

American History Honors

Seminar: Constitution and Ratification

For our seminar, you should prepare by reviewing the two topics for our upcoming paper assignment due at the end of the month:

Option # 1

Analyze the various compromises reached at the Constitutional Convention and to secure ratification of the Constitution. To what extent was the spirit of compromise vital to the founding and success of this new government?

Option # 2

To what extent was the U.S. Constitution a radical departure from the Articles of Confederation?

Make a brief list of ideas and events that you would use for each of these topics. We will discuss both topics in our seminar discussion.

In addition, please read the following document excerpts that we will also reference in our discussion:

Document A – James Madison, *Notes on the Federal Convention (1787)*

Source: http://www.classzone.com/cz/books/americans05/resources/pdfs/psource/TAS03_5_142_PS.pdf

Wednesday August 22. in Convention

Art. VII sect 4. resumed. Mr. Sherman was for leaving the clause as it stands. He disapproved of the slave trade: yet as the States were now possessed of the right to import slaves, as the public good did not require it to be taken from them, & as it was expedient to have as few objections as possible to the proposed scheme of Government, he thought it best to leave the matter as we find it. He observed that the abolition of slavery seemed to be going on in the U.S. & that the good sense of the several States would probably by degrees compleat it. He urged on the Convention the necessity of despatch[ing its business.]

Col. Mason.—This infernal trafic originated in the avarice of British Merchants. The British Govt. constantly checked the attempts of Virginia to put a stop to it. The present question concerns not the importing States alone but the whole Union....Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of heaven on a Country. As nations can not be rewarded or punished in the next world they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes & effects providence punishes national sins, by national calamities. He lamented that some of our Eastern brethren had from a lust of gain embarked in this nefarious traffic. As to the States being in possession of the Right to import, this was the case with many other rights, now to be properly given up. He held it essential in every point of view, that the Genl. Govt. should have power to prevent the increase of slavery.

Mr. Pinkney.—If slavery be wrong, it is justified by the example of all the world. He cited the case of Greece Rome & other antient States; the sanction given by France England, Holland & other modern States. In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves. If the [Southern] States were let alone they will probably of themselves stop importations....An attempt to take away the right as proposed will produce serious objections to the Constitution which he wished to see adopted.

General Pinkney declared it to be his firm opinion that if himself & all his colleagues were to sign the Constitution & use their personal influence, it would be of no avail towards obtaining the assent of their Constituents. S. Carolina & Georgia cannot do without slaves....

What compromises were reached to resolve these debates?

Did they create problems for the future?

Document B – Anonymous, *The Federal Constitution is Wisely Formed* (1788)

Source: http://www.classzone.com/cz/books/americans05/resources/pdfs/psource/TAS03_5_146a_PS.pdf

Can you, my fellow countrymen, on a question of existence as a nation hesitate in your decision? whether to be united and powerful, each supporting the dignity of the other; or to be divided into petty States, each seeking and contending for its own local advantages; and like the bundle of twigs which separated, was easily destroyed by an old and infirm man. *Unite or die* has been a successful motto to this country; never was it more applicable than at this moment.

To have *energy*, we must *give power*; to *preserve liberty*, that *power* must have *sufficient checks*. As I am satisfied, (and no man is more jealous of his rights than myself,) that the Federal Constitution is wisely formed to give the one, without sacrificing the other; and that all ambitious and designing men must meet with their just reward for the *very attempt* to encroach on the *rights we have preserved*...

Union at home will give respectability abroad; this, with the inconvenience foreign powers must suffer from a proper regulation of commerce by Congress, will oblige them to enter into treaties, which will open ports on conditions of mutual advantage, and give vend to the produce of our soil; now the conditions are *their own*, or we are *totally excluded*.—Many are the reasons and powerful, why the Foederal Constitution should meet with the warm support of the *country*. An increased revenue, from a proper and universal regulation of trade, will render needless so large a *dry tax* as we have been subject to. Imposts on *foreign woolens* or *other* manufactories, will be advantageous to this country, either in the consumption of the *raw material*, or to the manufactories as such.—Confidence between individuals will be establish'd, money more easily obtained; and farms of course more generally improved. Lands will increase in value, as we increase in wealth and industry.—Good laws, and a steady government will invite property as well as people to us.—Having full confidence in the good sense of my fellow citizens;—no doubt remains in my mind but they will adopt a system so well calculated to secure our liberties as individuals, and establish our dignity as a nation

How was this new Constitution so different from the Articles of Confederation?

Document C – Publius (Hamilton or Madison), *Federalist 62* (1788)

I. The qualifications proposed for senators, as distinguished from those of representatives, consist in a more advanced age and a longer period of citizenship. A senator must be thirty years of age at least; as a representative must be twenty-five. And the former must have been a citizen nine years; as seven years are required for the latter. The propriety of these distinctions is explained by the nature of the senatorial trust, which, requiring greater extent of information and stability of character, requires at the same time that the senator should have reached a period of life most likely to supply these advantages; and which, participating immediately in transactions with foreign nations, ought to be exercised by none who are not thoroughly weaned from the prepossessions and habits incident to foreign birth and education. The term of nine years appears to be a prudent mediocrity between a total exclusion of adopted citizens, whose merits and talents may claim a share in the public confidence, and an indiscriminate and hasty admission of them, which might create a channel for foreign influence on the national councils.

How did the Great Compromise create features of the House and the Senate that would please both large and small states? (For example, what are features of the House of Representatives that would please large states? What are features of the Senate that would please smaller states?)