
DBQ 5: WHAT CHALLENGES DID GEORGE WASHINGTON FACE AS PRESIDENT?

This DBQ, unlike most others in this book, generates no real debate. It asks you to use the documents and your outside knowledge to support a common position.

Historical Background

George Washington never really ran for president. He loved his life at Mt. Vernon, his large plantation on the Potomac River in Virginia. In 1788, the Constitution was ratified and the new national government formed. Washington was fifty-six years old at this time, no longer young. He was tired of being away from home during the war years. He was very eager to return to Mt. Vernon. He hoped to spend his remaining years there surrounded by family and friends.

But the American people had other plans for Washington. No one was more popular and more respected. Most people expected that he would become our first president. When the electoral votes were counted, Washington had received all sixty-nine. Now he was president of the United States. He said that he felt “like a culprit who is going to . . . his execution” as he made his way to New York City. (This was the temporary capital of the new nation.) There, he would take his place at the head of the new government.

Eight years later, in 1797, Washington returned home at last to Mt. Vernon. He had completed his two terms as the first president of the new nation. Washington was exhausted, tired of political squabbles, and eager to escape the attacks of opposition newspapers. He wondered how future historians would see his presidency.

Today, over 200 years later, we see Washington’s presidency as remarkably successful. As chief executive, Washington faced a variety of major challenges and crises. Yet he left our young government strong, sound, and secure.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the documents (1–6) that follow.

Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.
2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?
3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?

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4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you're confused by or don't understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.
5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You'll want to state this thesis early in your essay.
6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you'll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.
7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you're saying.

Question: What challenges did George Washington face during the eight years of his presidency?

PART A

The following documents will help you answer the document-based question. Read each document carefully. Answer the question or questions that follow each document.

Document 1

Alexander Hamilton was a brilliant man. He had served General Washington during the Revolutionary War as a close and trusted aide. Now, as president, Washington turned to him again. He chose Hamilton to be our nation's first secretary of the treasury. (The treasury is the government department in charge of finances.) Hamilton's first goal was to pay off the country's huge debt. The states and the Continental Congress had run up these debts to cover the costs of the Revolutionary War.

In 1790, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton sent a report to Congress. It outlined his financial plan for the national government. The report called for higher taxes and the creation of a national bank. It also recommended that the national government pay the Revolutionary War debts of the states.

Washington, himself, generally favored these proposals. But many other people did not. Some states had been frugal during the war. In the years after the war, they had heavily taxed their own citizens in order to pay off their debts. These states protested Hamilton's plan. Why, they asked, should their citizens now be taxed to pay the debts of the other, less-frugal states?

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The following is an excerpt from a resolution passed by the state legislature of Virginia in December of 1790.

[We] can find no clause in the constitution authorizing Congress to assume the debts of the states. . . . The General Assembly of . . . Virginia . . . hope that [Congress] will . . . repeal [the proposal calling for] the assumption of the state debts.

Why, according to the resolution, did Virginia oppose Hamilton's plan to have the national government pay the debts of the states? _____

The introductory paragraph before this document suggests another reason. What was it?

Document 2

Part of Hamilton's financial plan called for the establishment of a national bank. The Bank of the United States would collect all tax revenues. It would issue U.S. currency. It would make loans to support the growth of business and industry. Many Americans, especially farmers and debtors, opposed this proposal. They feared the great power of such an institution. Thomas Jefferson was President Washington's secretary of state. Washington asked Jefferson for his opinion of this proposal. The following excerpts are from Jefferson's memo back to the president. As you'll see, Jefferson firmly opposed the bank.

The incorporation of a bank, and the powers assumed by this bill, have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the [national government].

Jefferson went on in this same document to point out some of the dangers and wrongs he saw in establishing the national bank.

To give [it] the sole and exclusive right of banking under the national authority . . . is against the laws of monopoly . . . to [grant it] a power to make laws [superior] to the laws of states . . . [is wrong].

