

Note Cards

201. Newburgh Conspiracy

The officers of the Continental Army had long gone without pay, and they met in Newburgh, New York to address Congress about their pay. Unfortunately, the American government had little money after the Revolutionary War. They also considered staging a coup and seizing control of the new government, but the plotting ceased when George Washington refused to support the plan.

202. Articles of Confederation: powers, weaknesses, successes

The Articles of Confederation delegated most of the powers (the power to tax, to regulate trade, and to draft troops) to the individual states, but left the federal government power over war, foreign policy, and issuing money. The Articles' weakness was that they gave the federal government so little power that it couldn't keep the country united. The Articles' only major success was that they settled western land claims with the Northwest Ordinance. The Articles were abandoned for the Constitution.

203. Constitution

The document which established the present federal government of the United States and outlined its powers. It can be changed through amendments.

204. Constitution: Preamble

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, 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."

205. Constitution: Legislature

One of the three branches of government, the legislature makes laws. There are two parts to the legislature: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

206. Constitution: Logrolling

This refers to the practice of representatives or senators exchanging votes for each others' pet bills.

207. Constitution: Riders

Separate, unrelated clauses added to a bill in the legislature, either in order to ensure that the bill passes or to ensure that it fails.

208. Constitution: Quorum

The minimum number of members of Congress who must be present in order to hold a session. In Congress, this number is more than half of the members.

209. Constitution: Seniority

Part of the committee system. A member of Congress in a committee moves up in rank in that committee as long as he is reelected.

210. Constitution: Committee system

After a bill is introduced in Congress, it is assigned to a small group of legislators for review and consideration, and the committee must vote to approve the bill before it is returned to the Senate or the House for a vote.

211. Constitution: Majority leader

The person elected, by the majority party of Congress, to be leader of the majority party in Congress.

212. Constitution: Majority whip

The person who tells members of the majority party in Congress how they should vote.

213. Constitution: Minority leader

The person elected, by the minority party of Congress, to be leader of the minority party in Congress.

214. Constitution: Minority whip

The person who tells members of the minority party in Congress how they should vote.

215. Constitution: Gerrymander

The practice of drawing the boundary lines of Congressional voting districts to give a particular political party an advantage when electing representatives. First used during Eldbridge Gerry's second term as governor of Massachusetts, the term comes from a combination of Gerry's name and a reference that the shape of the district boundary resembled a salamander.

216. Constitution: Bills become law

In order for a bill to become a law, it must be introduced to committee and be approved. Then it must be voted on by the House of Representatives, and then voted on by the Senate, or vice versa, depending on the branch in which the bill was first introduced. Finally, it must be signed by the President.

217. Constitution: House of Representatives

One of the two parts of Congress, considered the "lower house." Representatives are elected directly by the people, with the number of representatives for each state determined by the state's population.

218. Constitution: Senate

The other of the two parts of Congress, considered the "upper house." Senators were originally appointed by state legislatures, but now they are elected directly by the people. Each state has two senators.

219. Constitution: Executive branch

One of the three branches of government, the executive enforces laws. It is headed by the president, who has the power to veto legislation passed by Congress.

220. Constitution: Judiciary branch

One of the three branches of government, the judiciary interprets laws. The highest authority in the judiciary is the Supreme Court, which determines the constitutionality of laws.

221. Constitution: Interstate relations

No state is allowed to form a compact with another state or with a foreign power without the consent of Congress.

222. Constitution: The amendment process

An amendment to the Constitution may be proposed if 2/3 of the members of Congress or 2/3 of state legislatures vote for it. The amendment may then be added to the Constitution by a 3/4 vote of state legislatures, or special state conventions elected for that purpose.

223. Constitution: Supremacy clause

Article VI of the Constitution, which declares the Constitution, all federal laws passed pursuant to its provisions, and all federal treaties, to be the "supreme law of the land," which override any state laws or state constitutional provisions to the contrary.

224. Constitution: Ratification

The Constitution had to be ratified (approved) by at least 9 of the 13 original states in order to be put into effect.

225. Constitution: Checks and balances

Each of the three branches of government "checks" (ie, blocks) the power of the other two, so no one branch can become too powerful. The president (executive) can veto laws passed by Congress (legislative), and also chooses the judges in the Supreme Court (judiciary). Congress can overturn a presidential veto if 2/3 of the members vote to do so. The Supreme Court can declare laws passed by Congress and the president unconstitutional, and hence invalid.

226. Constitution: Separation of power

The powers of the government are divided between three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary.

227. Maryland, cession of western land claims

After the Revolutionary War, many states claimed all of the western land between their northernmost and southernmost borders, which meant that many strips of land were claimed by more than one state. The Continental Congress was trying to get the states to ratify the Articles of Confederation, but Maryland refused to ratify it until all the states gave their western land claims. Maryland held out, and the western land claims were abandoned.

228. New state constitutions during the Revolutionary War and after
The first set of constitutions drafted by the individual states placed most of the government's power in the legislature, and almost none in the executive in order to promote democracy and avoid tyranny. However, without the strong leadership of the executive, the state legislatures argued among themselves and couldn't get anything done. After the Constitution was written, the states abandoned these old constitutions and wrote new ones that better balanced the power between the legislative and the executive.

229. Pennsylvania militia routs Congress, 1783
Unpaid Revolutionary War veterans staged a protest outside Congress' meeting hall, forcing Congress to move to Princeton, New Jersey.

