

**BUILDING BACKGROUND.** It did not take long for people to realize that the Articles of Confederation had many weaknesses. By the mid-1780s most political leaders agreed that changes were needed. To make those changes, they called on people with experience in government.

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| <p><b>Constitutional Convention.</b> In February 1787 the Confederation Congress invited each state to send delegates to a convention in Philadelphia. The goal of the meeting was to improve the Articles of Confederation.</p> <p>The Constitutional Convention was held in May 1787 in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall to improve the Articles of Confederation. However, delegates would leave with an entirely new U.S. Constitution. This decision angered some of the participants. Most delegates were well educated, and many had served in state legislatures or Congress. Benjamin Franklin and James Madison were there. Revolutionary War hero George Washington was elected president of the Convention.</p> <p>Several important voices were absent. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson could not attend. Patrick Henry chose not to attend because he did not want a stronger central government. Women, African Americans, and Native Americans did not take part because they did not yet have the rights of citizens.</p> |  |
| <p><b>Great Compromise.</b> Several issues divided the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. Some members wanted only small changes to the Articles of Confederation, while others wanted to rewrite the Articles completely.</p> <p>Those delegates who wanted major changes to the Articles had different goals. For example, small and large states had different ideas about representation, economic concerns such as tariffs, and slavery. In addition, delegates disagreed over how strong to make the national government.</p>   |  |
| <p><b>Virginia Plan.</b> After the delegates had met for four days, Edmund Randolph of Virginia presented the Virginia Plan. He proposed a new federal constitution that would give sovereignty, or supreme power, to the central government. The legislature would be bicameral—made up of two houses, or groups of representatives—and chosen on the basis of state populations.</p> <p>Larger states would thus have more representatives than would smaller states. Delegates from the smaller states believed that it would give too much power to the larger states.</p>   |  |

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| <p><b>New Jersey Plan.</b> The smaller states came up with a plan to stop the larger states from getting too much power. New Jersey delegate William Paterson presented the small-state or New Jersey Plan, which called for a unicameral, or one-house, legislature. The plan gave each state an equal number of votes, thus an equal voice, in the federal government. The plan gave the federal government the power to tax citizens in all states, and it allowed the government to regulate commerce.</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Compromise is Reached.</b> After a month of debate; the delegates were unable to agree on how states should be represented. The convention reached a deadlock.</p> <p>Finally, Roger Sherman of Connecticut proposed a compromise plan. The legislative branch would have two houses. The Impact Today Each state, regardless of its size, would have two representatives in the Senate, or upper house. This would give each state an equal voice, pleasing the smaller states. In the House of Representatives, or lower house, the number of representatives for each state would be determined by the state's population. This pleased the larger states. The agreement to create a two-house legislature became known as the Great Compromise. James Wilson, a great speaker, saw his dream of a strong national government come true.</p>   |  |
| <p><b>Three-Fifths Compromise.</b> The debate over representation also involved regional differences. Southern delegates wanted enslaved Africans to be counted as part of their state populations. This way they would have more representatives, and more power, in Congress. Northerners disagreed. They wanted the number of slaves to determine taxes but not representation.</p> <p>To resolve this problem, some delegates thought of a compromise. They wanted to count three-fifths of the slaves in each state as part of that state's population to decide how many representatives a state would have. After much debate, the delegates voted to accept the proposal, called the Three-Fifths Compromise. Under this agreement only three-fifths of a state's slave population would count when determining representation.</p> <p>Another major issue was the foreign slave trade. Some of the delegates believed slavery was wrong and wanted the federal government to ban the slave trade. Others said that the southern states' economies needed the slave trade. Many southern delegates said they would leave the Union if the Constitution immediately ended the slave trade. Also at issue was Congress's ability to tax imports and exports.</p> <p>Worried delegates reached another compromise. The Commerce Compromises allowed Congress to levy tariffs on imports, but not exports, and allowed the importation of slaves until the end of 1807. The delegates omitted, or left out, the words slavery and slave in the Constitution. They referred instead to "free Persons" and "all other Persons."</p> |  |