

VI. The Critical Period

A. Differences, Disagreements, and Common Ground

1. When the war with Britain was won, the thirteen colonies, now thirteen states, were still very much separate, and there were many reasons why they might never form a single country.
 - a) They were geographically far apart from each other (given the transportation methods of the time).
 - b) They had separate governments, such as the House of Burgesses for Virginia.
 - c) Along with the rest of the world, the southern states believed slavery was normal and should continue. Many of the founding fathers were beginning to reject this idea, and were hoping to bring slavery to an end in America.
 - d) The southern states wanted to trade freely with Britain, but the northern states wanted American laws of trade called “navigation acts” to give their shipbuilders and merchants an advantage.
 - e) At least four different states had contradictory claims to land west of the Appalachians, especially Virginia and Massachusetts, which had the earliest charters.
 - f) Each state had unique religious traditions. Some were Anglican, some Catholic, some Puritan.
2. Despite disagreeing over many things the people of the separate states did have the continental congress, where they worked together as the “*united* States of America,” according to rules called the “Articles of Confederation.”
3. All the American people also believed in defending their rights, and that is was crucial for them to work together so that they could remain independent.

B. The First Compromise: the NW Ordinance of 1787

1. To get over their differences, it was necessary for the states to compromise over the things they disagreed about.
2. Virginia, which had the strongest claim to the new western lands, decided to give up its claim so that a combined government could have it.
3. Then, in 1784, Thomas Jefferson proposed a plan to organize this territory into ten new states, where no slavery would be allowed.
4. This plan was rejected by the southern states, because they wanted to protect slavery into the future.
5. In 1787, a new plan was put forward, dividing the new land into a Northwest Territory, where there would be no slavery, and a SW territory, where slavery would be allowed.
6. This Northwest Ordinance was the first important compromise between the states in the name of creating a new country.

C. The Constitutional Convention

1. In 1787, the representatives of the continental congress decided they should have a special meetings dedicated to improving the Articles of Confederation.
2. When they assembled, they realized that the better option was to start from scratch and create a new set of laws for all the colonies: a constitution.

D. Compromises for Unity

1. To create a single government, the thirteen states had to agree on how its new parliament would work.
 - a) If its representatives were chosen based on the size of the states' populations, then large states like Virginia would have many representatives and thus a lot of power, and small states like Rhode Island would have almost none.
 - b) If an equal number of representatives were chosen for each state, then smaller states would have much more power.
4. They decided to create a two-part parliament, called "Congress," where a "House of Representatives" would have representation by population, and the "Senate" would have representation by state.
5. Not only did the southern states want to keep their slaves, but they wanted to have them count towards the number of representatives they had in Congress. The North did not think this was fair, since slaves were treated like property and had no rights. Again, the two sides compromised, allowing 3/5 of the slave population to count towards a state's representation.
6. The final crucial compromise to keep the North and South together, the thirteen states agreed not to limit the importation of slaves from Africa until 1808.

E. Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

1. Once the leaders of the separate states had accepted the Constitution they had to return to their states and convince the people to accept it as well.
2. Those who supported the Constitution were known as "Federalists" because they wanted a "federal" government (one for all the states). Those who opposed the Constitution were known as "Anti-Federalists."
3. Patrick Henry was among the most famous Anti-Federalists. He believed that a large central government would be impossible to control and eventually attack people's rights instead of defending them.
4. The most famous Federalists were James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton. Together they wrote many newspaper articles to defend the Constitution. These articles are now known as the "Federalist Papers."
5. The Federalists also agreed to make a "Bill of Rights" to add special limits to the powers of the government to win over opponents.
6. In the end all thirteen states agreed to join, and they elected the first president in the history of the world: George Washington.