

Establishing the New Nation Lesson 1 The Articles of Confederation



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Learning Objectives

- Explain how the states' new constitutions reflected republican ideals.
- Describe the structure and powers of the national government under the Articles of Confederation.
- Summarize the Congress's plan for the settlement and governance of western lands.
- Understand why tensions with foreign countries revealed the weakness of the U.S. government.
- List the main weaknesses of the Articles.

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Key Terms

- republics
- unicameral legislature
- bicameral legislature
- Articles of Confederation
- John Dickinson
- federal
- Northwest Territory
- Land Ordinance of 1785
- Northwest Ordinance of 1787
- Shays' Rebellion

The States Create Republics

- After the Revolutionary War, the Patriots feared the creation of another tyrannical or abusive government
- They refused to entrust the new Union with much power
- most authority remained with the states
- powerful states and weak national government faced severe problems.

The States Create Republics

- **A Preference for Democracy**

- ✓ Seeking greater rights for the people, state leaders preferred a **unicameral legislature**, or one with a single house, whose members were elected by the people.
- ✓ Examples-Pennsylvania and Georgia

- **Maintaining Colonial Traditions**

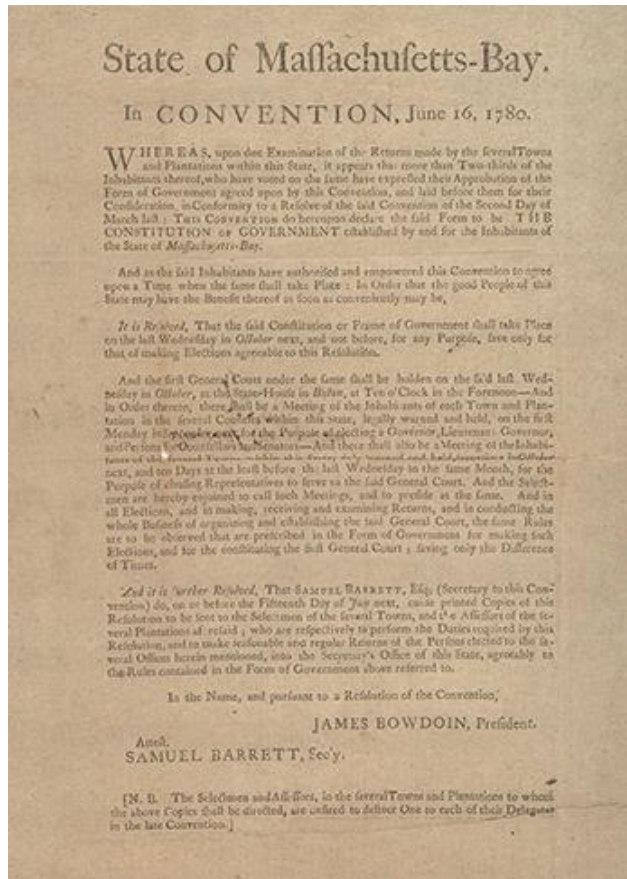
- ✓ A **bicameral legislature** is a lawmaking body with two houses, such as a Senate and a House of Representatives and a strong governor
- ✓ These constitutions counterbalanced the power of the common voters in the House with the power of wealthy, well-educated gentlemen in the Senate.

The States Create Republics

- **Accountability to the People**

- ✓ Voters chose the members of both houses of the new legislatures, rather than just the members of the lower house.
 - ✓ **Democratic Patriots** wanted equal political rights for almost all free men, even those who had little or no property.
 - ✓ **John Adams** warned that allowing poor men to vote would “confound and destroy all distinctions, and prostrate all ranks to the common level.”
 - ✓ These ideas excluded **slaves** and **women** from voting.
- **Religious Liberty**
 - ✓ Because the American Revolution promoted greater religious liberty, most states also guaranteed freedom of religion in their constitutions

The States Create Republics



In 1780, Massachusetts ratified its state constitution following a constitutional convention. Today, that constitution is among the oldest still in use anywhere in the world.

