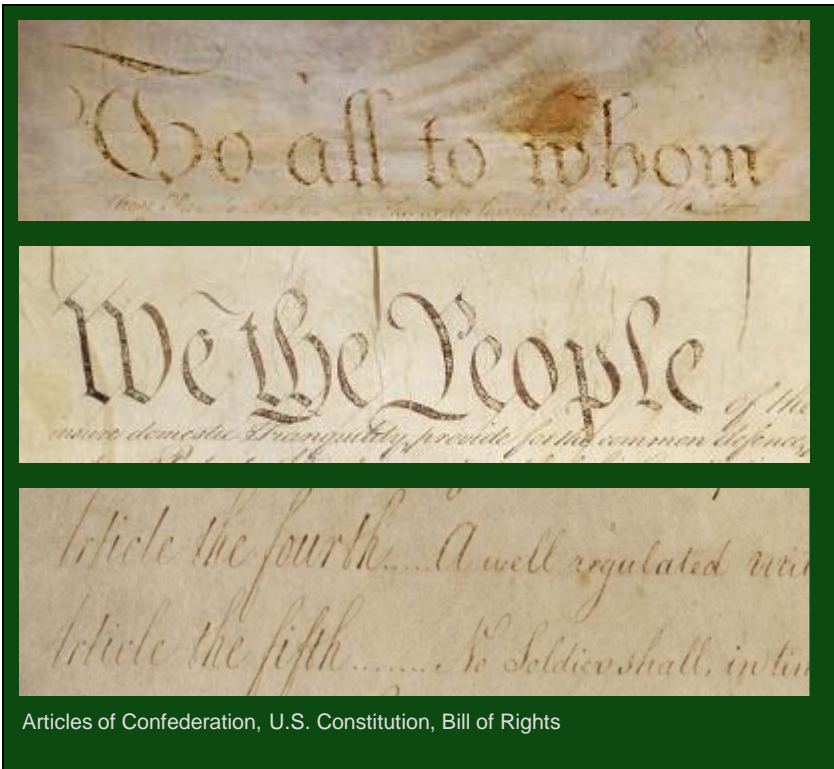


# The Constitution



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## An Online Professional Development Seminar

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Revolutionary History; Women's History  
Baruch College, CUNY



NATIONAL  
HUMANITIES  
CENTER



## GOALS

- To deepen our understanding of the nation's transition from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution
- To help us understand why our government is structured as it is
- To provide fresh material for classroom instruction



## Framing Questions

- In what ways did the Articles represent the culmination of the Revolution's goals?
- Why did they not work for the nation?
- Who went to the convention?
- Why did they meet in secret once they decided to replace the Articles?
- Why were the delegates to the Constitutional Convention not optimistic about the future of the country? Why did they fear it would vanish?
- What role did the Convention play in creating checks and balances, the bicameral legislature, separation of powers, an independent judiciary, etc.?
- What role did Anglo-American political culture play in the deliberations of the Convention?
- What innovations in government did the Convention develop?
- Why did the procedure for electing the president pose such a problem?
- What do the terms of the electoral college reveal about their fears of power and of foreign influence?
- Why did the Convention fail to include a Bill of Rights in the Constitution, and what role did that failure play in ratification?



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*Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* (1974)

*First Generations: Women of Colonial America* (1996)

*A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution* (2001)

*Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's  
Independence* (2004)

*Civil War Wives: The Life and Times of Angelina Grimke Weld,  
Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant* (2009)



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## Discussion Questions

What factors of 18th century American life made state sovereignty seem a reasonable political choice?

In what ways was the Articles of Confederation the fulfillment of the goals of the Revolution?

