

## How Alexander Hamilton Influenced a Nation

Version B

As a teenager on the Caribbean island of St. Croix, Alexander Hamilton worked as a clerk in a trading company. There he learned about trade, business, and finance. He also wrote newspaper articles, poetry, and sermons. In addition, he read countless books about the great leaders of Greece and Rome. Later, as an adult, he drew on all of these skills and experiences as he helped create a new United States government.

### *The Federalist Papers*

In 1787, Hamilton was a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention. The U.S. Constitution would not go into effect until the states ratified it. When he realized that New York might not ratify it, Hamilton decided to do something to persuade his fellow citizens.

One month after the Convention ended, Hamilton began to write a series of essays that was published in New York newspapers. These essays, called "The Federalist," made the case for ratification and a strong national government. Hamilton got two other delegates, John Jay of New York and James Madison of Virginia, to work with him. Over a period of seven months, they wrote nearly 80 more essays, with Hamilton writing 50 of them himself!

"The Federalist" essays were later published as a book called *The Federalist Papers*. Its greatest influence came after the Constitution's ratification. Today, the Supreme Court uses *The Federalist Papers* more than any other document to interpret the Constitution's meaning.

### Treasury Secretary Years

Soon after he became the nation's first Treasury secretary, Hamilton proposed a national bank. He based this idea on the central banks of Europe and the Bank of New York, which he had helped found in 1784. The bank would be able to lend the government money, hold its savings, create a national currency, and provide credit to business and industry. The new bank eventually placed the United States on an equal financial level with the nations of Europe.



Source: Wikipedia.org (public domain)

Hamilton also arranged for the federal government to take on the states' debts, then estimated at about \$25 million. He felt this would make the national economy stronger, establish America's credit overseas, and put the federal government in charge of taxes. It would also make the wealthy businessmen who held most of the debt more dependent on the new national government. As the government prospered, so would they. Many states were not happy to give the federal government control over their economies. Hamilton arranged compromises with representatives from those states to get the debt plan passed in Congress.

## Glossary

**currency:** forms of money; units of exchange for goods and services

**prospered:** was successful; had increased value or wealth

**ratification:** the formal approval of an official document, such as a constitution

## Writing Assignment

Using your notes from the lesson, write a one- to two-page paper on one of the following topics:

1. Describe at least two of Alexander Hamilton's greatest accomplishments in helping create the new country. How did his accomplishments move the individual states into a more unified country?
2. How does Hamilton's role in shaping the nation reflect his early experiences?

If you would like more information about Alexander Hamilton to complete your paper, check out the following Web sites:

***American Experience: Alexander Hamilton***

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/hamilton/index.html>

**Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America**

<http://www.alexanderhamiltonexhibition.org/>

**Alexander Hamilton and the Creation of the United States**

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/online/hamilton/index.html>