



Topic: Creating Madison's Constitution

Grades: 8, 11, 12

Course: American History, American Government

Context: Soon after the Second Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, launching the now “13 States” into the Revolutionary War, it was decided that writing a formal Constitution was in order. The leaders of the vulnerable new nation knew they would need allies if they were going to be successful in a prolonged war against the British Empire. By 1777, they had penned the Articles of Confederation, which would serve as America’s first Constitution until 1787.

The Articles of Confederation lent an air of legitimacy to the American cause as her ambassadors sought global support from the Dutch, French, Spanish, and others. If nations saw the United States as a formally organized and unified political body, they would be more forthcoming with financial and military support. By 1783, Britain, having lost the war, formally recognized the United States as a sovereign nation and the newly independent country began to establish itself as a stable but loose confederation of 13 independent states. The Articles of Confederation had been purposefully written to be a weak and arguably temporary Constitution that could bind the nation together for a war effort, while still ensuring that primary political power was maintained by the individual states.

By the mid-1780s the new states had a decision to make. It had become apparent that the new national government, then stationed in Philadelphia, was ineffective at fulfilling the role of a strong center for the various states. It was unable to tax, manage trade or currencies, or raise an army should uprisings or invasion occur. Various national leaders realized that if America were to maintain domestic stability and hold its own on a global scale, it would need a more powerful central government. In this context, Alexander Hamilton called for a Constitutional Convention in 1787. The initial purpose of the convention was to strengthen and improve the Articles of Confederation and its congress. However, once the delegates had come together, it became increasingly clear that designing a new constitution would be preferable to patching up the old one.

Focus: This lecture will focus first on the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Why was it insufficient to serve as a political center for the new nation? Secondly, the lecture should focus on the creation of the U.S. Constitution. What compromises had to occur? What was the structure of the newly proposed government? What was the ratification process like?

Outcomes: By the end of this lecture students should be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Article of Confederation, as well as the processes and compromises related to the forming and ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Likewise, students should be able to identify significant changes to the newly strengthened national government.

Factors:

- Northwest Ordinance, Land Ordinance of 1785
- Rules for amending the Articles of Confederation
- Shays' Rebellion
- The Great Compromise, Three-Fifths Compromise, The Electoral College
- Federalists, Anti-Federalists & The Federalist Papers

Student Writing: The Reformation is arguably the greatest social and religious change in modern Western history. Why would this be true? What changes in Germany and England were so radical? Please give at least four examples and explain each.

This lecture is brought to you by:



Lee
Eysturlid

—
History/Social Science Instructor

Illinois Mathematics and
Science Academy