

The First National Government: The Articles of Confederation ^[1]

The Articles of Confederation served as the written document that established the functions of the national government of the United States after it declared independence from Great Britain. The [Albany Plan](#) ^[2], an earlier, pre-independence attempt at joining the colonies into a larger union, had failed in part because the individual colonies were concerned about losing power to another central institution. However, as the American Revolution gained momentum, many political leaders saw the advantages of a centralized government that could coordinate the Revolutionary War.

Some Continental Congress delegates had previously discussed plans for a more permanent union than the Continental Congress, whose status was temporary. Benjamin Franklin submitted his [Sketch of Articles of Confederation](#) ^[3] to the Continental Congress on July 21, 1775, a year prior to the colonies declaring their independence. While some delegates, such as Thomas Jefferson, supported Franklin's proposal, many others were strongly opposed.

On June 11, 1776, the Continental Congress resolved "that a committee be appointed to prepare and digest the form of a confederation to be entered into between these colonies." On July 12, 1776, the first draft of the Articles of Confederation was presented to the Continental Congress. Delegates finally formulated the Articles of Confederation, in which they agreed to state-by-state voting and proportional state tax burdens based on land values, though they left the issue of state claims to western lands unresolved. The Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation on November 15, 1777.

The Articles required [unanimous](#) ^[4] approval (ratification) from the states. On [July 9, 1778](#) ^[5], the following states signed the ratification of the Articles of Confederation: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina. Representatives from New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland indicated that they did not yet have the power to sign and ratify. The states of North Carolina and Georgia were not present. The states that did not ratify on July 9, 1778, signed their consent to ratification as follows:

[July 21, 1778](#) ^[6] - North Carolina
[July 24, 1778](#) ^[7] - Georgia
[November 26, 1778](#) ^[8] - New Jersey
[May 5, 1779](#) ^[9] - Delaware
[March 1, 1781](#) ^[10] - Maryland

References:

A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875 Journals of the Continental Congress, vol. 11 (p. 677, 709, 716), vol. 12 (p.1164), vol. 14 (p. 548), vol. 19 (p. 213).

"The Articles of Confederation," *Primary Documents in American History*, Library of Congress. <https://guides.loc.gov/articles-of-confederation> ^[11].

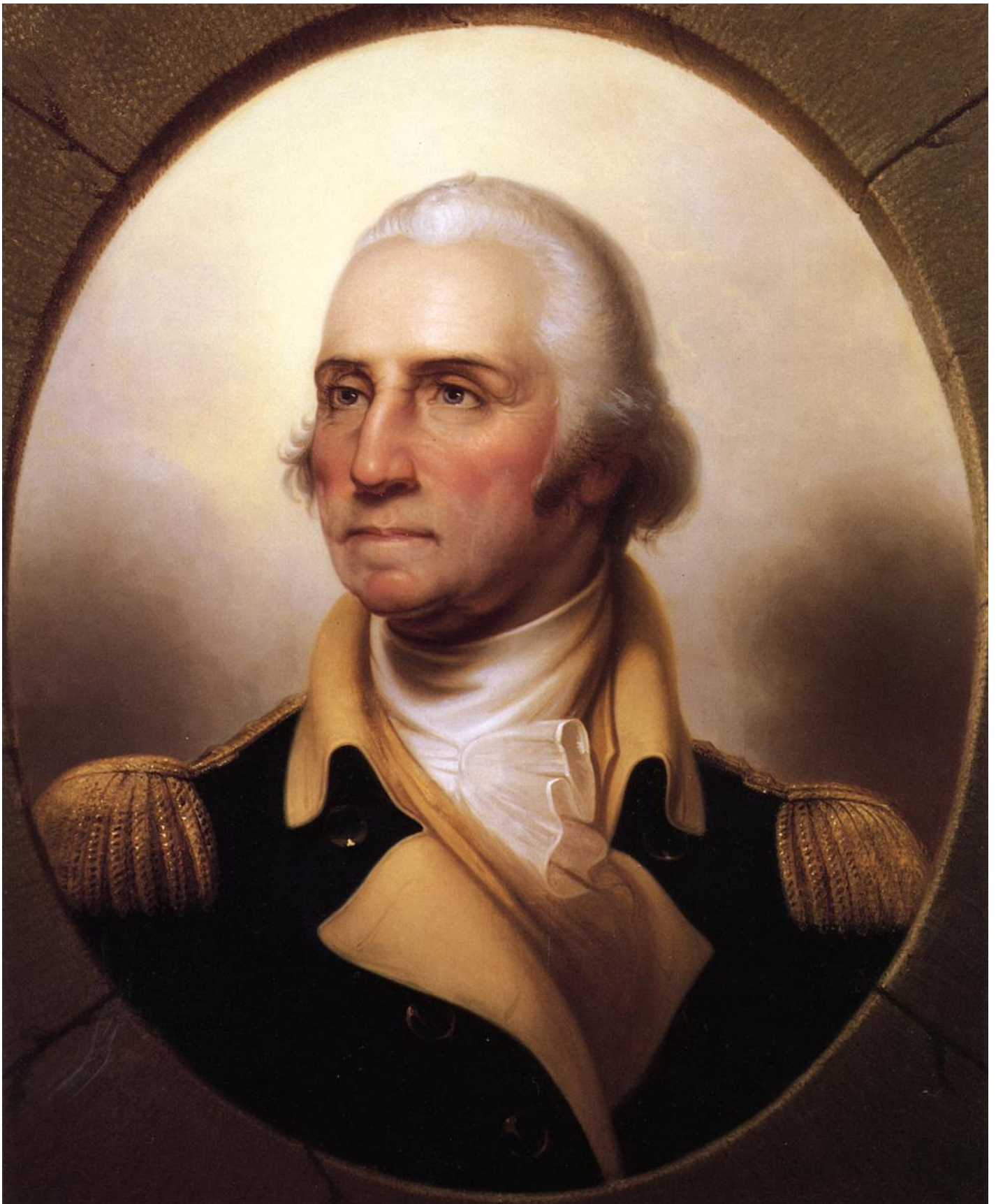
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People:



