

Chapter 2: Origins of American Government

Section 3

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Describe the structure of the government set up under the Articles of Confederation.
2. Explain why the weaknesses of the Articles led to a critical period for the country in the 1780s.
3. Describe how a growing need for a stronger national government led to plans for a Constitutional Convention.

▶ Key Terms

- **Articles of Confederation:** the agreement, effective in 1781, that established the first central government of the United States
- **ratification:** formal approval of a proposal

► Introduction

- What weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation made a lasting government impossible?
 - The Confederation Congress lacked key powers - it could not raise taxes or regulate trade.
 - The Congress could not make states obey the laws it passed.
 - 9 of 13 state delegations had to agree before Congress could act.
 - The Articles could only be changed with the consent of all 13 state legislatures.

▶ Articles of Confederation

- The Second Continental Congress had to create an official national government.
- Congress approved the Articles of Confederation in 1777, but they were not ratified until 1781.
- The Articles created a single unit of government, the Congress.
 - Congress was unicameral in structure, with each states electing its delegates each year.
 - Each state delegation had one vote in Congress.

▶ Federal Government

- The national government had no executive or judicial branch.
 - Special congressional committees exercised executive and judicial functions.
 - Each year Congress would elect a president of the Congress (but not the nation).

- Checkpoint: What powers did Congress hold under the Articles of Confederation?
 - Make war and peace
 - Make treaties and handle ambassadors
 - Borrow money and set up a money system
 - Build a navy and raise an army
 - Set standards of weights and measures
 - Settle disputes between the states

▶ States Under the Articles

- The states promised to:
 - Obey the Articles and acts of Congress
 - Provide funds and troops requested by Congress
 - Treat citizens of other states fairly
 - Respect the laws and court rulings of other states
 - Allow open travel and trade among states
 - Submit interstate disputes to Congress
 - Turn over fugitives from other states
- The states kept all powers not given to Congress.

► Weaknesses of the Articles

- Only a **“firm league of friendship”** among States
- **Only one vote** for each State, regardless of size
- Congress **powerless to levy taxes** or duties
- Congress **powerless to regulate commerce**
- **No executive power** to enforce acts of Congress
- **No national court system**
- Amendments required **the consent of all States**
- A **9/13 majority** required to pass laws.

► Problems with the Articles

- After the end of the Revolutionary War, states stopped cooperating with each other and the national government.
 - They refused to supply troops or money.
 - Some made their own treaties with other nations.
 - Most raised their own military forces.
 - They taxed goods from other states and banned trade with some states.
 - They printed their own money.

► Problem with the Articles, cont.

- The economies of many states struggled as a result of all the bickering and poor planning.
 - Much of the newly printed money was worth very little. Prices soared and loans became hard to get.
 - Many people fell into debt.
- The economic crisis led to Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts.
 - Indebted farmers and other small property owners lost land and possessions when they could not pay their debts or their state taxes.

► Shays' Rebellion

- In 1768, former revolutionary officer, Daniel Shays led an armed uprising of farmers.
- State troops finally ended the rebellion after rebels attacked state courts and a federal arsenal. Shays fled to Vermont.