The States Create Republics

Bicameral Versus Unicameral Legislatures

BICAMERAL	UNICAMERAL
Features two chambers/houses	Features one chamber/house
Typical in large countries with federal systems of government (e.g., United States, Germany, Brazil)	Typical in small countries with unitary systems of government (e.g., Denmark, Finland, New Zealand)
Legislation is usually passed more slowly because both houses have to agree; may prevent impulsive legislation	Legislation is usually passed quickly because there is only one house to decide on a bill; may lead to impulsive legislation
Power is spread more evenly, but system is more costly to maintain	Power more concentrated, but system is cheaper to maintain
All but three colonies had bicameral systems in 1776; today, all states but one have bicameral legislatures	Three colonies had unicameral systems in 1776; today, Nebraska is only state with a unicameral legislature

Sources: *Encyclopædia Britannica*; Kentlaw.itt.edu

Analyze Information What main advantages does a bicameral legislature offer? What advantages does a unicameral legislature offer?

Union Under the Articles of Confederation

- A **confederation** is a league or alliance of states that agree to work together.
- **John Dickinson** of Pennsylvania and Congress designed a loose confederation of 13 states, rather than a strong and centralized nation.
- The **Articles** reflected the principles of the Declaration of Independence and rejected the centralized power of the British Empire as a threat to liberty.

Union Under the Articles of Confederation

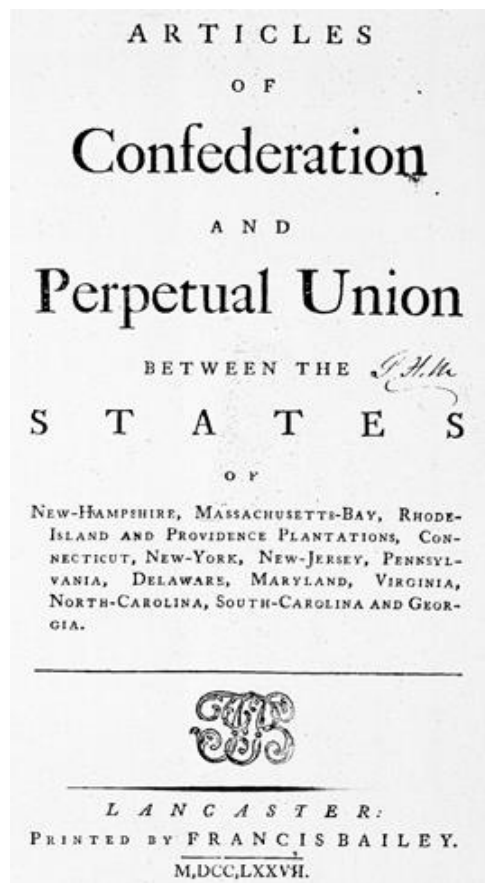
- **A Federal Government**

- ✓ **federal**, or national, government comprised a congress of delegates, chosen by state legislatures rather than by voters.
- ✓ states could choose to send as many as seven delegates, each **state—no matter how large or small—had a single vote.**
- ✓ Example-Enormous Virginia had no more power than tiny Rhode Island.
- ✓ Powers to make, implement, enforce laws were all placed with the Congress.
- ✓ The national government included **no President or executive branch.**

- **Powers of the National Congress**

- ✓ Declare&conduct war, negotiate peace, regulate foreign affairs, administer relations with Indian nations.
- ✓ Congress had **no power to raise money through taxes.**
- ✓ Congress relied on money contributions from the states
- ✓ major issues, including declaring war and making treaties, 2/3 of the states (nine) had to approve.
- ✓ Amending the Articles was almost impossible because all 13 states had to approve any change

Union Under the Articles of Confederation



The Articles of Confederation were the original constitution for the union of the 13 states. Analyze Primary Sources What does the full title of this document suggest about the planned relationship among the states?

Union Under the Articles of Confederation

Organization of the Articles of Confederation

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	FOREIGN POLICY	TAXATION	COMMERCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Made Congress the governing body of the federal government• Gave Congress the power to issue bills of credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gave Congress the power to sign treaties and make alliances with other nations• Gave Congress the power to manage relations with Native Americans• Gave Congress the power to declare war	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gave states the power to tax• Gave states the power to impose duties and tariffs on trade with other states	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gave states the power to regulate commerce• Gave states, rather than the federal government, the power to settle disputes

Sources: *Encyclopædia Britannica*; Central Connecticut State University; OurDocuments.gov; USHistory.org

Analyze Information Did Congress or the states exercise more authority under the Articles? What details support this evaluation?