^[23]
George Washington, commander of the Continental Army, worried that the Continental Congress' inability to force states to contribute money and soldiers would make it difficult to fund war efforts during the American Revolution

For Teachers:

- [Important milestones related to the Articles of Confederation](#)^[11]
- [Policies and Problems of the Confederation Government](#)^[24]

Primary Sources:

To all to whom

these Presents shall come, we the undersigned Delegates of the United States of America in Congress assembled, do hereby certify that on the 17th day of September, in the first year of the Independence of America, and on the second year of the Independence of America, we agreed to certain articles of Confederation and perpetual Union between the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia: in the Words following, viz. *Article of Confederation and perpetual Union between the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.*

Article I. The Name of this confederacy shall be The United States of America.

Article II. Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every Power, Jurisdiction and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled.

Article III. The said states hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defence, the security of their Liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding themselves to assist each other, against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, or any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any other pretence whatever.

Article IV. We enter to secure and perpetuate mutual friendship and intercourse among the people of the different states in this union, the free inhabitants of each of these states, paupers, vagabonds and fugitives from justice excepted, shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several states; and the people of each state shall have free ingress and egress to and from any other state, and shall enjoy therein all the privileges of trade and commerce, subject to the same duties, impositions and restrictions as the inhabitants thereof respectively, provided that such restriction shall not extend so far as to prevent the removal of property imported into any state, to any other state of which the Owner is an inhabitant; provided also that no imposition, duties or restrictions shall be laid by any state, on the property of the united states or either of them.

If any Person guilty of, or charged with treason, felony, or other high misdemeanor in any state, shall flee from Justice, and be found in any of the united states, he shall, upon demand of the Governor or executive power, of the state from which he fled, be delivered up and removed to the state having jurisdiction of his offence.

Full faith and credit shall be given in each of these states to the records, acts and judicial proceedings of the courts and magistrates of every other state.

Article V. For the more convenient management of the general

[25]

- The Articles of Confederation opened with the words "To all to whom these Presents shall come," not nearly as inspiring or as memorable as the "We the People" of the Constitution that replaced them.

Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/anchor/first-national-government> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/toward-union-colonies> [3] <https://www.archives.gov/philadelphia/exhibits/franklin/articles.html> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/glossary/unanimous> [5] <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=011/lljc011.db&recNum=263> [6] <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=011/lljc011.db&recNum=295> [7] <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=012/lljc012.db&recNum=305> [8] <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=014/lljc014.db&recNum=49> [9] <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=019/lljc019.db&recNum=224> [10] <https://guides.loc.gov/articles-of-confederation> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/american> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/articles> [13] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/government> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/history> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/north-carolina-6> [16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/page> [17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/students> [18] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/teachers> [19] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/united-states> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/public-domain> [21] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/anchor-north> [22] <https://ncpedia.org/media/portrait-george-washington> [23] <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/new-nation-1783-1815/policies-and-problems-of-the-confederation-government/> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/media/articles-confederation-page-1> [25] <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation> [26]