

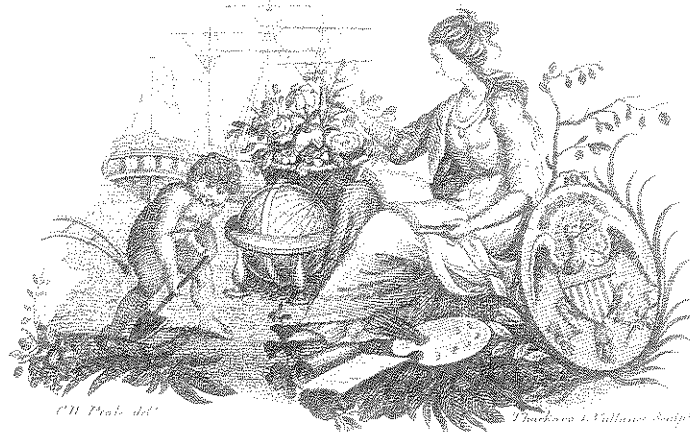
was a powerful undercurrent of uncertainty, suspicion, and anxiety. The Constitution provided a framework but not a blueprint; it left unanswered many questions about the actual structure and conduct of the new government. As James Madison had acknowledged, "We are in a wilderness without a single footstep to guide us."

### A NEW NATION

In 1789 the United States and the western territories reached from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River and hosted almost 4 million people. This vast new nation, much larger than any in Europe, harbored distinct regional differences. A southerner noted the clashing regional outlooks when he said that "men who come from New England are different from us." Although still characterized by small farms and bustling seaports, New England was on the verge of developing a manufacturing sector. The middle Atlantic states boasted the most well-balanced economy, the largest cities, and the most diverse collection of ethnic and religious groups. The South was an

#### A New Society

An engraving from the title page of *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*, (published in Philadelphia in 1790). America is represented as a woman laying down her shield to engage in education, art, commerce, and agriculture.



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agricultural region more ethnically homogeneous and increasingly dependent upon slave labor. By 1790 the southern states were exporting as much tobacco as they had been before the Revolution. Most important, however, was the surge in cotton production. Between 1790 and 1815 the annual production of cotton rose from less than 3 million pounds to 93 million pounds.

Overall, the United States in 1790 was predominantly a rural society. Eighty percent of households were involved in agricultural production. Only a few cities had more than 5,000 residents. The first national census, taken in 1790, counted 750,000 African Americans, almost one fifth of the population. Most of them lived in the five southernmost states; less than 10 percent lived outside the South. Most African Americans, of course, were enslaved, but there were many free blacks as a result of the Revolution. In fact, the proportion of free to enslaved blacks was never higher than in 1790.

The 1790 census did not even count the many Indians still living east of the Mississippi River. Most Americans viewed the Native Americans as those people whom the Declaration of Independence had dismissed as "merciless Indian Savages." It is estimated that there were over eighty tribes totaling perhaps as many as 150,000 persons in 1790. In the Old Northwest along the Great Lakes, the British continued to arm the Indians and encouraged them to resist American encroachments. Between 1784 and 1790 Indians killed or captured some 1,500 settlers in Kentucky alone. Such bloodshed generated a ferocious reaction. "The people of Kentucky," observed an official frustrated by his inability to negotiate a treaty between whites and Indians, "will carry on private expeditions against the Indians and kill them whenever they meet them, and I do not believe there is a jury in all Kentucky that will punish a man for it." In the South the five most powerful tribes—the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles—numbered between 50,000 and 100,000. They steadfastly refused to recognize U.S. authority and used Spanish-supplied weapons to thwart white settlement.

Only about 125,000 whites and blacks lived west of the Appalachian Mountains in 1790. But that was soon to change. The great theme of nineteenth-century American history would be the ceaseless stream of migrants flowing westward from the Atlantic seaboard. By foot, horse, boat, and wagon, pioneers and adventurers headed west. Kentucky, still part of Virginia but destined for statehood in 1792, harbored 75,000 settlers in 1790. In 1776 there had been only 150 pioneers there. Rapid population growth, cheap land, and new economic opportunities fueled the western migration. The average white woman gave birth to eight children, and the white population doubled approximately every twenty-two years. This made for a very

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