

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

Introduction



Demi Tracy: We are all familiar with the U.S. Constitution. This was not the first attempt at an American government, however. During the Second Continental Congress in 1776, a plan for national government was drafted, known as The Articles of Confederation. This plan organized America as a confederacy, with each state operating as an independent entity. Under this plan, the national government was weak and inefficient. We have Rick Henri in the studio with another edition of *The Impact*.

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

The Impact Introduction



Rick Henri: Welcome to *The Impact*. You are correct, Demi: the Articles of Confederation was, for all intents and purposes, a failure. The Founding Fathers realized this and gathered in Philadelphia at the Confederation Congress in May 1787, in order to revise the Articles of Confederation.


George Washington served as the president of the Convention, and another Virginian, James Madison, took the initiative to profess the need for a new plan for government. Madison wrote extensive notes during the four months that Congress was in session. His account is the best record of the Convention, during which two main plans for government emerged: the New Jersey Plan and the Virginia Plan.

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

The Virginia Plan

The Virginia Plan



- Drafted by James Madison
- Presented to the convention by Virginia delegate, Edmund Randolph
- Separated government into three branches
- Created a system of check and balances
- Established a strong national government
- Government could create laws, levy taxes, and regulate interstate commerce
- National government superseded state laws
- Bicameral legislature with representation based on the population of a state
- People elected the lower house
- Lower house elected the upper house


James Madison

Rick Henri: James Madison drafted Virginia's plan for government. The Virginia delegate, Edmund Randolph, officially presented it to the Convention. The Virginia Plan suggested a federal government consisting of three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. Each branch would have the power to check the other branches. The Virginia Plan established a strong national government with the power to create laws, levy taxes, and regulate interstate commerce. The national government would also have the power to supersede state laws. The Virginia Plan also established a bicameral legislature, consisting of two houses. The number of members in each house would depend on the population of each state; this meant that states with larger populations would have more representation in Congress. The people would elect members of the lower house of Congress, and the lower house would elect members of the upper house.

Module 2: The Constitution
Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise


The New Jersey Plan

The New Jersey Plan



William Patterson

- Presented by William Patterson
- Proposed a strong national government
- Divided national government into three separate branches
- Established a unicameral legislature
- Smaller states worried about representation under the Virginia Plan
- Each state received one vote
- Representation not based on population
- Equal representation for each state

Next 

Rick Henri: The New Jersey Plan also proposed a strong national government, divided into three branches. However, the remainder of the plan closely resembled the Articles of Confederation. The New Jersey Plan called for a unicameral legislature consisting of one house. Smaller states worried that the Virginia Plan allotted larger states too much power in government, since states with larger populations would always outweigh those with a smaller population. In the New Jersey Plan, each state received one vote in the legislature. With this policy, representation in Congress would not depend on the population of the state. Each state would have equal representation.

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

The Great Compromise

The Great Compromise



Roger Sherman

- Proposed by Roger Sherman of Connecticut
- Included elements from the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan
- Established a bicameral legislature
- Lower house elected by the people
- Lower house representation depended on state population
- Upper house comprised of two representatives from each state
- Upper house representation equal among all states

Rick Henri: The Convention did not accept the Virginia Plan or the New Jersey Plan. After several weeks of deadlock, Roger Sherman of Connecticut proposed the Great Compromise. The Great Compromise suggested a plan for government that included elements of both the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan. The Great Compromise accepted the bicameral legislature proposed by the Virginia Plan. The people would elect members of the lower house of Congress, known as the House of Representatives. The number of representatives would depend on the population of each state. This satisfied the delegates from the larger states. The upper house of Congress, known as the Senate, would be made up of two representatives from each state. This pleased delegates from smaller states, since membership in the Senate did not depend on the population of the state, allowing states equal representation in the Senate.

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

Other Compromises


Other Compromises

Three-Fifths Compromise

- The issue of slavery arose during the convention.
- There was debate over whether slaves should be counted toward the population of a state.
- Some delegates feared that southern states would have more power if slaves were counted toward the population.
- This compromise stated that for every five slaves, three would be counted toward the state population.

Presidential Election

- Some delegates wanted the people to elect the president.
- Other delegates wanted state or national legislatures to elect the president.
- It was decided each state would have a number of electors equal to its number of representatives in both houses of Congress.
- The electors then vote for who shall be President.



Rick Henri: There were two other significant compromises worth mentioning. The first is the Three-Fifths Compromise. The issue of slavery arose during the Convention. The morality of slavery, whether the practice should continue in America, was not addressed. Rather, the issue was whether slaves should be counted toward the population of a state. There was a fear that southern states, where slavery was the most prevalent, would have larger populations and therefore more power than states without a dependence on slave labor. The Three-Fifths Compromise resolved the issue by stating for every five slaves only three would be counted toward the state population.

There was also debate about how to approach the presidential election. Some delegates wanted the president to be elected by the people. Other representatives wanted the state or national legislatures to elect the president. Another compromise was reached whereby each state would have a number of electors equal to its number of representatives in both houses of Congress. The electors would elect the president.

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

The Impact Conclusion



Rick Henri: Even with these compromises, the delegates could not completely agree on all of the aspects of the Constitution. A few of the delegates refused to sign the Constitution, including Virginia's George Mason and Edmund Randolph and Massachusetts' Elbridge Gerry. In September 1787, the Constitutional Convention adjourned, and a draft of the Constitution now needed to be approved by the American people.

Module 2: The Constitution
Topic 3 Content: The Great Compromise

Ending of Episode



Glover Mint: Thank you Rick. That helps illustrate how compromise is an important concept when it comes to forming and maintaining a democracy. We'll see you next time!