

Building a Nation

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,196

Connections

Writing

Research the Bill of Rights. Write an essay about one of these rights, explaining why it was significant to the colonists and why it is still important today.

Social Studies

Choose one of the first three presidents of the United States to research. Create a biographical poster that includes details about his childhood, education, career, and presidency.

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Building a Nation



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Part Three of The American Revolution
Written by Terry Miller Shannon

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Focus Question

How did the United States develop from thirteen separate colonies to one united nation?

Words to Know

authority	judicial
checks and balances	legislative
compromise	prosperity
constitution	ratify
debates	rebellion
debts	representatives
executive	seizing
expansion	treaty
guaranteed	tyranny

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Part Three of The American Revolution

Building a Nation tells about the efforts of thirteen colonies to build a nation. Read *Seeds of Revolution* and *Battling for Independence* to find out what events led to the creation of the United States of America.

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Level Z1 Leveled Book

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Part Three of The American Revolution

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Correlation

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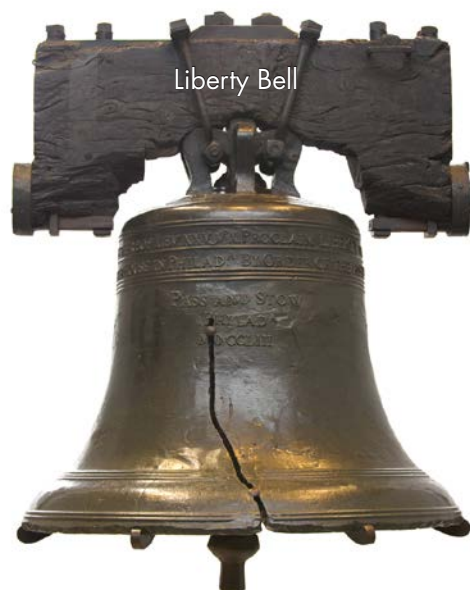


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Colonists fight British soldiers at the Battle of Lexington.

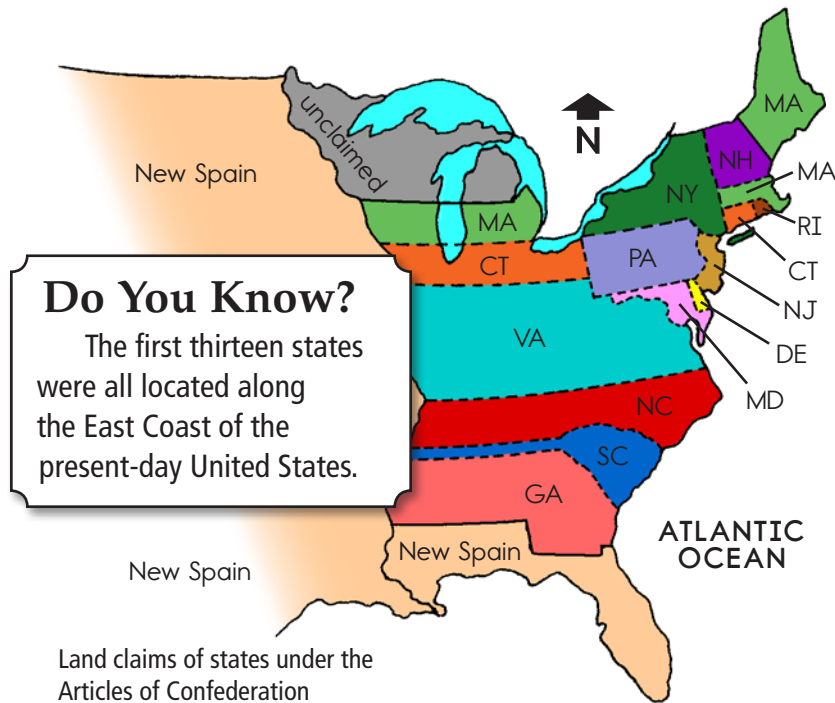
Introduction

In 1776, the thirteen British colonies in North America signed the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming they were free and independent of Great Britain's rule. At the same time, the colonies declared themselves a union of states called the United States of America. After that, the union of states needed to devise a system of government.