**The first article of the Articles of Confederations named the country the United States of America. But, as you can see below, articles II and III made clear that the government the Continental Congress was creating was a ‘league of friendship’ among sovereign states, not a national government.**

### II.

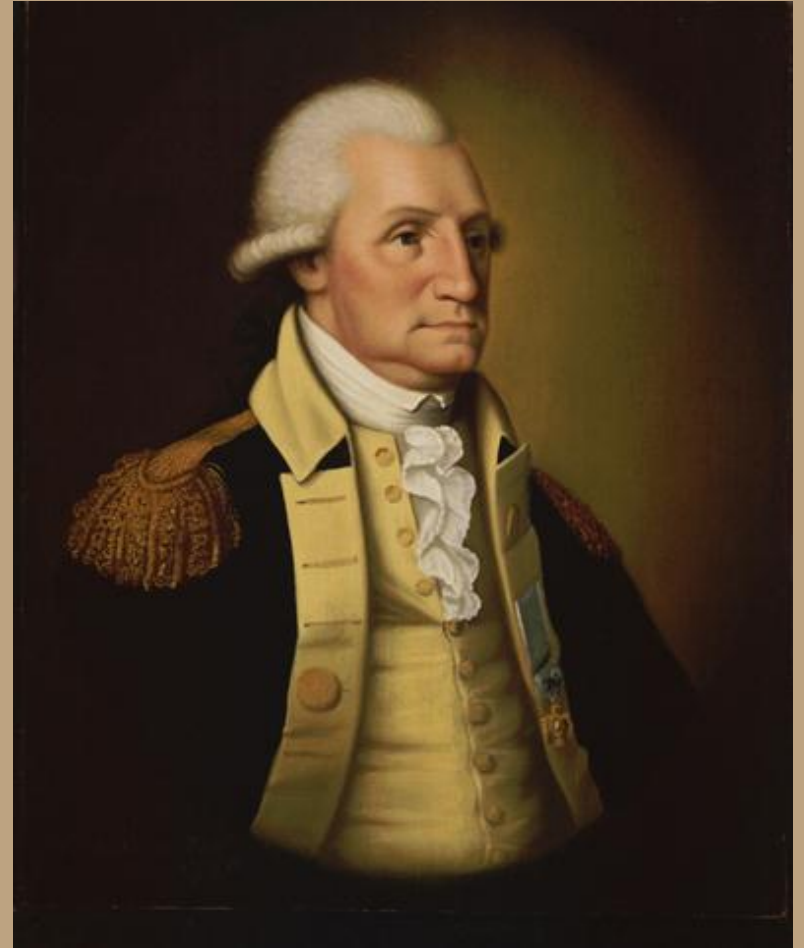
Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled.

### III.

The said States hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defense, 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 pretense whatever.



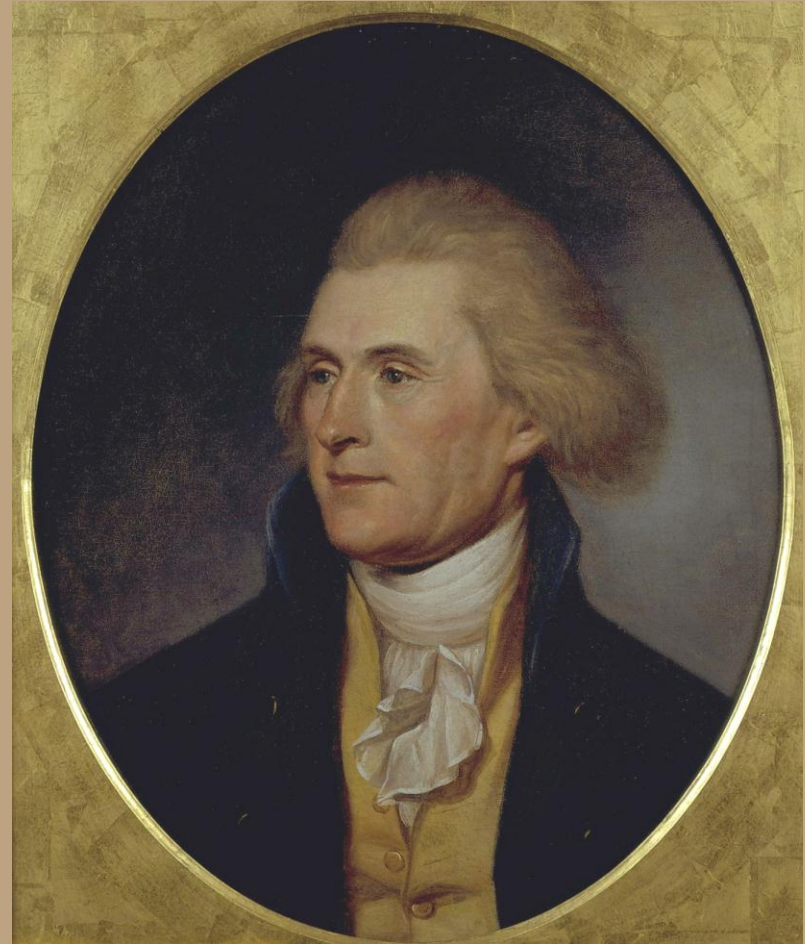
**George Washington, 1787** (age 55), portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Bequest of Mrs. Sarah Harrison, (The Joseph Harrison, Jr., Collection), 1912.14.3; reproduced by permission.



