**Now What? The Federalist Era Begins**

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| Topical Understanding: During the Federalist Era, the Founding Fathers developed a democratic republic to balance individual rights and responsibilities with the common good.  Guiding Question: How was the United States’ republican government created and structured to meet the needs of the people? |

**Directions:** Use the following information to fill in the “Now What? The Federalist Era Begins” worksheet.

When the American war for independence ended, no one was happier than a serious Virginia Patriot named James Madison. And no one was more worried about the future of the United States. While serving in Congress during the war, Madison had tried and failed to get the states to work easily together. He doubted that things would improve now that the war was over.

After declaring independence in 1776, Congress had tried to unite the states under one national (federal) government. This proved to be a difficult task. Most members of Congress were nervous about creating a strong central government. They feared that such a government would trample the very rights they were fighting to preserve. Their solution was a plan of government known as the **Articles of Confederation**. The Articles created “a firm league of friendship” in which “each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence.” This “league of friendship” was a loose union in which the 13 states cooperated for common purposes. It was run by Congress, in which each state had one vote.

On paper, the Articles of Confederation gave Congress several important powers. It could declare war, raise an army and a navy, print money, and set up a postal system. In reality, however, these powers were limited by the inability of Congress to impose taxes. Instead, Congress had to ask the states for funds to do anything. All too often, the states ignored Congress’s requests.  Under the Articles of Confederation, the new nation had serious money problems.  Congress had the power to make coins that would not lose their value. But it lacked gold or silver to mint into coins.

The states reacted to the money shortage by printing their own paper currency. Before long, bills of different sizes and colors were distributed from state to state. No one knew what any of these currencies was worth, but most agreed they were not worth much. The money shortage was particularly hard on farmers who could not earn enough to pay their debts and taxes. In Massachusetts, judges ordered farmers to sell their land and livestock to pay off their debts. Led by Daniel Shays, a hero of the Battle of Bunker Hill, Massachusetts farmers rebelled.

In 1786, Shays and his followers closed down courthouses to keep judges from taking their farms. Then they marched on the national arsenal at Springfield to seize the weapons stored there. Having disbanded the Continental army, Congress was unable to stop them.

The Massachusetts government ended Shays’s Rebellion in early 1787 by sending militia troops to Springfield to restore order. To many Americans, however, the uprising was a disturbing sign that the nation they had fought so hard to create was falling apart. “No respect is paid to the federal [national] authority,” James Madison wrote to a friend. “It is not possible that a government can last long under these circumstances.”

**Shays’s Rebellion** shocked Congress into calling for a convention to consider “the situation of the United States.” Each state was invited to send delegates to Philadelphia in May 1787 “for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.” Madison was ready. For the past year, he had devoted himself to the study of governments, both ancient and modern. The lesson of the past was always the same. A nation that was made up of many groups needed a strong central government, or it would soon be torn apart by quarrels. The question was, would Americans heed this lesson?

On May 25, 1787, the **Constitutional Convention** met for the first time in Philadelphia in the east room of the Pennsylvania State House (now known as Independence Hall). The Declaration of Independence had been debated in this very room just 11 years earlier. The delegates would meet in the east room all summer. The delegates’ first action was to elect George Washington president of the convention. No man was more admired and respected than the former commander in chief of the Continental army.

Fifty-five delegates from 12 states attended the Constitutional Convention. (Rhode Island, which prided itself as “the home of the otherwise minded” and feared a strong national government, boycotted the meeting.)

Most of the delegates brought extensive political experience to the meeting. More than two-thirds were lawyers. Most had served in their state legislatures or held a state office. Beyond that, these men had widely different ideas on how to fix the national government. Some wanted only to amend (or change) the Articles of Confederation, while others wanted to get rid of the document completely and start from scratch.

One thing many delegates did agree on was the need to have a government that was the combination of a **democracy** and a **republic**.

A **democracy** is a form of government, where a constitution guarantees basic personal and political rights, fair and free elections, and independent courts of law.

A **republic** is a form of government where the power lies in a body of citizens who are entitled to vote for officers and representatives responsible to them.

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