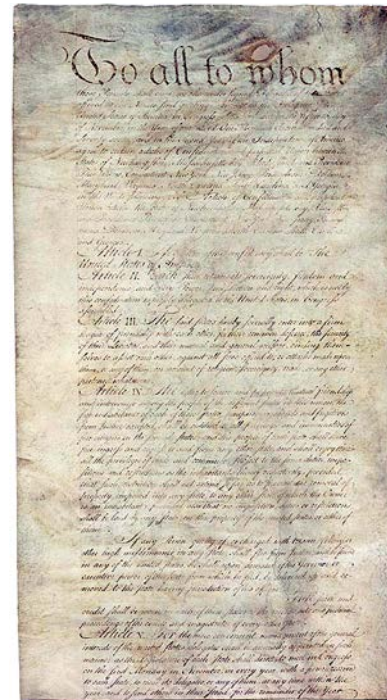
Delegates from the original thirteen colonies, now called *states*, began to draft a plan for a government. It would take five years for this plan to be firmly established within the new union of states because war with Great Britain continued. However, it would take another forty years and another war with Great Britain for this new union to feel truly united.

The Articles of Confederation

In 1777, delegates appointed by each state to the Second Continental Congress agreed to send the new plan for government to the states for review. The document detailing the plan would become known as the Articles of Confederation. It did not refer to the United States as a nation, but as a “firm league of friendship” between thirteen states. The document set up a weak federal government and strong state governments. The states liked the **authority** and freedom they had under the Articles. Each state created its own **constitution** and printed its own money.



The Articles of Confederation gave the federal government of the United States no authority and no freedom to act. The United States had **debts** from the war, but Congress, the one branch of federal government created by the Articles, could not tax people to raise money to pay off the



The Articles of Confederation

debts. The lack of power to tax would prove to be one of the Articles of Confederation’s fatal flaws. The document had other flaws as well, including that no one **executive** was in charge. A president was elected to oversee the proceedings of Congress, but had no power to make decisions. Congress also did not have the power to change the Articles if the union of states decided something about the plan was not working. Nine of the thirteen states had to agree to changes in the Articles. It would take several years after its approval by the states for the Articles of Confederation to show its flaws.

The Treaty of Paris

It took almost five years for all thirteen states to come to an agreement and approve the Articles of Confederation. In 1781, the major fighting of the Revolutionary War ended with U.S. General George Washington's win over British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, but the war itself wasn't officially over for two more years.

Representatives from the United States and Great Britain discussed peace terms in Paris, France, from the middle of 1782 until the **Treaty** of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783. Only then had the war officially ended.

The peace treaty established two important ideas:

1. It recognized the new United States to be independent of Great Britain.
2. It also set the boundaries of the new United States. It included all land from the Atlantic Ocean west to the Mississippi River with the exception of New Orleans and the Floridas, which Spain controlled. The United States' northern boundary was set at the Great Lakes and along the borders of Quebec and Nova Scotia, both part of British-controlled Canada.



Thinking Critically

WHY was it important for the U.S. to be recognized in the Treaty of Paris as independent of Britain?

IN YOUR MIND, what might have happened if the treaty did not recognize U.S. independence?

Why Did It Take So Long?

The Treaty of Paris was not signed until two years after the war ended at Yorktown. Great Britain was in no hurry to please the United States. Britain also hoped a delay would increase the chances that colonists who had fled the colonies due to their loyalty to Britain would get paid for property they lost when they fled. Estimates vary on how many colonists loyal to Britain left during and after the war, but some put the number around 100,000.

Money Problems

Once the Revolutionary War was over and the Treaty of Paris signed, there were terrible money troubles for the United States. Soldiers headed home, poor and tired. The government had no money and no power to tax, so many of the soldiers were not paid. But an even bigger money headache faced the new nation: war debts. The nation owed more than \$76 million to foreign countries, individual Americans, and state banks. Leaders did not know how they would raise the money to pay off the huge debts.

