

The U.S. Under The Articles of Confederation



I. New Social Fabrics

A. Pro-democracy efforts gained.

1. Expulsion of 80,000 Loyalists robbed the nation of leadership and a conservative balance to revolutionaries.

2. Entail and primogeniture repealed, weakening aristocracy.

3. Slavery weakened

- a) Forbidden in many new state constitutions

- b) Some northern states abolished slavery or provided for phased emancipation

B. Religious Change

1. Church of England ruined, replaced by Episcopal Church, separate from England.

2. Democratic spirit encouraged spread of frontier faiths (Methodism, Baptists).

3. Strong statement of separation of church and state written by Jefferson in Virginia in 1786.

II. Economic Stresses

A. Because economic democracy preceded political democracy, little retributive violence occurred following the war. Some Loyalist land was broken up into parcels for farming.

B. Postwar economic problems resulted from severing ties with Britain

- 1) Commerce with Britain almost completely halted
- 2) Speculation and profiteering during the war had led to inflation with Congress unable to control its effects
- 3) New class of profiteers emerged
- 4) Economic causes of war had led to distaste for taxes, further weakening Congress' ability to take action.

III. Articles of Confederation

A. Created by the 2nd Continental Congress in 1777, but not approved by the states until 1781.

B. Congress was the dominant force (no executive or federal courts), but it was hobbled by rules:

1. All bills required 2/3 vote for passage
2. Any amendment to the Articles required a unanimous vote
3. Each state had 1 vote.
4. No power to regulate commerce
5. No tax enforcement power (states paid taxes voluntarily).

C. Land Ordinance of 1785

1. Northwest territory land sold to pay off debt.
2. Land divided into townships six miles square (then into 36 sections of one square mile each).
3. One section reserved for a public school.

D. Northwest Ordinance of 1787

1. Territories established, which could eventually become states on an equal basis with the original 13. Needed a minimum of 60,000 inhabitants.

2. Slavery forbidden in Northwest.

IV. Foreign and Domestic Problems

A. The U.S. had difficulty commanding respect from allies or enemies

1. Britain refused to send an ambassador, to make a commercial treaty, or repeal the Navigation Laws. Trading posts along Canadian border source of trouble with Indians.
2. Spain seized lands granted to the U.S. by Britain and harassed trade on the Mississippi River.
3. France demanded repayment of loans made during the Revolution and restricted trade with the West Indies.

B. Domestic disputes arose over economic and political weakness

1. Some states refused to pay any taxes, while interest on the public debt grew and the nation's credit dwindled.
2. States began levying duties on each other's products and quarreling over boundaries.
3. Shays' Rebellion (1786) broke out in western Massachusetts with frustrated farmers losing their farms due to mortgage foreclosures and tax delinquencies.
 - a) Massachusetts authority put down the uprising with force (killing three)
 - b) Leaders throughout the nation worried about the potential of domestic unrest.

V. The Call for Reform of the Articles

A. Annapolis Convention, called to deal with interstate commerce squabbling, instead requested a convention to meet in Philadelphia to deal with reforming the Articles.

B. 55 representatives from 12 states (Rhode Island boycotted) assembled in Philadelphia in May 1787 to "make a more perfect union."