The Northwest Territory

- *The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a plan for organizing the western territory of the United States and steps for them to follow in order to join the United States.*
- This territory, called the Northwest Territory, lay north of the Ohio River and west of Pennsylvania to the Mississippi River.
- By selling this land to speculators and farmers, the Congress hoped to raise revenue and extend America's republican society westward.

The Northwest Territory

- **Land Ordinance of 1785**

- ✓ Federal surveyors divided the land into hundreds of townships
- ✓ Subdivided each township into 36 “sections” of one square mile (640 acres), to be sold for at least one dollar per acre.
- ✓ Ordinary farmers could not afford to pay \$640
- ✓ Price and size of the sections favored wealthy land speculators who had cash.
- ✓ Ordinary settlers had to buy it from the speculators.

- **Government under the Northwest Ordinance**

- ✓ *Territories that were admitted to the Union would not be colonies, but would be on equal footing with the original 13 states.*
- ✓ *The Northwest Ordinance banned slavery in the territories.*
- ✓ *It enabled settlers to move into the western territories, where American Indians already lived.*
- ✓ *Settlers ignored American Indian claims to the land.*
- ✓ *This angered American Indians and led to further conflict with them.*
- ✓ Territorial government led by a governor, secretary, and three judges.
- ✓ Citizens would enjoy freedom of religion, trial by jury, and the rights of common law, including habeas corpus.

The Northwest Territory



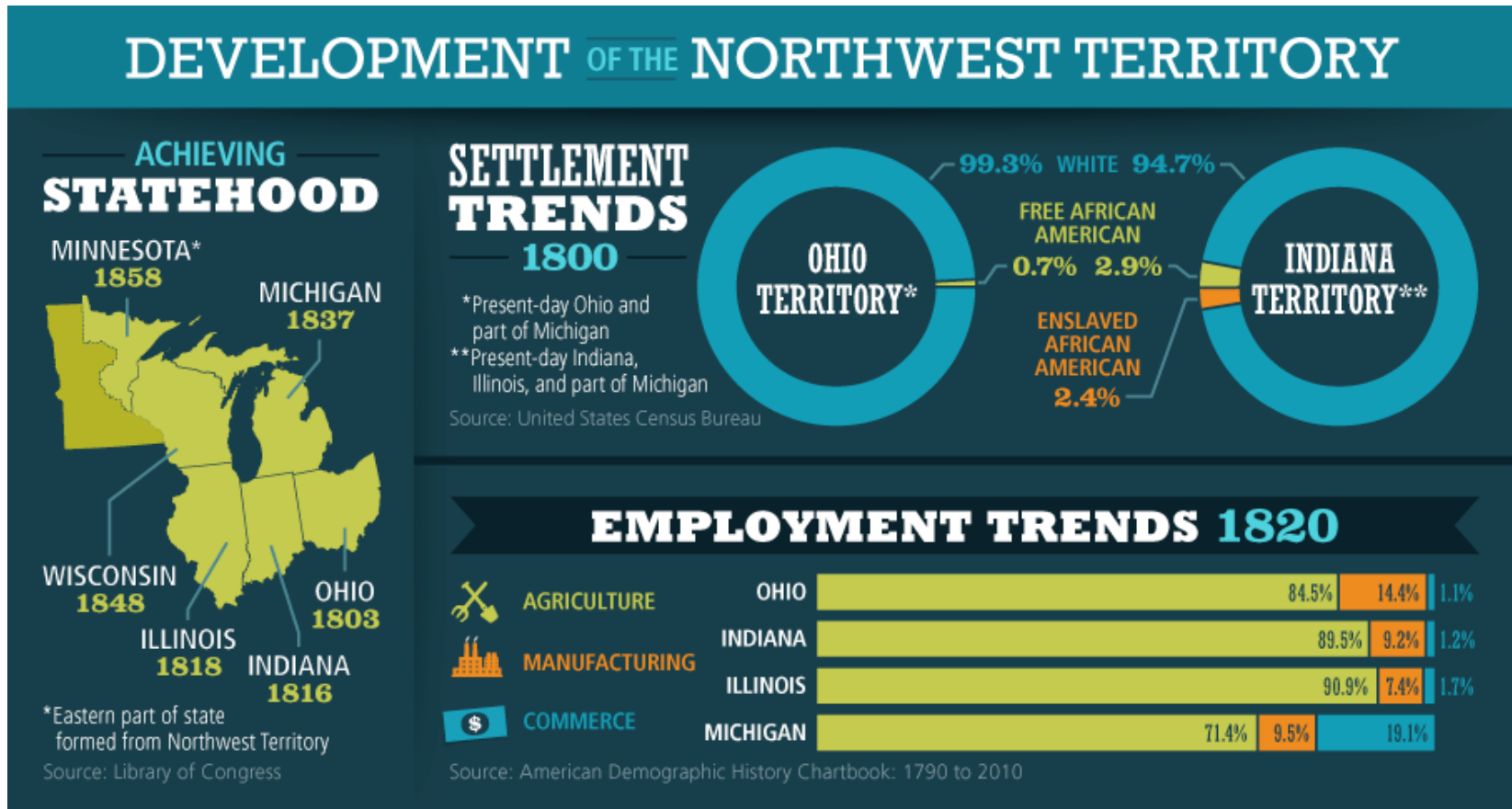
Analyze Maps How might the location of the Northwest Territory have made it difficult for the Confederation government to manage?