In Massachusetts, money problems at home inspired a **rebellion**. Farmers who fought for independence could not pay their debts and lost their farms. In 1786, Daniel Shays, a former Revolutionary War captain, and about a thousand farmers and other workers marched on the town of Springfield, Massachusetts, and then headed to Boston. The U.S. Army met them there, and gunfire was exchanged. Some of the workers were tried and hanged while others were not punished. Shays' Rebellion persuaded many citizens and leaders that a stronger federal government was needed.



This gold U.S. Half Eagle was made in 1795.



Constitutional Convention

To solve the many problems of the United States, fifty-five men arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for a meeting at Independence Hall



Independence Hall

in May 1787. The goal of the meeting was to change the Articles of Confederation to make the federal government stronger. They would work on drafting a constitution that would establish an executive to lead the union, give Congress the power to tax, and create a way to change the governing document.

Twelve of the thirteen states sent delegates. Each delegate was an influential leader in his own state and was also known as a leader in the new union. All the delegates were wealthy, educated white men. The delegates elected George Washington to preside over the meeting, which became known as the Constitutional Convention. The convention would last for several weeks.

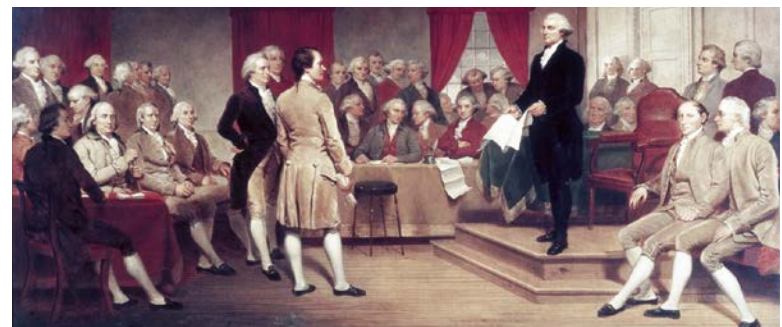
Debates over revisions to the Articles of Confederation raised tempers on two issues related to power in the new government. The first issue was representation. More representatives in Congress would equal more power, so two plans were proposed. One based representation on population, which meant more representatives for states with more people. The other plan made representation equal for all states.

The second issue was slavery, which was important to the farming economy in the Southern states. Slaves were people who were forced to work without pay. Southern states not only wanted to ensure they could keep their slaves, but also that they could have slaves counted for representation—even though slaves could not vote. The delegates for the Southern states thought that by counting slaves for representation, their states would be on more equal footing with the Northern states, which had more people.

An editorial cartoon shows debates during the Constitutional Convention.

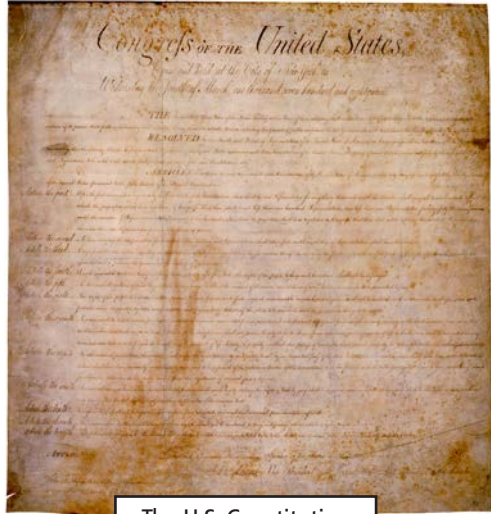


The delegates developed a **compromise** on both representation and slavery. For representation, they created two houses of Congress. In the Senate, all states would be equally represented. In the House of Representatives, states would be represented based on their population. On the issue of slavery, the delegates prohibited Congress from making any changes to control slavery for twenty years. They also agreed to count three-fifths of the slave population. Delegates also debated how much power the president should have. So they developed a system of **checks and balances** by which each power given to one branch of the government would be matched with equal power given to the other two branches. Three branches were proposed in all—a **legislative** branch with two houses of Congress, an executive branch with a president, and a **judicial** branch with a system of courts to enforce laws. A system to change the Constitution was also built into the document.



George Washington addresses the Constitutional Convention.

