

Daily Lecture Notes

Lesson

2-1

Did you know?

Even though the American colonists got many of their ideas about representative government and freedom from England, that country has no written constitution. The British constitution, which is one of the oldest in the world, was never set down in writing. Yet the centuries-old traditions of individual rights and limits on government in that unwritten constitution have been powerful forces for democracy in the United States, as well as in other nations.

Outline

- I. An English Political Heritage (pages 35–38)
 - A. The English colonists brought with them a heritage of freedom and principles of government that helped shape the development of the United States.
 - B. The concept of limited government, dating from the Magna Carta in 1215, was an accepted part of the English system.
 - C. The Petition of Right in 1628 severely limited the power of the English monarch.
 - D. The colonists believed in the limits on the ruler's power and the freedoms protected in the English Bill of Rights, passed by Parliament in 1688.
 - E. The colonists firmly believed in representative government, following the model of Parliament.
 - F. The ideas of the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke deeply influenced the American colonists.

Discussion Question

Why were John Locke's Ideas considered revolutionary? (Monarchs still ruled by divine right at the time.)

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II. Government in the Colonies (pages 38–40)

- A. The present system of American government evolved largely from colonial governments and their practices.
- B. Written plans of government were a key feature of the colonial period.
- C. Representative assemblies elected by the people helped establish the tradition of representative government in America.
- D. The division of government powers among the governor, the colonial legislatures, and colonial courts helped establish the principle of the separation of powers.

Discussion Question

How did democracy in the colonies differ from democracy in the United States today? (The vote was limited to white males with property.)

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Did you know?

John Hancock of Massachusetts, the president of the Continental Congress, was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. When he did, he wrote his name in very large letters, declaring, "There, I guess King George will be able to read that!" Even today, Americans often refer to a person's signature as a "John Hancock."

Outline

I. The Colonies on Their Own (pages 42–43)

- A.** Although Britain regarded the American colonies largely as a source of economic benefits, it allowed them limited self-government.
- B.** The British government tightened its control over the colonies after the French and Indian wars.
- C.** King George III and his ministers made the colonies help pay for the war by levying new taxes on the colonists.

Discussion Question

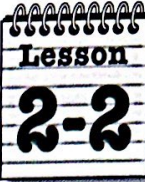
Why did the British government allow its American colonies to develop representative governments? (The distance of the colonies from Great Britain made colonial self-government convenient.)

II. Colonial Unity (pages 44–45)

- A.** Harsh British policies and taxes helped unite the colonies.
- B.** To protest British policies, the colonists sent petitions to the king and also organized committees of correspondence.
- C.** The First Continental Congress held in Philadelphia in 1774 debated what the colonies should do about their relationship with Britain.
- D.** When the Second Continental Congress met in 1775, fighting had begun and Congress acted as a central government to carry on the Revolution.



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Discussion Question

When did the Second Continental Congress become the colonies' acting government? (When fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.)

III. Independence (pages 45–47)

- A. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* strengthened the independence movement.
- B. A committee of delegates to the Philadelphia Congress, headed by Thomas Jefferson, drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776.
- C. The Declaration set forth the principles for the new nation.
- D. The Declaration had three parts: a statement of purpose, including a description of basic human rights; a list of specific complaints against King George III; and a statement of the colonists' determination to separate from Great Britain.
- E. By the end of 1776, 10 states had adopted written constitutions, which were based on the consent of the governed, limited government, and the protection of individual rights.

Discussion Question

Why did Jefferson's words in the Declaration of Independence stir the hearts of the American people? (The Declaration supported principles of human liberty and consent of the governed.)

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Did you know?

When you fly in a plane over Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, or Wisconsin, you often can see mile after mile of farmland neatly divided into squares. In 1785 Congress provided for a survey of the vast Northwest Territory, dividing it into sections one mile, or 640 acres, square. Families who settled there could buy an acre of land for \$1.

Outline

I. Government Under the Articles (page 48)

- A.** The nation's first government included a single-chamber Congress with limited powers.
- B.** Each state had one vote in Congress, but the government had no executive branch or court system.

Discussion Question

Why did the delegates who planned the Confederation government give nearly all powers of the central government to Congress instead of to a strong executive?
(Their experience with a king made delegates cautious about empowering an executive.)

II. Weaknesses of the Articles (pages 49–50)

- A.** The Congress had to depend on the states for money and had no power to collect taxes, regulate trade, or enforce the laws.
- B.** Amending the Articles required the approval of all the states.
- C.** The central government had no president or executive branch and carried out much of its work through congressional committees.
- D.** There was no system of national courts; instead state courts enforced and interpreted national laws.

