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Politics of the American Founding

Chapter 3

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In this chapter we will learn about

- The battle of colonial powers for control of America
- The process of settlement by the English
- The break with England and the Revolution
- The Articles of Confederation
- The Constitutional Convention
- The ratification of the Constitution
- The role of everyday citizens in the founding

The first battles for America

- The Spanish, English, French, and Native Americans fight over America's rich resources
- Spain loses control of New World because of weakening military, an ailing economy, and decreasing population
- England takes control of the New World

The English settlers

Colonists left England

- To escape feudalism and for the opportunity to own land
- For economic opportunities
- To practice religion freely

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Political participation in the colonies

- Property qualifications for voting
 - Less restrictive than in England (more people owned land)
- Religious qualifications for voting
 - Much more restrictive than property qualifications

Conflict between England and the colonies

Why England believed it was right

- Wanted colonists to help pay for the French and Indian War
- Colonists rejected offers of representation in Parliament

Why the colonists believed they were right

- Unfair taxation, such as the Sugar and Tea Acts
- Tyrannical monarch
- Belief in popular sovereignty

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The Declaration of Independence

- Jefferson is influenced by Locke's belief in natural rights (life, liberty, and property)
- He argues that King George has violated the social contract with the colonists
- Jefferson must make the case why *this* revolution is just, but others are not

Life after the Revolution

- African Americans
 - Still remained enslaved in the South
 - Slave trade continued
- Native Americans
 - Continued to lose land
- Women
 - Lost the ability to vote and the previous limited opportunities to participate in politics

The Articles of Confederation

- Established a “firm league of friendship”
- Created a confederacy giving power to the states
- Federal government had few powers and limited ability to carry out those powers

Provisions in the Articles

- A national government with a Congress empowered to make peace, coin money, appoint officers for an army, control the post office, and negotiate with Indian tribes
- One vote in the Continental Congress for each state regardless of size
- The vote of nine states to pass any measure; amendments had to be unanimous
- Delegates selected to the Congress by their respective state legislatures
- Because of the fear of a tyrannical ruler, no executive was created and the national government was quite weak

Problems with the Articles

- No executive to administer the government (no real leader)
- No power to tax without states' consent (difficult to do anything like establish a national army without money)
- No authority to regulate commerce (trade between states became chaotic because states were using their own money; continental dollars were worth nothing)
- Congress could pass laws but had little power to execute or enforce them

The Constitutional Convention

- Described as “an assembly of demigods”
- Called to revise the Articles of Confederation after concern over Shays’s Rebellion
- Meetings held in secret
- Created a whole new government
- Major debate remained over how much power the federal government should have

Two competing plans

The Virginia Plan

- Bicameral legislature
- Representation in both based on population
- One house elected by the people; one house elected by state legislatures
- Single executive chosen by Congress
- Favored by large states

The New Jersey Plan

- Unicameral legislature
- Equal representation
- Representatives elected by state legislatures
- Multi-person executive
- Favored by small states

The Great Compromise

- Bicameral legislature
 - House of Representatives based on population and chosen by the people
 - Senate based on equal representation and chosen by the state legislatures
- Single executive chosen by the electoral college
- Federal court system

The battle over ratification

Federalists

- Supported ratification of the Constitution
- Wanted strong central government
- Concerned about security and order
- E.g., Madison, Hamilton, Jay

Anti-Federalists

- Opposed ratification of the Constitution
- Wanted states to have power over the federal government
- Corruption best kept in check at the local level
- E.g., Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry

The Federalist Papers

- Written by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay under the pen name Publius
- Called for ratification of the Constitution
- Published in New York papers to persuade legislators to ratify the Constitution
- Among the best known: *Federalist* Nos. 10, 51, and 78

Federalist No. 10

- Madison warned against dangers of factions
- The *causes* of factions cannot be controlled (that infringes on liberty); must control the *effects* of factions
- Effects of factions could best be controlled by a republic

Federalist No. 10, cont'd.

A republic could best control factions:

- Representation would dilute the effects of factions
- A large territory would make it difficult for one faction to become a majority
- In a large territory, it would be difficult for people who shared common interests to find each other

Ratification of the Constitution

- Required support of nine of the thirteen state legislatures
- Small states were quick to support the Constitution because of the inclusion of the Senate
- Eventually all thirteen states ratified it (Rhode Island the last in 1790)

The citizens and the founding

- Competing elites
 - Elites weren't united in their views about a new government
- The rise of the “ordinary” citizen
 - Development of citizenship as we know it today

Three elements of citizenship

- Citizenship should rest on consent.
- There should not be grades or levels of citizenship.
- Citizenship should confer equal rights on all citizens.