On September 17, 1787, thirty-nine delegates of the convention signed the Constitution and sent it out to the states for a vote. People everywhere debated whether the Constitution created a good plan for government. A group called the



The U.S. Constitution

Federalists liked the Constitution and worked to get states to **ratify** it. Another group called the Antifederalists did not like the Constitution and worked against it becoming the law of the land.

The Antifederalists said the Constitution needed to list the rights that belonged to the people and could not be taken away by the government. Eventually, the two sides would reach an agreement, and all thirteen states would vote in favor of the Constitution. The agreement between the Federalists and the Antifederalists included ten changes to the Constitution, which were called the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights **guaranteed** the right to free speech, the right to practice a religion, and other rights.

Thinking Critically

WHY did the delegates compromise on so many issues to create the Constitution?

IN YOUR MIND, how does compromise make things stronger?



Abigail Adams was an early supporter of women's rights in America.

Liberty for All?

Slaves were not free, and neither were women. Women weren't able to vote, and pretty much had to do as their husbands or fathers told them. John Adams's wife, Abigail, frequently mentioned this fact to her husband:

"Whilst you are proclaiming peace and goodwill to men . . . you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives," she wrote to John. In another letter, she wrote: "In the new code of laws . . . I desire you remember the ladies . . ."



George Washington
President 1789–1797

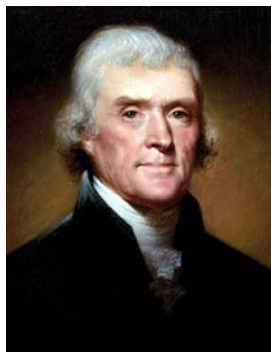
Under the new Constitution, George Washington was elected president of the United States of America and took office on April 30, 1789. Many people felt he was a great leader. He served two four-year terms as president of the United States.



John Adams
President 1797–1801

During his first term, Washington appointed Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury. Hamilton's plan to fix the new nation's many money problems included taxes on imports and the first national bank. Hamilton's plan seemed to restore faith in the government and stimulated growth in the economy.

After Washington finished his second term, John Adams was elected president of the United States in 1796. Next came Thomas Jefferson in 1801.



Thomas Jefferson
President 1801–1809

Arguments Over Land

Another problem faced the new country—what to do with the enormous lands the United States gained after winning the Revolutionary War. Everyone greedily claimed the new lands. Some areas were claimed by several states at one time. The leaders of the United States had to figure out how to fairly divide up the land.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 spelled out how to divide the new property into townships and sections. The sections were to be sold to settlers. Certain sections were set aside for the government and for public schools.

In 1787, Virginia state delegate Thomas Jefferson designed the Northwest Ordinance, which provided rules for how new states would be created in the Northwest Territory. It ensured that the United States would hold no colonies as Britain had held the thirteen colonies.



Tecumseh led the Shawnees to fight against American settlers moving into the Northwest Territory where Native Americans had been living for centuries.



Settlers built homes, such as the one above, when they moved westward.

The Land Ordinance and the Northwest Ordinance set the stage for a huge movement of settlers westward in the early 1800s. To enable this **expansion**, roads, canals, and railroads were built. The nation was rapidly expanding, and the new government seemed able to keep up with the pace. Debts were being paid, land disagreements were settled, and a division of power for the new government was established. The outlook for the new nation had turned from the grimness that followed the war to the brightness of the future.

The Louisiana Purchase

With all this **prosperity** and expansion, leaders of the United States started making plans. France now held the land from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and the port of New Orleans, which meant U.S. westerners could not use the Mississippi River or the port of New Orleans to move crops for trade. The United States approached Napoleon Bonaparte, France's emperor, to try to buy New Orleans.

Bonaparte had some major setbacks in a war in Europe, and he needed troops and money. In order to fund his war, he offered to sell not only New Orleans, but also the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. In October 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory for France's asking price—and doubled the size of the nation. The purchase added 800,000 square miles and 200,000 people to the United States.



Exploration and War

In May 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent two army officers—Meriwether Lewis and William Clark—plus a 45-member group to find a route across the continent, explore the Louisiana Territory, and report back. After more than two years of traveling, the group returned with journals, drawings, and samples of wildlife, plants, and stories of the Native Americans they had met on their travels.



