

Year 1:

Unit 6

"A More Perfect Union" - The Early Republic (1787 - 1820): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

In studying the postrevolutionary generation, politics, political leadership, and political institutions have always bulked large. Ratification of the Constitution did not end the national debate on federal power or how to create a “more perfect union.” Economic, regional, social, ideological, and political tensions have led to continuing debates over the meaning of the Constitution for generations. From 1787 to 1815, the foundations of the American two-party system, defined by the ideologies of federal versus state power, took shape. Indeed, until the War of 1812 ultimately drew the nation together against a common British enemy once more, the early United States was anything but united.

During this era, many individuals — both within and outside of the American political system — helped shape the development of the nation. While some leaders, like the Founding Fathers, established the foundations of our American government system, others, like early abolitionists or women’s rights activists, began to challenge and attempt to expand their limited roles in society.

The many debates and individuals defined American political philosophy and challenged the nation’s leaders and institutions to fulfill the revolutionary promises of the new government, promises that still define the system under which we live today. While precedents established by George Washington, such as a two-term presidency or the preference for isolationism, influenced presidents for generations to come, the heated political debates laid the groundwork for the partisan debates that continue to define — and plague — American politics today. The War of 1812 brought about the beginnings of the modern nation, leading to a sense of national pride and unity that first established the United States as a leader on the international stage, as well as a strong capitalist economy and centralized state. The new country, in struggling to find its grounding, ultimately laid the groundwork for the nation that would emerge over the course of the rest of U.S. history.

Unit 6 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 6 Essential Question: *How “united” was the early United States?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 6 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 6, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 6 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards U.S. History Era 3 and U.S. History Era 4.

- **Big Idea 1: Debates over the foreign and domestic powers of the new national government continued after the Constitution’s ratification and challenged the fragile unity of the nation.**
 - In the new government, despite President Washington’s calls for unity, Americans hotly debated issues in foreign policy, constitutional interpretation, the economy, and American industry. As a result, a two-party political system emerged, with President Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams leading the Federalist Party and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison leading the opposition party, the Democratic-Republicans.
 - While the Federalist Party supported a strong federal government, an industrial economy, and a close relationship with Great Britain, the Democratic-Republicans saw themselves as the party of the farmers, preferring an agrarian economy, a small federal government, and a close relationship with France.
 - Despite the intense differences in opinion, the election of Thomas Jefferson — the opposition to the ruling Federalists — in 1800 came to be known as the Peaceful Revolution, for the government experienced a regime change through election, rather than warfare, highlighting the strength and unity of the nation as a whole.
 - The Louisiana Purchase sparked further intense debate between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans; while Jefferson saw the purchase as an opportunity to develop an agrarian nation, many Federalists opposed the purchase — based on both political principle and bitter partisan division.
 - War with Great Britain erupted for a second time with the War of 1812. Emerging victorious for a second time, the war temporarily eased national tensions, ushering in the Era of Good Feelings and a national sense of unity, strength, and prosperity.
- **Big Idea 2: The early United States was influenced by individuals and groups of Americans, both within and beyond the government, who attempted to best fulfill the promises of the revolution and the new nation.**
 - Upon taking office, George Washington, the nation’s first president, set a number of precedents for interpreting executive power and established unwritten rules of the American presidency that still influence the office today.
 - In addition to Washington, a number of men, known as the Founding Fathers, helped shape the development of the new nation — men such as John Marshall, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson.

- Many other Americans shaped society and argued for expanded citizenship roles and rights, especially for women and black Americans. Despite their efforts, these Americans saw little immediate success, although their protests would lay the groundwork for future groups of Americans in the decades to come.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- President George Washington
- Washington's cabinet
- Federalist Party
- Democratic-Republican Party
- National Bank
- Agrarian vs. industrial economy
- Alexander Hamilton
- French Revolution
- President John Adams
- Election of 1800
- President Thomas Jefferson
- Louisiana Purchase
- Lewis and Clark Expedition
- President James Madison
- War of 1812
- President James Monroe
- Chief Justice John Marshall
- Era of Good Feelings
- Monroe Doctrine
- First ladies of the United States

Geography

The following places are foundational to understanding the geographical context of the unit. As you teach Unit 6, continually reference maps in class, not only to build scholars' fluency with geography but also to develop their geographic reasoning skills as they grapple with the Big Ideas of the unit.

- **The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804–1806:** the route from St. Louis, Missouri, to Fort Clatsop in Oregon Country
- **States of the United States in 1819**
- **Territories of the United States in 1819:** the Michigan and Florida territories, the Louisiana Purchase, and Oregon Country
- **Major physical features of North America:** the Mississippi River, Ohio River, and Erie Canal

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 6 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 6 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 6:

- Review the timeline “The New Nation (1783–1815) on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Review the essay “The New Nation” and read “The Early Republic” and “The Age of Jefferson and Madison” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Watch John Green’s [Crash Courses in U.S. History](#): “Where U.S. Politics Came From” and “Thomas Jefferson and His Democracy” on YouTube.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 6 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: How “united” was the early United States?

The first lesson introduces scholars to the nation’s first president, George Washington, and his lasting influence on the presidency of the United States. Scholars will understand how this one individual attempted to fulfill the promise of freedom and liberty from the Revolution in the new nation. By the end of this lesson, scholars will begin to understand the powerful role individuals had in the early republic and will be prepared to consider the debates and challenges that emerged in the new nation, despite Washington’s best efforts for unity.

Lesson 1: President Washington’s Legacy (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did President Washington influence the American presidency?

The next five lessons develop scholars’ understanding of the debates that ravaged the nation in its infancy. Lesson 2 introduces scholars to these political debates over political economy, foreign policy, constitutional interpretation, and American industry, as well as the political parties — the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans — that formed as a result of these debates. In Lessons 3 through 5, scholars will dive more deeply into one such partisan debate: the Louisiana Purchase. In this DBQ, scholars will be able to explain the conflicting motivations for opposition to the Louisiana Purchase: that of defending the integrity of the Constitution and that of heated partisan opposition to the Democratic-Republicans. In Lesson 6, scholars will study the War of 1812 and understand how the nation’s victory in war brought about a temporary pause to national division, uniting the nation with a pervasive nationalist spirit. By the end of these lessons, scholars must be able to explain the intense debates — and sudden resolution of such debates —

in the new nation and will be prepared to further explore how individuals, beyond the executive, shaped American society.

Lesson 2: Political Parties (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** Why did political parties emerge in the early United States?

Lessons 3–5: The Louisiana Purchase (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** Was opposition to the Louisiana Purchase driven more by politics or by principle? Why?

Lesson 6: The Impact of the War of 1812 (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did the War of 1812 affect American politics and society?

In the final three lessons of Unit 6, scholars will investigate the diverse individuals who influenced early American government and society through political and nonpolitical means. Through the examination of one individual, including such figures as John Marshall and Mum Bett, scholars will assess how these individuals attempted to uphold or promote the values of the new nation. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the role the individuals played in establishing the new nation and will be able to assess how united the United States was in its national infancy.

Lessons 7–9: Founding Figures (PBL)

- **Central Question:** How did individual Americans influence government and society in the early United States?