

Summary: Creating the Constitution

Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation was the first plan for the United States government. It gave the states more power than Congress, the national government. Congress was weak. It could not tax or have an army.

States argued about trade and land. The economy was harmed. Some Massachusetts farmers could not pay their taxes. Daniel Shays led them in a fight against the state government. Congress could not stop Shays's Rebellion because it had no army. This showed that Congress could not keep order.

The Constitution

In 1787, state delegates met at the Constitutional Convention to fix the Articles. James Madison offered the Virginia Plan. It would create a much stronger federal government that would share power with the states. It would be divided into three equal branches. The legislative branch would make laws. The executive branch would carry out the laws. The judicial branch would settle legal arguments.

Delegates from small states worried. Under this plan, their states would have fewer votes in Congress. A state with a greater population would have more representatives in Congress. Delegates decided to compromise. There would be two houses of Congress. Big states would have more representatives in one house of Congress. In the other house of Congress, each state would have the same number of votes.

Northern and southern states also argued about whether enslaved people should count as part of a state's population. Delegates compromised. They agreed that three of every five slaves would count. Delegates also argued about ending slavery. They compromised and agreed the slave trade could continue until 1808.

Nine states had to ratify this new plan for government, or Constitution. People in each state decided. Some people were afraid a strong central government would threaten freedoms. A Bill of Rights was added to guarantee rights such as freedom of speech. In 1788, the Constitution became the country's new plan of government.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

confederation *noun*, a group of nations or states that joins together

delegate *noun*, a person who speaks and acts for others

federal *noun*, a system in which the national and state governments share power

compromise *verb*, when both sides give up something to settle a disagreement

ratify *verb*, to officially accept a plan



After You Read

REVIEW What problems did the Articles of Confederation cause? Draw a box around the sentence that tells what powers Congress did not have.

REVIEW What three branches of the national government did the Virginia Plan create? Circle three sentences that name the three branches of government.

REVIEW What compromises did delegates make? Underline the problems delegates had when they discussed the new constitution. Then highlight the compromises they made.