

## **EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT**

**COLONIAL TENSIONS WITH THE BRITISH EMPIRE**- The British “Mercantile System” was designed to exploit the colonies in order to: a) provide Britain with cheap raw materials, b) serve as markets for British finished goods, and c) provide tax revenue to pay off Britain’s war debt. American colonists resented “taxation without representation” in Parliament (the English congress), and relations deteriorated between the colonies and their mother country. Colonists began attacking British officials and burning government buildings as a means of protest.

**CONFLICT BEGINS**- In reaction to the Boston Massacre (1770), colonial elites formed “Committees of Correspondence” to keep each other informed of events. Many members of these committees later became leading figures in American politics. The Boston Tea Party (1773) caused the British to increase their troop strength in America and to take away legislative powers from some colonial assemblies. Some prominent colonists began calling for independence from the British.

**FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS (1774)**- Delegates from all the colonies (except Georgia!) met in Philadelphia in the First Continental Congress. They demanded full rights of British citizenship and full legislative power in the colonies. The colonies also created “Committees of Safety & Inspection” (militias), though they insisted they were not planning a revolution against British rule. The First Continental Congress agreed to meet again next year.

**THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR BEGINS**- Before the Continental Congress is scheduled to meet again, large-scale battles begin between British troops and colonial militias. The Revolutionary War had begun.

**SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS (1775)**- The Second Continental Congress met as scheduled and appointed George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. The Continental Congress then stayed in session because of the war emergency and became our country’s first functional national government.

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress issued the Declaration of Independence. Written by Thomas Jefferson, it proclaimed our independence from England and tried to justify the rebellion to American colonists and to the rest of the world. It promised to create a government based on John Locke’s Social Contract Theory, but gave no details regarding what kind of government it would be.

After staying in session for several years, the Second Continental Congress finally adopted the Articles of Confederation, our country’s first written constitution. This would replace the Continental Congress with an elected legislative branch.

**ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION (1781)**- The Articles, our country’s first written constitution, was designed to protect the independence and power of the states. It created a very weak form of national government known as a confederation. Under the Articles,

the national government could not collect taxes, raise an army, issue money or make foreign treaties. On the other hand, the states were allowed to do all these things.

SHAYS' REBELLION- In 1786, Revolutionary War veteran Daniel Shays led a rebellion of Massachusetts farmers who had lost their land during a postwar economic depression. Although the rebellion failed, it convinced American elites that a stronger form of national government was needed.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION (1787)- Although the Convention was originally intended to merely amend (modify) the Articles of Confederation, it quickly changed its purpose to writing an entirely new constitution. Most delegates agreed that the new national government would: a) be a republic, b) have a stronger federal type of government (one that shares powers with the states), and c) would be divided into three separate branches (with a system of checks & balances) to limit its power.

The delegates arrived at a number of compromises on the way to a final draft document. The "Great Compromise" created a bicameral legislature known as Congress which would be composed of two houses: the House of Representatives (with representation based on population) and the Senate (equal representation for each state regardless of size). The "3/5 Compromise" stated that slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of taxation and representation in Congress. The "Commerce & Slave Trade Compromise" gave power to regulate interstate commerce to Congress, gave the President the power to negotiate foreign treaties, gave the Senate the power to ratify foreign treaties with a 2/3 vote, and allowed the importation of slaves to remain legal for another 20 years. The "Electoral College Compromise" required that the President be chosen by the electors of the Electoral College, thus preventing our nation's citizens from directly electing their leader.

RATIFICATION OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION (1788)- The proposed constitution was approved by the delegates, but was then submitted to the states for official ratification. Federalists (mostly northerners and businessmen) supported the constitution because it created a strong central government with a single national currency. Anti-Federalists (mostly southerners and people wanting guarantees of states' rights and individual freedoms) opposed the constitution. Three leading Federalists wrote a collection of essays known as the Federalist Papers to convince people to support ratification. A compromise between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists resulted in the ratification of the constitution, but with a promise to add a Bill of Rights later. The Articles of Confederation were swept away and our country gained the constitution we have today.

THE BILL OF RIGHTS (1791)- Ten amendments were soon added to the U.S. Constitution. Known as the Bill of Rights, they fulfilled the promise made by the Federalists to the Anti-Federalists to add written guarantees of states' rights and individual freedoms to the Constitution. They contain some of our most basic civil liberties, including the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of press, right to bear arms, several rights ensuring a fair trial, and a clear statement regarding the powers of states. At the present time, we have a total of 27 constitutional amendments.