

Philadelphia convention topics

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Introduction

By 1786, the Americans recognized that the Articles of the Confederacy, the founding document for the new United States, adopted in 1777, should be substantially altered. The articles gave Congress little authority to regulate domestic affairs - neither the tax authority nor the authority to regulate trade. Without coercive powers, Congress had to rely on state contributions, and they often declined requests. Congress had neither the money to pay soldiers for their service in the War of Independence, nor to repay foreign loans provided to support military action. In 1786, the United States went bankrupt. In addition, the young nation has faced many other challenges and threats. States are waging an endless war of economic discrimination against trade by other States. Southern states fought the northern states for economic gain. The country was ill-equipped for war wars, and other countries wondered whether treaties with the United States were worth the document on which they were written. On top of that, Americans suffered from injuries of pride as European countries rejected the United States as a third-tier republic. The American class of creditors had other concerns. In Rhode Island (called The Elite Island-Out), a state legislature dominated by a debtor class passed legislation essentially to forgive all debts as it considered a measure that would redistribute property every thirteen years. The last straw for many was western Massachusetts, where angry farmers led by Daniel Shays took up arms and engaged in an active uprising in an attempt to secure debt relief. Problems with the existing Confederacy of States finally persuaded the Continental Congress in February 1787 to call for a congress of delegates to meet in Philadelphia in May to develop the additional provisions they thought were necessary to make the federal government's constitution adequate to the Union's requirements. Across the country, the cry of Freedom! Filled the air. But what freedom? Few people claim to be anti-semy, but the word freedom has many meanings. Should delegates be most concerned about protected freedom of conscience, freedom of contract (meaning for many at the time the right of creditors to collect debts under their contracts) or the freedom to seize property (debtors complained that this freedom was taken by banks and other

