

Road to the Convention

The New Nation

When the American states demanded their independence from England in 1775, the American Revolution began. Soon after the start of the war, the 13 American states set out to establish a new government. A group of knowledgeable and respected leaders were chosen to draft a set of rules outlining the powers and responsibilities of the new national government.

Those elected to draft the rules worked hard to limit the power of the national government. They worried that a strong national government would treat citizens unfairly the way the British government had done. Instead of the national government holding most of the power, they wanted the state governments to be strong. They came up with a set of rules that they called the Articles of Confederation which all 13 states approved.

The Articles of Confederation

Under the Articles of Confederation, the national government could not tax citizens or the states. It had no say over trade. Instead each state was in charge of its own trade relationships. Every state, no matter its size, was given one vote in the national government and nine of the thirteen states had to agree on a law before it became a law. There was one branch of government — the national legislature — that held all the power of the national government.

After the war ended, everyone was hopeful that the newly formed nation would prosper and grow. They had approved the Articles of Confederation and hoped they would work well. Unfortunately, soon after the end of the war, the states faced numerous problems. Many blamed the growing weakness of the new nation on the Articles of Confederation. They said that under these rules the national government was too weak to solve any of the nation's troubles. Others disagreed. They liked the fact that under the Articles of Confederation the states were more powerful than the national government.

Problems and Conflicts

Nobody could deny, however, that the nation had many problems, and that these problems were growing. One problem was an inability to protect the nation's borders. England and Spain were trying

to take over lands in the Northwest and the South that belonged to the United States. People argued that since Congress did not have the power to tax, it would never have enough money to raise an army to defend this land.

Another trouble concerned trade agreements with foreign nations. Leaders like James Madison and John Jay complained that agreements could never be reached because the national government could never get nine states (the number required to pass a law) to agree on anything.

Yet another problem involved the states themselves. They were very independent, almost like their own small nations. They began to constantly bicker with each other over trade issues. For example, one state would charge a tax at its border. Another state would get angry and begin charging a toll on one of its rivers. The first state would claim a river toll was unjust because the river belonged to both of them not just to one of them, and the argument would continue.

Many leaders were also disappointed with the state governments. They said the state legislatures were controlled by large groups who only looked out for themselves instead of thinking about the good of the whole state. Consequently, there were complaints that unjust and sometimes foolish laws were being passed by the state governments. Some people became determined to decrease the power of the state governments.

Finally, there was a rebellion in the state of Massachusetts that made everybody extremely nervous. Farmers in the western part of the state had huge debts. Many were being sent to jail because they could not make their payments. The state government did not try to help them with their problems. Instead, the state listened to the bankers and merchants to whom the farmers owed money. Angry and frustrated that the state government was not helping them, the farmers planned a rebellion under the leadership of Daniel Shays. The rebellion failed, but it frightened leaders in many of the states. Would rebellions happen in other states? People feared the spread of chaos and disorder.

Call for a Convention

Concerned about the future, a handful of respected leaders worked to change the Articles of Confederation. They tried to amend the document, but none of the suggestions was ever ap-

proved by all nine states. Finally, a formal convention was called where only a simple majority was needed to make changes.

Each state elected delegates to attend the convention, which was set to begin in late May of 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Delegates like George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin all attended, knowing that they had a mighty and grave task before them.

When you play *Decisions, Decisions: The Constitution*, you will face a similar task. You will begin to understand firsthand the dilemmas the founding fathers faced that summer in Philadelphia.

Good luck.

Road to the Convention

Name _____ Date _____

Read the Road to the Convention information sheets and review the time line. Then answer the following questions.

1. When did the Revolutionary War begin?

2. When were the Articles of Confederation first drafted? When did all the states approve the document?

3. Did the national government have the power to tax under the Articles of Confederation?

4. Did the citizens of America in the 1770s want a strong national government? Why?

— on back —



Name _____ Date _____

5. Why did some people grow to dislike the Articles of Confederation?

6. What kinds of problems did America face in the early years of its history?



Name: _____ Date: _____

Define:

395 1. Revolution: _____

23 2. Article: _____

90 3. Confederation: _____

259 4. Law: _____

5. 9 of 13 is what % (per cent)? Hint= divide 9 by 13. _____

366 6. Prosper: _____

227 7. Inability: _____

115 8. Defend: _____

179 9. Foreign: _____

41 10. Bicker: _____

48 11. Border: _____

92 12. Consequently: _____

381 13. Rebellion: _____

286 14. Merchant: _____

184 15. Frustrate: _____

71 16. Chaos: _____

127 17. Disorder: _____

392 18. Respect: _____

96 19. Convention: _____

123 20. Dilemma: _____

Write two sentences from two words above.

1. _____

2. _____