

"Loyalty... is a realization that America was born of revolt, flourished in dissent, became great through experimentation."

Henry Steele Commager
"Freedom, Loyalty, and Dissent"

"WE WERE THERE..."



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INTRODUCTION

The Federal Convention convened in the State House (Independence Hall) in Philadelphia on May 14, 1787, to revise the Articles of Confederation. Because the delegations from only two states were at first present, the members adjourned from day to day until a quorum of seven states was obtained on May 25. Through discussion and debate it became clear by mid-June that, rather than amend the existing Articles, the Convention would draft an entirely new frame of government. All through the summer, in closed sessions, the delegates debated, and redrafted the articles of the new Constitution. Among the chief points at issue were how much power to allow the central government, how many representatives in Congress to allow each state, and how these representatives should be elected--directly by the people or by the state legislators. The work of many minds, the Constitution stands as a model of cooperative statesmanship and the art of compromise. ([From National Archives and Records Administration](#))

TASK

You find yourself in late 18th century United States and everything is just like you learned in your American History class, except that you have computers and the other many electronic technologies of today at your disposal. You will be a part of an effort to garner support and gain approval of a certain political policy. To be more specific, you are going to work towards getting your vision of a new federal government approved by the Constitutional Convention.

Each group (a "political action committee") consists of a prominent politician and his

public relations experts and consultants. Together your team wishes to convince other delegates to ratify the new constitution or to convince the population of the states to encourage their delegates to support ratification. Your public relations experts advise that the best way to win support for the proposed Constitution is to inform the delegates who do not presently support ratification, and the population in general.

LOBBYISTS

The three Political Action Committees (PACs), as well as other two political pressure groups, developed to lobby the Constitutional Convention are the following:

Virginia Plan PAC

New Jersey Plan PAC

Great Compromise PAC

Crispus Attucks Coalition

Dixiecrat Bloc

Your teacher will assign you to one of them.

PROCESS

First, you want to examine your group, look at the various individual roles therein, and then choose one. Next, you want to review the events of the summer of 1787 in Philadelphia, both [online](#), in your text, and in supporting lecture ("[Miracle at Philadelphia](#)"). Then you must complete the task of presenting your vision of the new federal Constitution to the delegates and general public as effectively, persuasively, and eloquently as possible. You must in your group complete the following:

- make a 30 second radio ad;
- 60 second television commercial;
- a webpage for your position;
- an official position paper and a brochure to be handed out at press conference;
- a speech to be delivered to reporters and TV cameras;
- a representative to attend a TV talk show;
- and a journalist to chronicle the events that have transpired.

(**NOTE:** Make sure as a group you are all on the same page in terms of logos, slogans, graphics, points of view, etc. You each have individual roles, but the group must deliver a coherent, unified presentation as to a particular point of view! This will not happen by itself. You must coordinate your actions!)

On a date assigned to the class by the teacher, you will have all your artifacts ready to present. Each group will then make a prepared statement, and then we will have a talk-show format Town Hall meeting where debate can take place. Each group's journalist will take copious notes during these presentations so as to be able to chronicle effectively the entire happening.

Throughout the whole project we will study the actual history of the Constitutional Convention, and then we will study [the debate over the ratification](#) of the document - as well as what [the Constitution actually says](#), and its crucial first ten amendments (the "[Bill of Rights](#)"). Finally, we will [discuss](#) and [draw conclusions](#) on the entire period of

American history.

Good luck!

RESOURCES

Here are some general sites to help you:

- [**Constitutional Convention Research**](#) (*do your research here!*)
 - [**A Roadmap to the U.S. Constitution**](#) (*A cool site!*)
 - [**Political.AdCritic.com**](#) (*great for examples of political ads!*)
 - [**American Political Parties**](#) (*look how the pros do it!*)
 - [**California 2002 Election Webpages**](#) (*what is going on NOW!*)
 - [**The Constitution of the United States \(National Archives and Records Administration\)**](#)
 - [**Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention**](#) from the American Memory Collection at the Library of Congress.
 - [**U.S. Constitution: Founding Fathers**](#) Biographies of the delegates sent by each state to sign the Constitution.
 - [**Constitution of the United States of America**](#)
 - [**The U.S. Constitution Online**](#)
 - [**Our Constitution**](#)
 - [**About the Constitution – US Library of Congress**](#)
 - [**US Founding Documents**](#)

 - [**"The Idea of the Constitution" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge**](#)
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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention strongly believed they were acting in the best interests of the United States when they ratified or worked against ratification of the United States Constitution. Looking back over more than the past 200 years:

1. Do you think it better to deliberate and debate polemical issues in secret? Or in public? Why?
 2. What flaws do you believe the Constitution contained as ratified? What were its strengths, in your opinion? How "democratic" a system of government does the U.S. Constitution enact? What items might the delegates have better addressed at the time? Why? How?
 3. Given recent technological inventions and our contemporary "global village," do you feel the U.S. Constitution stands the "test of time"? Could we improve upon it today? Should we?
 4. To what extent did individual delegates to the Constitutional Convention offer up proposals for a new framework of government out of idealism and principle vs. economic motives, personal enrichment, and political aggrandizement.
 5. Is the Constitution a betrayal of "the Spirit of '76"? Or is it a reasonable accommodation to power?
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ASSESSMENT