creditors)? In addition, the cry for freedom can mean two very different things in relation to the slave issue - for some the freedom to own slaves needs protection, while (those who are more able to see with black eyes) freedom means the end of slavery. Convention at the Philadelphia Room at the Independence Hall (formerly the State Chamber) in Philadelphia, where the debate debates The proposed Constitution took place (photo by Doug Linder) on May 25, 1787, a week after the scheduled, delegates from various states met at the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in Philadelphia. One of the first orders of business was the election of George Washington as President of the Convention and the establishment of rules, including the complete secrecy of his discussions that will determine the work. (Several delegates, most notably James Madison, took extensive notes, but they were not published until decades later.) The convention's primary activity began four days later, when Virginia Governor Edmund Randolph presented and defended a plan for a new government structure (the so-called Virginia Plan), which was mostly designed by Virginia delegate colleague James Madison. Virginia's plan called for a strong national government with both branches of the legislature, a row over the population. The plan gave the national government the power to legislate whenever individual States were incompetent and even granted the proposed National Review Board a veto over state legislatures. Delegates from smaller states and states less sympathetic to broad federal authority opposed many of Virginia's provisions. Charles Pinckney of North Carolina asked if the proponents of this plan are meant to eliminate state governments completely. On June 14, a competing plan called the New Jersey Plan was presented by delegate William Paterson of New Jersey. The New Jersey plan kept federal powers fairly limited and did not create any new Congress. Instead, the plan expanded some of the powers that were then held by the Continental Congress. Paterson made clear the unwavering opposition of delegates from many small states to any new plan that would deprive them of equal votes (equal suffrage) in the legislature. Over the next three months, delegates worked out a series of compromises between competing plans. Congress had been given new powers to regulate the economy, currency and national defence, but provisions giving the national government a veto over new state laws had been rejected. At the urging of delegates from the southern states, Congress was denied the authority to restrict the slave trade for at least twenty years and slaves, although it denied the results of the vote and was not recognized as citizens of those states, it was allowed to be considered three-quarters of the persons for the purpose of counting representatives and determining the votes. Most importantly, perhaps, delegates are compromised on the complex issue of the separation of members of Congress, an issue that is bitterly divided by more and fewer states. Under the plan put forward by Delegate Roger Sherman of Connecticut, the House of Representatives will be represented population, while each state will be guaranteed equal two senators in the new Senate. By September final final have been made, the final provisions have been polished, and it is time to vote. In the Convention, each state, regardless of the number of delegates, had one vote, so the even division of the state could not register the right to vote for adoption. In the end, thirty-nine of the fifty-five delegates supported the adoption of the new Constitution, barely enough to win support from each of the twelve state delegations present. (Rhode Island, which opposed the Convention, did not send any delegation.) After the signing ceremony on September 17, most of the delegates renovated the city's second street tavern near Walnut, where, according to George Washington, they had dinner together and took a heartwarming vacation from each other. CONSTITUTION AS PROPOSED In Philadelphia George Washington presides over the Constitutional Convention Who were the 55 delegates to the Convention? The delegates of the Constitutional Assembly did not represent a cross-section of America in 1787. The Convention does not provide for women, slaves, Native Americans, racial underage or workers. As one historian noted, it was a convention of the well-mannered, well-fed, the in-icret and the well-fed. Among the delegates were famous figures of American history, such as George Washington, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton. Other prominent Americans of the time, who might have been expected to be in Philadelphia, were not present for various reasons. Notable non-participants include John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Below are links with more information about delegates. The Founding Fathers (National Archives of Biography and Images) The theory behind Madison James Madison's plan, James Madison, believes that the protection of freedom lies in the structure of government, not on the list of parchment guarantees. In his opinion, the main threat to freedom in the past comes from a repressive majority seizing power. Madison's solution, as he proposed it in Philadelphia, is to increase the scope by passing a lot of power to the federal government. Since the nation is made up of much larger and more diverse interest communities than individual states, it becomes much harder for any one interest group to become a majority and seize control of power. Rather than seeing competing factions as a danger, Madison saw the preservation of diversity of interests as a defense of freedom: We need to make ambitions to counter ambition. Madison also sought to block the ability of a repressive majority to work against minorities, dividing the power of the national government into three relatively equal branches, each of which will receive weapons to fight the other. Even if the majority seize one branch, Madison reasoned, he could only do limited harm if other branches remained outside their domination. Philadelphia in 1787 Map of Philadelphia in 1787 (TeachingAmericanHistory.org) Visit the aforementioned map and explore Click on the images of the Independence Hall, Mary House Guest House and the Taverns of the Indian queen. Issues to discuss Class 1. Did the Convention exceed its powers? How do you begin to answer such a question? 2. If the Convention did exceed its powers, should it in any case? Does it matter whether the Convention was acting outside the powers given to it? 3. Would the United States have been better off if the Virginia plan had been adopted in accordance with the presented order? Had the New Jersey plan been passed? 4. Has our constitutional system worked more or less as Madison had hoped? In what respect, if any, do you think Madison will be disappointed? 5. What is the biggest flaw in the Constitutional Convention? Why? The signing of the Constitution, September 17, 1787 Ben Franklin Comments on the signing, As reported in the notes of James Madison Dr. Franklin, looking at the chair of the President, at the back of which the rising sun happened to be painted, observed several members beside him that artists had a hard time distinguishing in their art the rising sun from the setting sun. I said that he, often during this session, and vissitudes my hopes and fears regarding his question, looked at it behind the president without being able to say whether he was growing or tweaking; but finally I have the good fortune to know that this is a sunrise, not a setting sun. Battle for ratification: Federalists against anti-federalist ratification came only after a dogged struggle between those who favor the adoption of a new Constitution (federalists) and those who oppose (anti-federalists). Anti-feminists had many complaints. They argued that the national government, and especially the president, had too much power. They complained that the six-year term of the senators was too long. They demanded to know why delegates did not include a declaration of individual rights. The Federalists have tried to answer each of these objections, and one such attempt to do so, the Federalist Papers, acts as the primary work of political philosophy. After easy victories in several states, the Federalists spent the day winning close votes for ratification in Massachusetts (187-168) with the help of Samuel Adams, Virginia (88-80) over the tense arguments of Patrick Henry, and in New York (30-27). (30-27).

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