

THE BIG PICTURE: HOW WE GOT TO THE CONSTITUTION FROM THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

1787

*The Said States
hereby severally
enter into a
firm league of
friendship with
each other...*

Articles of Confederation

CRITICAL PERIOD

- economic downturn
- political instability
- weak central government
- state-level legislative chaos

1781: Articles ratified

1783: Treaties of Paris

1786: Shays's Rebellion

Founders abandon
Articles of Confederation

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Federalists

Anti-Federalists

How much power does the national government have vis à vis the states and individuals?

Large States

The Virginia Plan

The New Jersey Plan

Small States

Should representation be based on population or be equal across states?

Northern States

Southern States

If representation is based on population, who should be counted?

Articles of Confederation

State sovereignty

State law is supreme

Unicameral legislature;
equal votes for all states

Two-thirds vote to pass important laws

No congressional power to levy taxes,
regulate commerce

No executive branch; laws executed by
congressional committee

No national judiciary

All states required to pass amendments

The Virginia Plan

Popular sovereignty

National law is supreme

Bicameral legislature; representation in
both houses based on population

Majority vote to pass laws

Congressional power to regulate commerce
and tax

No restriction on strong single executive

National judiciary

Popular ratification of amendments