

Origins of American Government

Lesson 3 *The Articles of Confederation*

I. Government Under the Articles of Confederation

- A. Some delegates believed the national government needed to be strong. Others wanted the local and state governments to be stronger than the national government.
- B. Under the Articles of Confederation, the states retained significant independence and there was no strong central government.
- C. Each state had one vote in Congress, no matter what its population.

II. Problems in the Confederation Period

- A. All had significant debts, many to foreign governments, and the national government still owed pay to soldiers of the Revolutionary War.
- B. Students should list three issues. Sample answer: Three issues were differing currencies among the states, tariffs imposed on rival states, and the refusal by states to help fund the national government.
- C. Students should list three weaknesses from among these: The weak national government could not demand money from the states; it appeared weak in the eyes of foreign countries; the money it issued was considered worthless; it had difficulty settling disputes among the states because it lacked a national court system; states could easily block laws that Congress tried to pass; Congress could not enforce laws.
- D. The Land Ordinance of 1785 set out the process of surveying and dividing the Northwest Territory, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the process by which these areas would gain statehood.

III. Need for a Stronger National Government

- A. The farmers were faced with increased taxes, an economic depression, and bad harvests, and they could not pay their debts. They wanted to close the courts in order to stop foreclosure of their land.
- B. Many Americans were frightened and began to see the need for a strong national government.
- C. The purpose of the meeting was to revise the Articles of Confederation.

Summary and Reflection

The national government under the Articles of Confederation was weak in dealing with the states and weak internationally. The individual states competed with one another by issuing different currencies, imposing tariffs on rival states, and refusing to fund the national government. The widespread unrest that began with Shays's Rebellion frightened national leaders and moved them in favor of a strong national government that could protect lives and property.