The Northwest Territory



Federal surveyors working under the Land Ordinance of 1785 used sophisticated equipment like this theodolite to measure the horizontal and vertical angles that divided land into townships.

The Northwest Territory



Analyze Information In what ways was the Northwest Territory similar the rest of the United States in the late 1700s? In what ways was it different?

Relations With Foreign Powers

- During the mid-1780s, the Spanish and the British did not take the United States seriously.
- Britain and Spain thought the republican Confederation seemed weak to the point of anarchy, or lawlessness.

Relations With Foreign Powers

- **The Closure of New Orleans**

- ✓ *New Orleans was an important trading port for Americans. Settlers shipped their goods down the Mississippi River to market in New Orleans.*

- **Disputes with Britain**

- ✓ *Britain renewed the policy of mercantilism, which meant that Americans could only trade with the British Empire under rules that favored British interests.*
- ✓ *The British cut off American trade with the West Indies, one of the biggest markets for American goods.*
- ✓ *The British also continued to hold forts on the American side of borders set by the Treaty of Paris.*

Relations With Foreign Powers



The location of New Orleans at the juncture of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico has made the city a key commercial hub for centuries.

Relations With Foreign Powers



Analyze Maps What geographic factors likely made the British West Indies an important trade partner with the young United States?

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

- The fledgling government under the Articles of Confederation found itself facing a host of difficulties.
- It soon became clear to many that the Articles themselves were part of the problem.

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

- **Economic Weaknesses**

- ✓ To fight the Revolutionary War, America had borrowed money from France.
- ✓ They needed to pay the money back with interest
- ✓ The weak U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation did not have the power to **tax the states or the people** and **raise the money**.

- **Shays' Rebellion**

- ✓ American farmers faced hardships such as lower prices for their goods and rising debt
- ✓ Daniel Shays, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, became a leader among the farmers.
- ✓ In 1787, he led about 1,000 farmers to seize weapons from the Springfield Armory and attempted to shut down the courts.
- ✓ Massachusetts Army marched west to suppress the rebellion.

