

Forming a Government

Although the colonies were willing to cooperate with each other, they were afraid of losing too much individual power. They were used to making their own laws and decisions. They were not eager to turn their government over to someone else.

The Articles of Confederation

The country was governed by the **Articles of Confederation** during the Revolutionary War. The Articles gave the country a chance to test a democratic government. Under the Articles, a legislature, **Congress**, was set up. There was no executive branch or judicial branch of government. Each state was given one vote in the Congress. Nine states had to approve any major decision. The powers given to Congress were very limited and mostly related to the war effort. Congress could wage war, make peace, make treaties, and request troops and money from the states. It could also borrow money. Congress could not levy taxes or regulate trade. It could not force states to contribute money or troops or to obey treaties. The main purpose of the Articles of Confederation was to create a bond of friendship between the states.

It became clear after the war ended in 1783 that the Articles of Confederation were too weak to be effective. Some major changes needed to be made.

The Constitution

In May of 1787, the **Constitutional Convention** began in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Fifty-five delegates attended the convention. They planned to change the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they wrote a new document called the **Constitution** of the United States.

Although the delegates had been sent by their states to change the Articles of Confederation, most of them believed that the articles were beyond mending. Most delegates agreed that any new government had to have the authority that Congress lacked under the Articles of Confederation. In particular, the government needed the power to levy taxes, to raise and support armed forces, to regulate trade, and to make and enforce laws. Most also agreed on the importance of separating government functions into branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—as a way to guard against the abuse of power by any one branch. That is about all they agreed on.

The remainder of the Constitutional Convention consisted of debates followed by **compromises**. After compromising on the major issues—state representation in Congress, election of the President, and slavery—the delegates were ready to complete their work. On September 17, 1787, the Constitution was read to the convention. Thirty-nine delegates signed it. Then the people at the state level had to approve, or **ratify**, the Constitution for it to take effect. In 1788, eleven states had ratified it. By the spring of 1790, all thirteen states had ratified the Constitution.

Review Unit 1

Write your answer to the following questions.

1. Why did the colonies decide they needed to work together under some written plan?

2. Under the Articles of Confederation, what branch of government was set up?

3. What were three things Congress could do under the Articles of Confederation?

4. What were two things Congress could not do under the Articles of Confederation?

5. When did the Revolutionary War end? _____
6. Why did the Articles of Confederation need to be changed?

7. When and where was the Constitutional Convention held? _____
8. How many delegates attended the Constitutional Convention? _____
9. How many branches of government were set up? What were they called?

10. How did the delegates reach agreement on issues that divided them?

11. What was the result of the convention? _____
12. How many delegates signed the Constitution? _____