**The Treaty of Paris**

The Treaty of Paris was the official peace treaty between the United States and Britain that ended the American Revolutionary War. The British had surrendered after the Battle of Yorktown in October 1781, but the treaty was not signed until September 3, 1783, in Paris, France. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay had negotiated with Britain. Not only did the states get their independence; they also received all the land from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. The treaty also made sure that citizens of the states who had remained loyal to Britain would not be punished.

**The Northwest Ordinance**

The Northwest Ordinance was enacted by the Confederation Congress on July 13, 1787. Conflict had occurred when states made overlapping claims to the land won in the Treaty of Paris. To avoid conflict and unite the states, the land was turned over to the national government. The Northwest Ordinance organized the land into territories and described how the territories would be governed and the steps a territory would take to become a state. This plan would continue to be used as the country expanded to the Pacific. Once land was organized into a territory, there were three steps for it to become a state. In the first stage, Congress appointed a governor, a secretary, and three judges to rule. The second stage allowed a territory that had 5,000 free adult, male inhabitants to elect an assembly and gave the territory one non-voting delegate to Congress. During the second stage, the territory drafted a state constitution which was required to have a bill of rights protecting religious freedom, the right of habeas corpus, and the benefit of trial by jury. Land was to be put aside for public education, and slavery was not to be allowed. The third stage was reached when the territory reached a population of 60,000. It could then submit its constitution to Congress for approval and ask to become a state.

**Articles of Confederation**

The Articles of Confederation served as the document that created the government of the United States from 1781 to 1789, when the Constitution was ratified. Due to their experience with the abuse of the powerful British government, the new states designed a confederacy of independent states with only a very weak national government. The Articles were written in 1776–77 and adopted by the Congress in November 1777. However, the document was not fully ratified by the states until March 1, 1781.

Congress had power to declare war, appoint military officers, negotiate a peace treaty, borrow money, coin money, and create a postal service. The national government could not tax and had no chief executive and no court system. During this time, the states were each busy drafting their own state constitutions.

**Shays’ Rebellion**

Shays' Rebellion occurred from August 1786 to February 1787 in western Massachusetts. Because taxes between the states had hurt the economy, the states began to tax land. Subsistence farmers could not pay these taxes, and uprisings like Shays' occurred in all thirteen states to fight to these taxes. Armed bands forced the closing of several courts to **stop** court decisions that forced the sale of farms when taxes had not been paid and sentenced people to jail for not paying taxes. In September 1786, Daniel Shays led several hundred men who forced the Supreme Court of Massachusetts to close. In January of 1787, Shays led a force of about 1,200 men who attacked a federal arsenal to steal guns to continue the fight. Shays' and his men were defeated and fled, but this rebellion and the others like it caused the states to attend the Constitutional Convention. At the convention a plan for a stronger national government that could prevent economic problems was created.

**The Constitution of the United States**

The Constitution of the United States established a new national government and fundamental laws and guaranteed certain basic rights for its citizens. It was signed on September 17, 1787, by delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Under America’s first governing document, the Articles of Confederation, the national government was weak and states operated like independent countries. At the 1787 convention, delegates wrote a plan for a stronger federal government with three branches, executive, legislative and judicial, along with a system of checks and balances to ensure no single branch would have too much power. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, wrote a series of essays to persuade people to ratify the Constitution. People who supported the Constitution became known as Federalists. Those who opposed it were called Anti-Federalists. The Anti-Federalists thought that the new Constitution gave too much power to the national government and did not have a bill of rights. Nine states were needed to ratify the Constitution.

With the promise of a Bill of Rights, the Constitution was adopted. In June 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the document. All states eventually did, the last being Rhode Island in May 1790.

**The Constitutional Convention**

Motivated by severe economic troubles, which produced uprisings such as Shays’ Rebellion, a convention of delegates from each state except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia between May and September of 1787. The stated goal of the convention was to [amend](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/amend) the Articles of Confederation, but the delegates actually set out to plan a new form of government immediately. The delegates included many leading figures of the period, such as George Washington, who was elected to serve as the convention's president, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin. Three major conflicts arose and were settled by compromise.

The first conflict concerned the representation of large states and small states. A plan known as the Virginia, or large state, plan provided for a two-house legislature with representation of each state based on its population. The New Jersey, or small state, plan provided for equal representation in Congress. A compromise, known as the Great Compromise, was reached that created a two house legislature with representation in the lower house based on population and equal representation in the upper house. All tax acts would have to start in the lower house.

The issue of whether slaves should count as population when deciding on the number of representatives a state would have in the lower house was settled by a compromise stating that three-fifths of the slave population should be counted. The issue of ending the importation of slaves ended with the agreement that importation would not be forbidden before 1808.

With these three major issues settled, the delegates finished the description of the legislative branch and described the executive and judicial branches and the relationship between the states and the federal government. The document then states that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land and describes the process by which it can be amended and the process by which it would be ratified.

Once the final decisions were made, the Committee of Style was appointed to polish the wording and arrange the articles which had been agreed to, and a stirring preamble was added. It was then sent to the printer and back to the convention to be signed. Ultimately, 39 of the original 55 delegates ended up signing, but it is likely that none were completely satisfied. Some demanded a bill of rights, and many states later ratified the Constitution only after it was agreed that a bill of rights would soon follow.