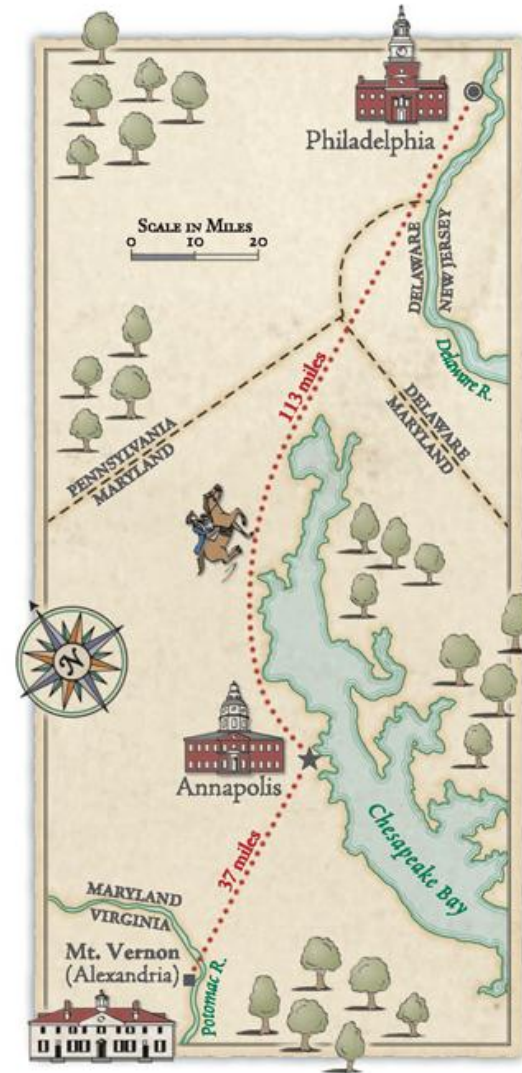


► Stronger Government

- The call went out for a stronger, more effective central government.
 - In 1785, Maryland and Virginia settled a trade dispute after meeting at George Washington's home at Mount Vernon.
 - In 1786, Virginia called for all the states to meet to discuss trade issues.
 - Five states attended the resulting meeting at Annapolis, Maryland.
 - These delegates called for another meeting, this one in Philadelphia in 1787. Congress eventually gave its support for this meeting.

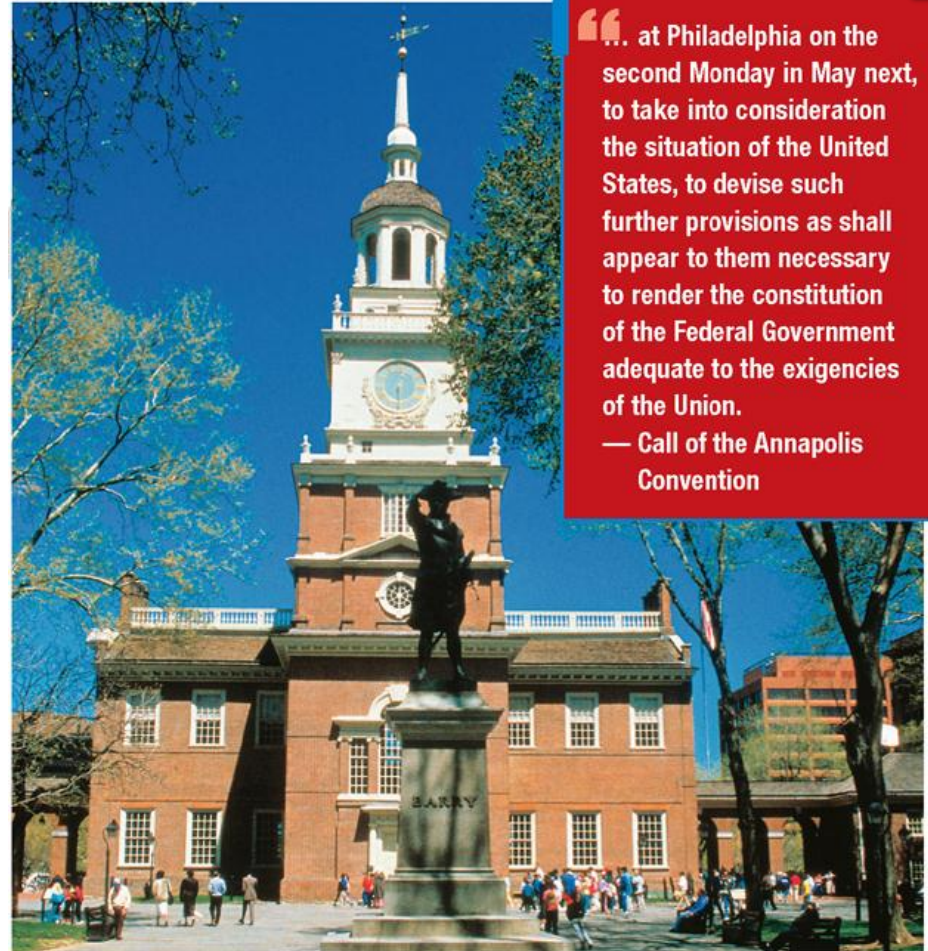
► Stronger Government, cont.

- Delegates first met at Alexandria. They met again at Annapolis. The First and Second Continental Congresses met at Philadelphia.



► Constitutional Convention

- The Philadelphia meeting, held in 1787 to revise the Articles of Confederation, turned into the Constitutional Convention. Instead of revising the Articles, it would replace them with something new.
 - What significance might this building have had for the Constitutional Convention?



“... at Philadelphia on the second Monday in May next, to take into consideration the situation of the United States, to devise such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union.
— Call of the Annapolis Convention

► Review

- Now that you have learned about the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation that made a lasting government impossible, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question
 - How does the Constitution reflect the times in which it was written?