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POLITICAL CRISIS OF 1780'S: How the Constitutional Convention Preserved the Union

There are several contributing factors that led to the creation of our sovereign nation today. The events leading up to the Revolutionary War and the lingering aftermath were crucial components in the development of the Constitution. The thirteen colonies were desperate for a solution to the internal collapse of their nation. It was evident that Congress had their work cut out in resolving the battle between power and liberty.

The 1780's was a critical period in United States History. The American Revolutionary War was an unofficial victory for the colonies. In 1783 the Treaty of Paris was signed which outlined boundaries and gave the colonies independence from Great Britain. It is important to note that over the next thirty years tensions would rise between United States and Britain which would start the War of 1812. United State's independence was not fully respected until the conclusion of this war after the Treaty of Ghent was signed in 1814. The United States independence from Britain was a turning point in American political development.

Directly following the Revolutionary War there was raised awareness regarding domestic and international issues. Economic and foreign policy problems were a priority as well as entitlement to land. Trade and agricultural affairs were hugely impacted. Nationwide war debt fueled rapid inflation. There was opposition in many states and diverse views across the region. There was too much distance between the states, too much regional diversity and very poor communication. It was a recipe for disaster, the

national turmoil put the government at risk for ultimate failure. The Economic Crisis of 1780's was a motivating factor in finding resolution for the collapse of the government.

During the American Revolutionary War, the nation was failing under The Articles of Confederation. When the Continental Congress initially adopted The Articles of Confederation in 1777 (officially ratified by all thirteen states in 1781) their main vision was to provide defense against political tyranny. Being the first constitution of the United States, it was very underdeveloped. Congress was not prepared to resolve the issues that arose due to the aftermath of the war, including economic hardship and internal collapse of the states. The thought of creating a weak central government was ideal but unfortunately it had given too much power to the individual states, resulting in poor outcomes. The Articles of Confederation slowly led to the dismantling of law, noncompliance by states, and essentially a stalemate government. On a positive note, the Articles of Confederation paved the way for the creation of a federal republic that would be well equipped to face the future challenges set forth by the nation both domestically and internationally.

An influential event in early American history, known as Shay's Rebellion, also got recognition for sparking George Washington's interest in attending the Constitutional Convention. Many army men who were involved in the Revolutionary War became farmers after the fact. They were not properly compensated for their active duty in the war and as a result were unable to manage their business let alone afford high taxes set forth by state legislatures. Eventually Boston authorities began to arrest farmers and foreclose on their farms. This sparked an uprising in western Massachusetts.

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Daniel Shay was a farmer and prior military man who was enraged by the trials. He led an army of several hundred men to Springfield, Massachusetts where he attempted to overtake the courts. They were confronted by militia who defeated their rebellion. This event was enough to persuade the public of the need for a more conservative national government. It makes sense that the nationalists took advantage of the rebellion and used it as a tool to heighten awareness among states.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were heavily involved in political leadership and were eager to address the need for a stronger, more organized central government. The end goal was to unite the thirteen colonies under one government. The disgruntled nation's failure to thrive eventually led to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. This was a four-month process that took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and consisted of 55 delegates chosen by the people. Key players involved in the convention were mostly nationalists and included George Washington as the presiding officer (VA), James Madison (VA), George Mason (VA), Roger Sherman (CT), William Paterson (NJ), and James Wilson (PA). Issues that were addressed included representation in Congress, slavery, weak central government, Articles of Confederation, and the development of new government branches. The significance of the political crisis was acknowledged. These political figures were well on their way to developing a cure all for the nation. They needed to rejuvenate the power of democracy to promote national confidence and resolve the economic crisis. The end goal was to preserve the Union and continue to grow as an independent sovereign nation under a consolidated empire.

The Virginia delegates, including James Madison, were vital contributors to the layout of governmental branches. During the Constitutional Convention they devised the Virginia Plan. This plan consisted of three separate branches: The Legislative Branch, Judicial Branch and the Executive Branch. After some debate back and forth, the delegates sorted out the details and reached a conclusion. They placed emphasis on having a bicameral legislative branch, consisting of two senators and at least one house of representatives (based on state population). Each state would be entitled to a specific number of votes based on population. This allowed larger states to have more than one vote. It underwent several revisions before being finalized. Disagreements among small and large states led to the Connecticut Compromise, also known as the Great Compromise). Formulated by Roger Sherman, it was decided that there would be a House of Representatives apportioned by population and a Senate in which each state is equally represented. The executive President would be chosen by the legislative branch. Aside from these provisions, the concept of checks and balances was proposed to allow the executive and judiciary branch power to review and veto laws. Laws were subjected to overriding if there was 2/3 legislative majority.

The delegates at the Constitutional Convention had their work cut out. Another topic causing major debate was slavery in the south. Slaves made up a large percentage of the population in these states. A solution called the 3/5 Compromise was devised which said that the number of representatives would be based on each state's total white population plus 3/5 of its slave population. This generally resulted in one republican delegated per forty

thousand people. For purposes of representation, free blacks were counted the same as free whites. At the time slavery was heavily controversial. The topic on banning the slave trade was significant at this time but was not fully addressed until 1808. Congress eventually obtained the right to terminate the importing of new slaves. The north wanted to completely abolish slavery, but the south opposed due to their heavy dependence on slavery to thrive economically. The use of slave labor promoted agricultural outcomes and the abolishment of it would impose financial devastation and failure. The south bargained with Congress, if their right to utilize slaves was depleted, they demanded to be exempt from taxation on exports.

At the Constitutional Convention, George Mason (a Virginia delegate) had spent a great deal of time advocating for A Bill of Rights. Although he was very passionate about implementing and passing amendments that reduced the superiority of government and promoted individual sovereignty, he wasn't very convincing. The Federalists, specifically James Madison, began to recognize the popular demand for a Bill of Rights, which would help restrict national authority over its states. It wasn't until 1789-1791 that The Bill of Rights was drafted by James Madison. He later became known as the Father of the Constitution because of his crucial role in drafting and ratifying the document. The completion of the First 10 Amendments eventually led to nine states ratifying the Constitution by 1788. It was then in 1789 that George Washington was elected as the very first President of the United States.

Before, during, and after the American Revolutionary War profound arguments arose regarding Constitutionalism. In a sense, the war was a constitutional event that resulted in the modification of, and limitation on, <https://assignbuster.com/political-crisis-of-1780s-how-the-constitutional-convention-preserved-the-union/>

Legislative authority. The Articles of Confederation failed miserably between the years 1781 and 1787. The Revolutionary generation's strong desire to escape economic crisis and achieve prosperity was a major political weapon for the nationalists. Following the temporary conclusion of international affairs, it was motivation to restore the national chaos and instill sovereignty. The finalized Constitution encompassed several key principles. A consistent and arguably beneficial theme of the document focused on Federalism, limiting government, separation of powers, and popular sovereignty. As a result, power was divided between national government and the states. Through the elected representatives, states were able to govern themselves. They exercised self-management of laws, tax regulation, foreign policy and trading and commerce.

Over the decades, the Constitution has proven to be versatile and has been interpreted in a vast variety of ways. It is important to remember that without the implementation of this document the battle between power and liberty would never have been resolved. It is the fundamental backbone of legislature and is superior to all operations of government.

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