

The History of the U.S. Government



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Colonial American Government



- ❧ Great Britain began colonizing North America in 1607
- ❧ Eventually, Great Britain controlled 13 colonies in the “New World”.
- ❧ Each colony was run by a governor, who was responsible to the British government
- ❧ In some colonies, people were able to vote for their governors, but this was not the case in all
- ❧ Many colonists became fed up with being under the rule of the British government, especially after they began imposing taxes to repay their debt from the French and Indian War.

Thomas Paine



- ❧ In January 1776, Thomas Paine, a journalist from Philadelphia, wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*
- ❧ In it, he urged the colonists to separate from Great Britain and their government
- ❧ Paine followed up with a series of pamphlets which had a great deal of influence on the Second Continental Congress, which began meeting in Philadelphia in May 1776.

Second Continental Congress

- ❧ One of the most important government meetings in the history of the country
- ❧ Began meeting after the battles of Lexington and Concord at the start of the American Revolution
- ❧ At the meetings, they decided to formally break away from Great Britain
- ❧ Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence while at the Congress
- ❧ Other decisions, including deciding to print paper money and electing George Washington Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, were made at the meetings.

The Articles of Confederation



- ❧ The Second Continental Congress was also responsible for deciding how the new United States government would be structured
- ❧ They created the Articles of Confederation, the first written plan for the government of the U.S., which were ratified in 1777
- ❧ In the Articles, the Congress intentionally created a weak national government so they would be different from the British government, which they all hated

Weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation



- ❧ The new U.S. federal government consisted of a unicameral (one house) legislature in which each state had only one vote
- ❧ There was no chief executive (president or governor)
- ❧ There was no national court system
- ❧ The federal government, because it did not have much power over the states, could not control trade between the states or regulate their currency (money)
- ❧ As a result of all of this turmoil, foreign countries had little respect for the new U.S.

George Washington



- Washington, who had retired to his farm (Mt. Vernon) after the end of the Revolutionary War, was concerned that the weak government would cause the new country to fail
- He joined a movement that was intent on reorganizing the structure of the government
- A meeting was organized in Philadelphia in 1787 to discuss the problems with the Articles of Confederation

The Constitutional Convention



- ❧ Washington presided over this meeting, which was held to revise the Articles of Confederation
- ❧ The document that was drawn up would fix the weaknesses in the Articles and become the new embodiment of the U.S. government
- ❧ When the meetings concluded, the document was signed in September 1787 and sent to the states for ratification
- ❧ Nine states were required to ratify before the document could take effect
- ❧ New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify in June 1788
- ❧ This document, the Constitution of the United States of America went into effect in March 1789

Questions



1. When did Great Britain begin colonizing the New World?
2. Who was Thomas Paine & what did he do?
3. Why did colonists become fed up with Great Britain?
4. Why was the 2nd Continental Congress one of the most important meetings in U.S. history?
5. After what event did the 2nd Continental Congress call a meeting?
6. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
7. Who was elected commander-in-chief of the Continental Army?
8. What was the 2nd Continental Congress responsible for?
9. What were the Articles of Confederation?
10. What were the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation?

More Questions...



11. Why was Washington concerned about the weak federal government?
12. What was the purpose of the Constitutional Convention?
13. What new document was drawn up at the meeting in 1787?
14. How many states were required to ratify the Constitution?
15. When did the Constitution go into effect?