Lewis and Clark's group travels through the Louisiana Territory.

It seemed that the United States had a firm hold on its land in North America. However, while Lewis and Clark explored the new western territory of the United States, an old ally—France—fought a raging war with Great Britain. President Jefferson hoped to keep the United States out of the war, and when James Madison became president in 1808, he hoped to do the same.

The United States would not be able to stay out of the war, however, because British and French ships began **seizing** and searching U.S. ships in order to keep supplies from reaching their enemies. The British also seized the sailors on the ships they took, forcing them to serve as British sailors. This made U.S. citizens who had gained independence from Britain subject to Great Britain's **tyranny** again.

In 1812, President Madison told Britain to stop searching and seizing U.S. ships or there would be war. Not satisfied with the response, Madison declared war with Britain on June 18, 1812.

The United States did not have the navy to fight Britain on the seas. An invasion to conquer British-controlled Canada failed, proving the army could not take on the giant nation again. For two



The U.S. ship *Constitution* defeats the British ship *Guerriere* on August 19, 1812.

and a half years, the United States remained at war with Britain. On December 24, 1814, the two countries signed a peace treaty to end the war.

Battle of New Orleans



Thinking Critically

HOW long do you think the process of forming a new nation takes—a long time or a short time?

IN YOUR MIND, what does this tell you about new governments being formed today?

Even though the war had officially ended, the United States engaged in one more battle against the British. On January 8, 1815, Americans decisively won the Battle of New Orleans under General Andrew Jackson (who was unaware a peace treaty had been signed). Almost three hundred British soldiers died. The U.S. death toll was less than twenty.

The victory at the Battle of New Orleans made it clear that the United States, not Great Britain, truly controlled the western part of the country. It also made U.S. citizens feel like they had won the War of 1812, although, in truth, neither side was victorious. Maybe the most important outcome was that the late victory made the new United States of America feel truly united as one nation.

Timeline of the American Revolution

1754–63	French and Indian War
1764–65	Sugar Act, Quartering Act, and Stamp Act
1767	Townshend Acts
1770	Boston Massacre
1774	Coercive (Intolerable) Acts; First Continental Congress meets
1775	Revolutionary War starts; Second Continental Congress meets
July 4, 1776	Declaration of Independence signed
1781	Revolutionary War ends; Articles of Confederation approved by all thirteen states
1786	Shays' Rebellion
1787	Constitutional Convention held
1791	Constitution ratified by all states; Bill of Rights ratified
1812	War with Britain begins again
1814	Treaty of Ghent signed to end War of 1812



Glossary

authority (<i>n.</i>)	the power to govern, give orders, or make decisions (p. 5)
checks and balances (<i>n.</i>)	the division of power among branches of government so that no one branch can dominate the others (p. 12)
compromise (<i>n.</i>)	a decision between parties in an argument where both sides give up something to reach an agreement (p. 12)
constitution (<i>n.</i>)	basic laws of a state or nation that tell how the government is run (p. 5)
debates (<i>n.</i>)	discussions between people or groups who have different opinions on an issue (p. 11)
debts (<i>n.</i>)	things, usually money, that are owed to someone else (p. 6)
executive (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to a branch of government that leads a nation and carries out the laws of the land (p. 6)
expansion (<i>n.</i>)	an increase in the size, amount, volume, or scope of something (p. 17)
guaranteed (<i>v.</i>)	promised or ensured (p. 13)
judicial (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the branch of government that makes sure laws agree with the constitution (p. 12)
legislative (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the branch of government that makes laws (p. 12)
prosperity (<i>n.</i>)	success, wealth, or good fortune (p. 18)
ratify (<i>v.</i>)	to approve through official means (p. 13)
rebellion (<i>n.</i>)	a fight against authority or power (p. 9)

representatives (<i>n.</i>)	people chosen to speak, vote, or otherwise act on behalf of an individual or group (p. 7)
seizing (<i>v.</i>)	taking control by force (p. 20)
treaty (<i>n.</i>)	a formal agreement of peace or friendship between two nations or groups (p. 7)
tyranny (<i>n.</i>)	harsh or cruel acts by a person or a group in power (p. 20)

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