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FACE AS PRESIDENT? *CONTINUED***

What did Jefferson think about Hamilton's plan for a national bank? _____

Document 3

The financial plan was only one of many issues that pitted Jefferson against Hamilton. President Washington found himself struggling with public opinion split into two opposed groups. One supported Jefferson and his positions. The other supported Hamilton and his ideas. As the following excerpts show, the feud became bitter, mean, and nasty.

Here is an excerpt from a memo written by Jefferson in 1791. (A *monarchist* is a person who favors rule by a king or queen.)

Hamilton [is] not only a monarchist, but . . . a monarchist bottomed on corruption. . . . [He is] so bewitched and perverted by the British example as to [believe] that corruption [is] essential to the government of a nation.

A few months later Hamilton wrote this about Jefferson. (By a *faction*, Hamilton means what we now call a political party.)

Mr. Madison, cooperating with Mr. Jefferson, is at the head of a faction . . . hostile to me . . . and subversive of the principles of good government, and dangerous to the union, peace and happiness of the country. They have a womanish attachment to France, and a womanish resentment against Great Britain.

What did Jefferson and Hamilton think of each other? _____

Document 4

One of the issues dividing Jefferson and Hamilton, and their supporters, was the ongoing war in Europe. This war between Britain and France broke out in the early 1790s. In part, it was a response to the French Revolution, which had begun in 1789.

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President Washington knew that the U.S. military was weak. He also knew that the U.S. system of government was new and untried. He saw that to become involved actively in war with either Britain or France would have disastrous results for the United States. Washington was concerned that the American people were taking sides in this war. He was angry that Jefferson and Hamilton seemed to be encouraging this. Realizing the danger to our security, Washington issued the following statement on April 22, 1793. (*Impartial* means neutral.)

Whereas it appears that a state of war exists between . . . Great Britain . . . on the one part and France on the other . . . the . . . interest of the United States require that [it] should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward [both countries].

Source: James D. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. I. Published in 1897.

Why did Washington issue this "Neutrality Proclamation"? _____

Document 5

Governments provide services to their citizens. They need money from taxes to pay for these services. Hamilton's financial plan found two tax sources for the new national government. Most revenue would come from tariffs. (*Tariffs* are taxes on imported goods.) The rest of the government's revenues would come from a tax on distilled liquor. The burden of this tax fell hardest on the farmers of the backcountry of western Virginia and Pennsylvania. They distilled much of their corn crop into whiskey for sale. The farmers' protests turned into outright refusal to pay the taxes. President Washington responded quickly and aggressively. Here are excerpts from a presidential proclamation announced in August 1794. (*Insurgents* are rebels.)

Whereas, [groups have formed] to defeat the [enforcement] of the laws laying [taxes] upon spirits distilled within the United States . . . it is in my judgment necessary . . . for calling forth the militia in order to suppress the [revolt] . . . and to cause the laws to be duly [enforced].

Therefore . . . I, George Washington, President of the United States, do hereby command all persons, being insurgents . . . to disperse and retire peaceably. . . .

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Why did President Washington feel that he had to act so quickly and firmly in this situation? _____

How do you think Hamilton and Jefferson differed in their views of this Whiskey Rebellion? _____

Document 6

George Washington served two terms as the first president of the United States. Near the end of his second term, he decided to write a farewell address to the American people. Alexander Hamilton helped prepare this statement. It was published in American newspapers in September 1796. In it, Washington shared his advice with Congress and with his fellow citizens. As you might expect, Washington's advice grew from his experiences as president. His words express his deepest concerns about the issues and challenges that he and the nation had faced during these years. Here are some key excerpts from the Farewell Address. (*Baneful* means destructive.)

I . . . warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects [of political parties].

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is . . . to have with them as little political connection as possible. . . . [We must] steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world. . . .

What two major issues of his presidency was Washington referring to in these excerpts from his Farewell Address? _____

Why do you suppose Washington was so concerned about these issues? _____

PART B

Essay: What challenges did George Washington face during the eight years of his presidency?