Chapter Nine:
Articles of Confederation and the Constitution

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Chapter Nine: Articles of Confederation and the Constitution

9.1 INTRODUCTION

During the Revolutionary War, American colonists papered over many RI WKHLU UHJLRQDO GLIIHUHQFHV LQ RUGHU WR ¿JKW still separated the Revolution's participants. Nationalism grew during the war, but the states still saw themselves as separate entities. Moreover, many residents initially did not see much need for a central government. American leaders thus relied on virtue or patriotism to help form bonds between the people. According to historian John Murrin, patriotism "would inspire the VHWWOHUV WR VDFUL¿FH WKHLU SULYDWH LQWHUHVWV

- Explain the need for an overarching political framework for the newly-LQGHSHQGHQW $PHULFDQ VWDWHV DQG DQDO\]H WKH ¿UVW structure for the American states, including the Second Continental Congress and the Articles of Confederation.

9.2 THE STATE GOVERNMENTS

The American colonies began to transition to independent republics or states in the months after Lexington-Concord in 1775. First, the residents RYHUWKUHZ UR\DO DXWKRULW\ E\ FORVLQJ FRXUWV DQG RI¿FH 7KHQ WR PHHW WKH GHPDQGV RI ZDU WKH\ VHW WR ¿OO WKH YRLG OHIW E\ WKH GHSDUWLQJ %ULWLVK JI to create lasting governments that would promote order and independence. Most states found it easier to depose their governments than to construct new ones. However, the people avidly took to the cause. “The building of this permanent founding of freedom,” says historian Gordon S. Wood, “became the essence of the Revolution.”[2] As John Adams noted in 1776:

sought to implement republicanism. In the late 1780s, James Madison said a republican government "derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people; and is administered by persons holding their RI¿FHV GXULQJ SOHDVXUH IRU D OLPLWHG SHULRG RU people, broadly construed in Madison's interpretation of republicanism,

Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Georgia implemented unicameralism, or a single-house legislature.[16]

Debates about the merits of virtual representation versus actual representation had played a large role in the road to the revolution and continued to play a part in determining the nature of representation. In the 1760s, the colonists increasingly protested that the members of Parliament could never represent their interests; in other words, they challenged the theory of virtual representation. Most colonists did not want to send representatives to Parliament; they wanted local assemblies to make the decisions affecting them. The Americans translated their concerns about virtual representation to their constitution-making in the late 1770s. In his Thoughts on Government*[(d2Th)1(ought06(he)]TJ3T1 1 hM 0.2xuse .lnment)]TJ /TTepre

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As the people thought about creating their state governments, questions about the structure of the legislative branch and the extension of voting rights tended to divide them more than did other issues. Historian Francis D. Cogliano suggested that the American people split into two camps, democrats and elitists, on the political questions raised by the revolution. The democrats were men whose involvement in the war made them more politically aware. Most hailed from humble origins and distrusted the elites' ideas about the structure of the government and the electorate. They wanted to give the common people more power in drafting state constitutions because the common people would bring honesty, common sense, and SODLQ XQGHUVWDQGLQJ WR WKH SURFHVV 7KH HOLW colonial politics, on the other hand, favored a government closely modeled on the British system and an electorate composed primarily of property-holding men. They feared excesses of democracy, especially a decentralized government, would lead to anarchy.[20] Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, which wrote the most radical and most conservative constitutions respectively, struggled to balance the interests of the democrats and the elitists. Meanwhile, New Jersey temporarily expanded the electorate in a way that no other state seriously considered when it allowed single women to vote.

Pennsylvania

Given that the democrats controlled the constitutional convention, Pennsylvania adopted the most radical state constitution of the Revolutionary Era. When it came time to select the members of the convention, Pennsylvania's lawmakers allowed all taxpaying men who would swear an allegiance to the revolutionary cause to vote for delegates. Since most elites remained loyal to Britain, they could not participate in the process of making the constitution. A majority of the voters in 1776, and the delegates they selected to frame the government, came from the middling ranks of society. The small farmers, merchants, lawyers, and artisans who served as GUDIWHUV ¿UPO\ EHOLHYHG LQ WKH GHPRFUDWL]DWLR people, not just property owners, should have a say in the government.[21]

During their deliberations, as Gary B. Nash notes, the delegates "considered and then rejected three of the most honored elements of English republican thought." They chose not to implement bicameral legislature; they felt a unicameral legislature would better serve the common good. They decided not to have a governor; instead, they implemented a weak elected governing council to manage the state, not to make laws. Finally, they abandoned traditional notions about voting rights; they expanded suffrage to all taxpayers instead of all property holders, meaning most adult males