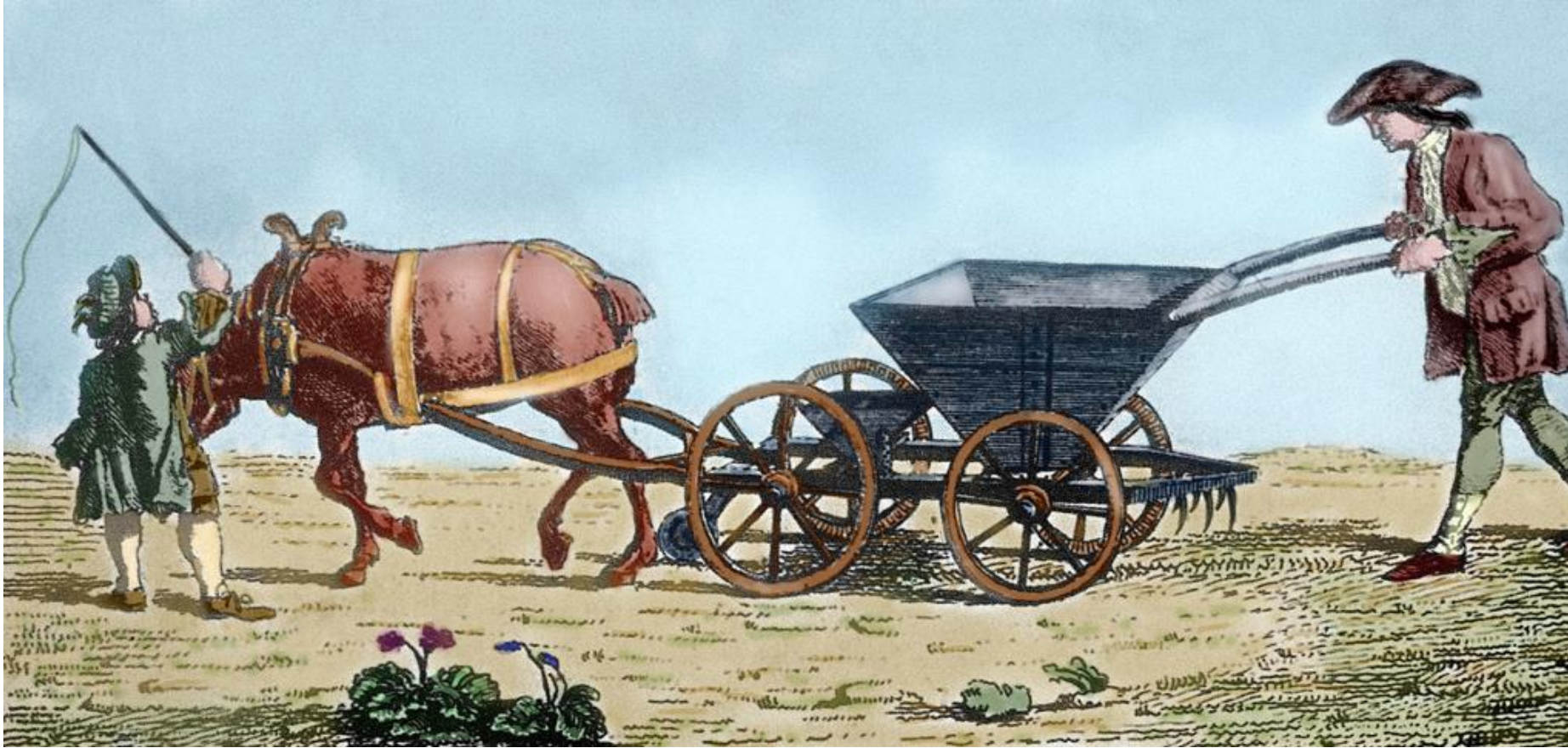
Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

- Congress could not levy or collect taxes.
- Congress was powerless to regulate interstate commerce and foreign trade.
- Each state had only one vote in Congress, regardless of its size.
- A two-thirds majority (9 out of 13 states) was required to pass laws.
- Articles could only be amended with the consent of all states.
- There was no separate executive branch to enforce acts of Congress.
- There was no system of federal courts.

Analyze Information Which weaknesses would likely cause the most problems for the nation over time?

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation



American farmers faced hardships such as lower prices for their goods and rising debt in the late 1700s. Growing discontent due to the possibility of foreclosure and a loss of livelihood pushed some farmers to rebel.

Quiz: The States Create Republics

Which form of state government was considered the most democratic and the least conservative?

- A. bicameral legislature with strong governor
- B. bicameral legislature with weak governor
- C. unicameral legislature with strong governor
- D. unicameral legislature with weak governor

Quiz: Union Under the Articles of Confederation

In what significant way did most state governments differ from the federal government under the Articles of Confederation?

- A. The federal government had a bicameral legislature.
- B. Citizens elected their federal representatives.
- C. State governments negotiated with American Indian nations.
- D. The federal government did not have an executive branch.

Quiz: The Northwest Territory

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a plan for

- A. abolition of slavery throughout the nation.
- B. recognition of American Indian nations.
- C. statehood for territories.
- D. distributing the public lands.

Quiz: Relations With Foreign Powers

Following the American Revolution, Britain tried to retaliate against the United States through

- A. attacks on merchant vessels.
- B. mercantilist trade policies.
- C. port closures.
- D. trade boycotts.

Quiz: Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

After the Revolution, the national government lacked the funds it needed to repay its war debts because

- A. Congress had committed the nation to unfavorable trade agreements.
- B. the Articles failed to give Congress the power to tax.
- C. the Articles permitted Congress to borrow money from states.
- D. the Articles did not create a national banking system.