

Summary: Constitutional Convention

Leaders of the Convention

The Constitutional Convention met in 1787. Delegates met to give Congress more power. Delegates included only white, male landowners. Some delegates wanted a republic. They thought a republic would protect citizens' rights. Others wanted a federal system. In a federal system, Congress could share power with the states.

Creating a New Government

James Madison suggested that the government should have three branches. One branch, the Congress, would make laws. A second branch would carry out laws. A third branch would settle legal arguments. States compromised in order to support the Constitution. Madison wanted the number of delegates from each state to be based on the state's population. Delegates from smaller states thought this would give bigger states more power. Roger Sherman suggested dividing Congress into two parts. Each state would have the same number of representatives in one house, the Senate. In the other house, the House of Representatives, the number of representatives would depend on the state's population. Southern delegates wanted to count enslaved people in their populations. Northern delegates believed they should not be counted. The states compromised. Every five enslaved persons were counted as three free people. Some states wanted to end slavery. Southern states would not accept this. The states agreed to end the slave trade by 1808.

Ratifying the Constitution

Federalists supported the Constitution. Antifederalists wanted a Bill of Rights added to the Constitution. The Bill of Rights would protect people's liberties. Federalists agreed. Nine of thirteen states needed to ratify the Constitution for it to become law. In June 1788, nine states agreed to ratify the Constitution. The country had a new government.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

federal *adjective*, a system of government in which the states share power with a central government

republic *noun*, a government in which the citizens elect leaders to represent them

compromise *noun*, both sides give up something they want to settle a disagreement

ratify *verb*, to officially accept

After You Read

REVIEW What was the advantage of a federal system? Circle the words that tell how the federal system was better.

REVIEW Why did delegates argue over representation in Congress? Highlight a sentence that tells why small states worried. Circle the sentence that tells about counting enslaved people.

REVIEW Why did Antifederalists demand a Bill of Rights? Circle the sentence that tells what a Bill of Rights would do.