

Timeline of Events

September-October 1774: First Continental Congress in Philadelphia

April 1775: Lexington and Concord

May 1775: Second Continental Congress begins meeting in Philadelphia and served as the first government of the United States for five years, from the formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 until the Articles of Confederation went into effect in 1781.

July 4, 1776: Congress adopted the revised Declaration of Independence

1776 to 1777: Colonies write and adopt new state constitutions

November 15, 1777: Articles of Confederation approved by Congress, but not ratified until March 1, 1781.

October 1781: Revolutionary War comes to an end

September 1783: Treaty of Paris signed

March 1785: Maryland and Virginia meet to discuss trade disputes

September 1786: Five of the thirteen states meet in Annapolis, Maryland

May-September 1787: Constitutional Convention meets in Philadelphia

Constitutional Convention

Virginia Plan: Congress would become bicameral, representation would be based on each state's population, and national government's powers would be significantly increased. The Congress would choose the executive and judiciary.

New Jersey Plan: Congress would remain unicameral, representation would be equal for each state, and national government's powers would be minimally increased. The Congress would choose a plural executive and judiciary.

Connecticut Compromise: Bicameral legislature with equal representation in Senate and proportional representation in House of Representatives.

Three-Fifths Compromise: Northern states agreed to add 3/5 of the slave population to a state's total population for purposes of representation (southern slave states wanted to maximize their representation in the House).

Slave Trade Compromise: Northern states agreed to forbid Congress from making any law in regards to the slave trade for twenty years (southern slave states fear that the national government will interfere with slavery).

Commerce Compromise: Northern states agreed to forbid Congress from taxing the exports of states (southern agricultural states fear that cotton will be taxed).

September 17, 1787: Convention approves the final draft of the U.S. Constitution

Ratification by the states involved a public debate between the Federalists who supported the new constitution and the Anti-Federalists who opposed it.

The Anti-Federalists wanted a federal Bill of Rights that would explicitly limit the powers of the federal government in order to preserve state power.

Fall 1787 to spring 1788: The *Federalist Essays* written by “Publius” appear in New York newspapers supporting ratification of the new constitution and addressing Anti-Federalist concerns, while the Anti-Federalists’ views are promoted by “Brutus” and “The Federal Farmer.”

September 13, 1788: Eleven of the thirteen states, including Virginia and New York, have ratified the new constitution. New York City is chosen as the capital and the first presidential election is February 1789.

March 4, 1789: First Congress convenes on Wall Street in New York City.

April 30, 1789: George Washington inaugurated as the first President of the United States in New York City.

Constitutional Principles

Popular sovereignty: The U.S. Constitution, with the consent of the people, is the source of both the national and state governments’ powers.

Limited government: The national and state governments’ can only do what the people have empowered the government to do.

Separation of powers: The legislative, executive, and judicial powers are distributed among three distinct and independent branches of government.

Checks and balances: Each of the three independent branches is subject to restraints by the others or requires the cooperation of the others when exercising its own power.

Judicial Review: The power of the court to determine the constitutionality of a governmental action. Judicial review is necessary at the federal level because the national government is one of limited powers.

Federalism: The division of governmental power between different levels of government. In the United States, the national government does NOT receive its authority from the states, and the states do NOT receive their authority from the national government. Both the national government and state governments receive their authority from the U.S. Constitution and the people. The national government was limited in its power in order to protect the power of the states. Most provisions in the U.S. Constitution that seem to pertain to individual rights are actually federalism provisions designed to protect state power.