Discussion Question

What do you consider the main weaknesses of the Confederation government? Explain your reasons. (See list of weaknesses on text pages 49–50.)

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III. Achievements (pages 50–51)

- A. Despite its weaknesses, the Confederation government established a fair policy for developing western land.
- B. The Confederation government signed the peace treaty with England.
- C. The Confederation government set up several departments establishing the precedent for cabinet departments later mentioned in the Constitution.

Discussion Question

How did the Confederation government provide for the future growth of the nation?

(Individual states ceded western lands to the central government.)

IV. The Need for Stronger Government (pages 51–52)

- A. Soon after the war, disputes broke out among the states; the government's debt left soldiers unpaid.
- B. Many were alarmed when an economic depression in 1786 led to Shays's Rebellion, an armed uprising by Massachusetts farmers who could not pay their debts.
- C. Leaders who favored a stronger government failed to accomplish much at the 1786 Annapolis Convention, but persuaded the Confederation Congress to call a convention in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation.

Discussion Question

How did Shays's Rebellion suggest the need for a stronger government?

(The rebellion alarmed people who feared mob violence.)

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Did you know?

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia held all their meetings in secret. For five months, from May until September 1787, guards stood watch at every door of Independence Hall to bar the public and reporters while the delegates argued and debated the provisions of the Constitution. Ironically, the great document that guarantees the basic rights and freedoms of all Americans was written without any input from the people.

Outline

I. The Convention Begins (pages 53–54)

- A.** The delegates to the Constitutional Convention had great practical experience in politics and government and included many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation.
- B.** The delegates held their meetings in secret, deciding each state would have one vote, all decisions would be by majority vote, and a quorum of seven states was required for all meetings.
- C.** The delegates decided to give up the idea of revising the Articles of Confederation and to draft a new plan of government about which they shared many ideas.

Discussion Question

Why were the delegates to the Constitutional Convention able to work together despite their disagreements? (The delegates did agree on many things. They had strong leadership and a common purpose.)

II. Decisions and Compromises (pages 54–56)

- A.** The Virginia Plan proposed a strong executive, a national judiciary, and a strong two-house legislature in which the lower house would be chosen by the people and the upper house would be chosen by the lower house. This plan favored the large, more populous states.


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II. Decisions and Compromises (pages 54–56, continued)

- B.** The New Jersey Plan proposed a weak executive of more than one person elected by Congress, a national judiciary with limited powers, and a one-house legislature, with one vote for each state. This plan favored the small states.
- C.** A special committee devised the Connecticut Compromise, which proposed a legislative branch with two parts: a House of Representatives with state representation based on population, and a Senate with two members from each state, regardless of size. This compromise gave the large states an advantage in the House and protected the smaller states in the Senate.
- D.** The Three-Fifths Compromise settled the issue of representation in the House of Representatives, counting three-fifths of enslaved Africans in determining the number of a state's representatives.
- E.** The Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise allowed the slave trade to continue until 1808. Congress was forbidden to tax exports and was granted power to regulate both interstate commerce and trade with other nations.
- F.** Although many Northern delegates wanted to end slavery, they realized that if they insisted on doing so, the Southern states would never accept the Constitution and the nation would face an uncertain future. Thus, the Founders compromised and refused to deal with slavery in the Constitution.
- G.** The delegates agreed to other compromises as well, including a four-year term for the president and an Electoral College rather than a direct election of the president.

Discussion Question

Why does the word *slave* not appear in the Constitution? (Northern delegates chose not to risk confrontation with southern delegates on an issue that might split the convention.)

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III. Ratifying the Constitution (pages 56–58)

- A. Supporters and opponents of the Constitution began a great debate over whether to accept or reject it.
- B. The Federalists who urged ratification argued that a strong national government was badly needed to solve the nation's problems and to deal with foreign countries; without the Constitution, disorder or anarchy would undermine the nation.
- C. The Anti-Federalists who opposed ratification argued that the delegates had drafted the Constitution in secret and had been given no power to replace the Articles. They contended that the Constitution took important powers away from the states and lacked a Bill of Rights.
- D. When the Federalists promised to add a Bill of Rights, and the small states learned more about the Connecticut Compromise, the battle over ratification was finally won.
- E. The new national government was launched in 1789 when Congress met for the first time in New York City. Soon after that George Washington took the oath of office as president of the United States.

Discussion Question

Why did ratification of the Constitution cause great debate among people in the various states? (Inland farmers, laborers, and others feared a strong central government.)

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