice of the Supreme Court (appointed in 1795). Jay favored a strong union and emphatically supported the Constitution.

**THE BILL OF RIGHTS** In the new House of Representatives, James Madison made a bill of rights a top priority. The lack of provisions guaranteeing individuals' and states' rights had been one of the anti-Federalists' major objections to the Constitution. Madison viewed a bill of rights as "the most dramatic single gesture of