

Summary: The Nation Faces Challenges

The Articles of Confederation

The 13 colonies had fought for self-government. Each new state had a constitution to protect its citizens. Americans did not want to give up their power to a strong, central government.

The Continental Congress created the Articles of Confederation, which was the country's first plan for a national government. The states had more power than the national government. Congress could declare war, borrow and print money, and make treaties with other nations. It could not start an army, create taxes, or control trade.

People wanted to settle on land won in the Revolutionary War. Congress passed two ordinances to control what happened in the Northwest Territories. The Land Ordinance of 1785 explained how the land would be measured, divided, and sold. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 explained the government of the Northwest Territory. It also outlawed slavery in the territory.

Problems for the Nation

Congress owed money to banks and to other countries for the Revolutionary War. Congress could not raise money because it could not collect taxes. The states were not working together. They printed their own money. People could not agree on how much the money was worth.

In Massachusetts, many farmers did not earn enough money to pay their debts and high state taxes. If farmers did not pay, the state took their farms. In 1786, Daniel Shays led a rebellion of armed farmers. They protested to stop the state government from taking farms. The state militia stopped them. Shays's Rebellion showed that a weak national government could not keep order. George Washington worried the government was not strong enough to protect people's rights. In February 1787, Congress invited state delegates to meet and change the Articles of Confederation to make the nation stronger.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

constitution *noun*, a written plan for government

Articles of Confederation *noun*, the country's first plan for a national government

territory *noun*, land ruled by a national government but which has no representatives in the government

ordinance *noun*, a law



After You Read

REVIEW What did Congress do to organize the Northwest Territory?

Highlight the names of each ordinance. Underline what each ordinance said.

REVIEW Why did farmers in western Massachusetts protest? Circle the sentences that tell why the farmers had trouble paying taxes and what happened if they did not pay.