On the day of your PAC's presentation, you will need to arrive to class with a [group work rubric](#) and [individual effort rubric](#) filled out. **BE ADVISED!**

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CONSENSUS AND CONTENTION, AND THE "SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE"

The United States Constitution, still in effect over 200 years later, was ratified by the separate States and became law; but the Founding Fathers and their constituents never reached consensus on the issue: many key political elites and ordinary citizens, in fact, objected to the document and campaigned vociferously against it. The Constitution was ratified often by very slim margins in State ratifying conventions; not everybody agreed that it was the best way to go, by any means. Rather than atypical this is typical of American political behavior. A certain "tension" in our political culture - the struggle between **consensus** and **contention** in how we should govern ourselves - has always been and still is an integral, unavoidable part of American democracy.

This means Americans live amidst considerable turmoil and debate, a tension not often seen in less democratic societies that seem to operate more efficiently and smoothly. As Massachusetts Congressman Fisher Ames claimed in the House of Representatives back in 1795: *"A monarchy is a merchantman which sails well, but will sometimes strike on a rock, and go to the bottom; a republic is a raft which will never sink, but then your feet are always in the water."* So the hope is that the constant drive and need to reach some sort of **consensus** through **contention** gives a republic a durability not afforded to dictatorships and monarchies. But then one must constantly live amidst the sometimes wearisome and discordant din of democracy where one is never entirely comfortable (*"your feet always in the water"*). Everybody gets something they want; nobody gets everything they want - just like during the Constitutional Convention, a drive to reach **consensus** by means of **contention**.

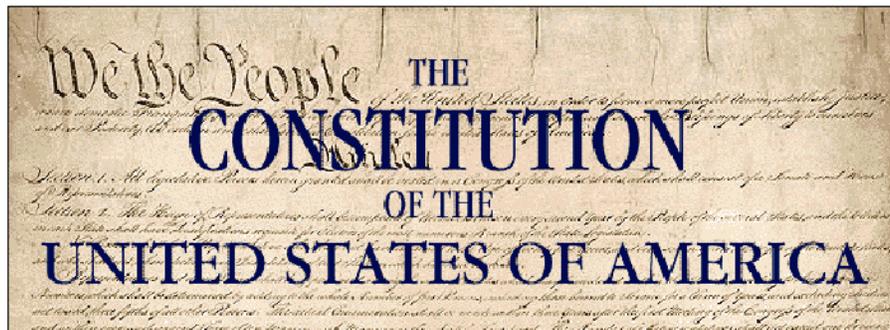
A perceptive student will see this **consensus-contention** dynamic at work constantly in this American history course. Throughout the history of the United States the contending political forces — Federalists and anti-Federalists, Whigs and Democrats, free-soilers and slaveholders, liberals and conservatives — have agreed on the principle of the "sovereignty of the people." They have quarreled over the best means for allowing the people, however defined, to express their will, and this has often translated into a quarrel over which level of government (local or national; state or federal) best encapsulates that will. Since there is no definite answer to that question, we must live with considerable tension and constantly re-evaluate our governmental power relationships at any given time, as circumstances evolve and needs and crises arise.

END RESULT: THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

From the Preamble of the United States of America ratified by the 13 colonies in 1789



"Although it had flaws and is still not perfect, our Constitution has allowed a system of government to flourish with freedom and opportunity unequalled anywhere in the world before or since. The United States has no need for walls or laws to keep people from moving elsewhere; and for over 200 years countless millions of people have come here from all parts of the globe, creating a society of pluralism and diversity resting on liberty.

"For being an American and enjoying the fruits of our Constitution - the liberty and opportunity that our system of self-government makes possible - is a lifelong adventure. It is a privilege that carries responsibilities we must all fulfill."

Warren E. Burger
"The Constitutions: Foundation of Our Freedom"

"True democracy means the ability to remove a government without

violence, to punish political failure or misjudgment by votes alone... The art of politics is the minimization of unhappiness, or of unavoidable suffering... The process of avoiding suffering is greatly assisted by the existence of free institutions. The greater their number, variety and intrinsic strength, and the greater their individual independence, the more effective the democracy which harbours them will be. All such institutions should be treated like fortresses: that is, soundly constructed and continually manned...

"Free institutions will only survive when there is the rule of law. This is an absolute on which there can be no compromise: the subjection of everyone and everything to the final arbitration of the law is more fundamental to human freedom and happiness than democracy itself... Once the law is humbled, all else that is valuable in a civilized society will vanish, usually with terrifying speed. On the other hand, provided the rule of law is maintained intact, the evil forces in society, however powerful, will be brought to book in the end - as witness the downfall of the Nixon administration."



Paul Johnson
"The Enemies of Society"

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"He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me. That ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man, and improvement of his condition, seems to have been peculiarly and benevolently designed by nature, when she made them, like fire, expansible over all space, without lessening their density at any point, and like the air in which we breathe, move, and have our physical being, incapable of confinement or exclusive appropriation."

-- Thomas Jefferson

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