230. Northwest posts
British fur-trading posts in the Northwest Territory. Their presence in the U.S. led to continued British-American conflicts.

231. Land Ordinance of 1785
A major success of the Articles of Confederation. Provided for the orderly surveying and distribution of land belonging to the U.S.

232. Northwest Ordinance, 1787
A major success of the Articles of Confederation. Set up the framework of a government for the Northwest territory. The Ordinance provided that the Territory would be divided into 3 to 5 states, outlawed slavery in the Territory, and set 60,000 as the minimum population for statehood.

233. Proposed Jay-Gardoqui Treaty, 1785
This treaty between the U.S. and Spain would have given the U.S. special privileges at Spanish ports in exchange for giving Spain exclusive rights to the Mississippi River. The U.S. needed access to the Mississippi more than they needed privileged trade with Spain, so this treaty was never signed.

234. Shay's Rebellion
Occurred in the winter of 1786-7 under the Articles of Confederation. Poor, indebted landowners in Massachusetts blocked access to courts and prevented the government from arresting or repossessing the property of those in debt. The federal government was too weak to help Boston remove the rebels, a sign that the Articles of Confederation weren't working effectively.

235. Annapolis Convention, 1786
A precursor to the Constitutional Convention of 1787. A dozen commissioners from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia met to discuss reform of interstate commerce regulations, to design a U.S. currency standard, and to find a way to repay the federal government's debts to Revolutionary War veterans. Little was accomplished, except for the delegates to recommend that a further convention be held to discuss changes to the form of the federal government; the idea was endorsed by the

Confederation Congress in February, 1788, which called for another convention to be held in May that year in Philadelphia.

236. 1780's Depression

Caused by a post-war decrease in production and increase in unemployment, and also caused by tough interstate commerce rules which decreased trade.

237. Noah Webster (1758-1843)

Wrote some of the first dictionaries and spellers in the U.S. His books, which became the standard for the U.S., promoted American spellings and pronunciations, rather than British.

238. Philadelphia Convention for the Constitution (Constitutional Convention)

Beginning on May 25, 1787, the convention recommended by the Annapolis Convention was held in Philadelphia. All of the states except Rhode Island sent delegates, and George Washington served as president of the convention. The convention lasted 16 weeks, and on September 17, 1787, produced the present Constitution of the United States, which was drafted largely by James Madison.

239. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*

He believed that the government's power should be divided into separate branches, that the government should be close to the people, and that laws should reflect the will of the people.

240. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

He wrote that all human beings have a right to life, liberty, and property and that governments exist to protect those rights. He believed that a contract existed between a government and its people, and if the government failed to uphold its end of the contract, the people could rebel and institute a new government.

241. Hobbes (1588-1679)

English philosopher who believed that people are motivated mainly by greed and fear, and need a strong government to keep them under control. He developed the theory that kings are given their position by divine right, and thus should have absolute power.

242. James Madison, "Father of the Constitution"

His proposals for an effective government became the Virginia Plan, which was the basis for the Constitution. He was responsible for drafting most of the language of the Constitution.

243. Great Compromise

At the Constitutional Convention, larger states wanted to follow the Virginia Plan, which based each state's representation in Congress on state population. Smaller states wanted to follow the New Jersey Plan, which gave every state the same number of representatives. The convention compromised by creating the House and the Senate, and using both of the two separate plans as the method for electing members of each.

244. Virginia Plan, New Jersey Plan, Connecticut Plan

The Virginia Plan called for a two-house Congress with each state's representation based on state population. The New Jersey Plan called for a one-house Congress in which each state had equal representation. The Connecticut Plan called for a two-house Congress in which both types of representation would be applied, and is also known as the Compromise Plan.

245. North-South Compromises

The North was given full federal protection of trade and commerce. The South was given permanent relief from export taxes and a guarantee that the importation of slaves would not be halted for at least 20 years, plus the national capitol was placed in the South. Slaves were also deemed to be counted as $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person when determining the state population, thus giving the Southern states a greater number of representatives in the House.

246. Slavery and the Constitution: slave trade, $\frac{3}{5}$ Clause

The South's slave trade was guaranteed for at least 20 years after the ratification of the Constitution. Slaves were considered $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person when determining the state population.

247. Procedures for amendments

An amendment to the Constitution may be proposed if $\frac{2}{3}$ of Congress or $\frac{2}{3}$ of state legislatures vote for it. The amendment may then be added to the Constitution by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of state legislatures or state conventions.

248. Beard thesis, his critics

Charles Austin Beard wrote in 1913 that the Constitution was written not to ensure a democratic government for the people, but to protect the economic interests of its writers (most of the men at the Constitutional Convention were very rich), and specifically to benefit wealthy financial speculators who had purchased Revolutionary War government bonds through the creation of a strong national government that could insure the bonds repayment. Beard's thesis has met with much criticism.

249. Fiske, *The Critical Period of American History*

He called the introduction of the Constitution the "critical period" because the Constitution saved the nation from certain disaster under the Articles of Confederation.

250. Antifederalists

They opposed the ratification of the Constitution because it gave more power to the federal government and less to the states, and because it did not ensure individual rights. Many wanted to keep the Articles of Confederation. The Antifederalists were instrumental in obtaining passage of the Bill of Rights as a prerequisite to ratification of the Constitution in several states. After the ratification of the Constitution, the Antifederalists regrouped as the Democratic-Republican (or simply Republican) party.