**George Washington, 1790** (age 58), portrait from life by Edward Savage, oil on canvas, Harvard Art Museums, Portrait Collection, Gift of Edward Savage to Harvard College, 1791, H49; reproduced by permission.



**Thomas Jefferson, 1788** (age 45), miniature portrait (from original painted from life) by John Trumbull, oil on mahogany, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Cornelia Cruger, 1923, 24.19; permission pending.



**Thomas Jefferson, 1791** (age 48), portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, oil on canvas, Independence National Historical Park, INDE11883; reproduced by permission.





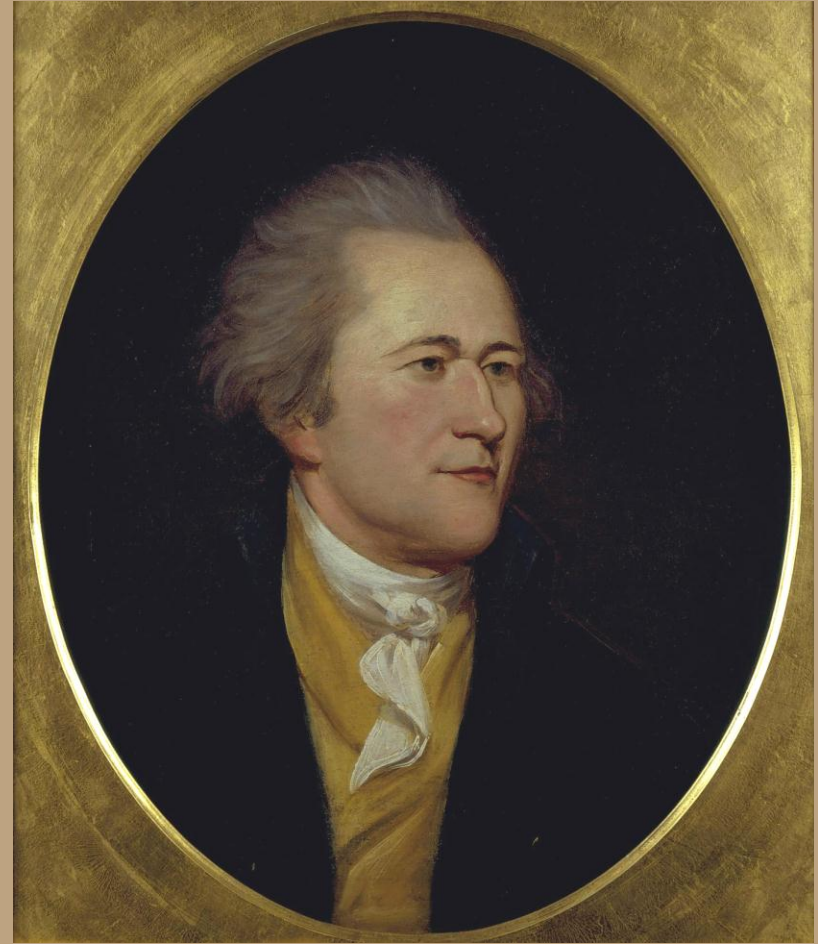
**James Madison, 1783** (age 32), miniature portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, watercolor on ivory in gold case, presented in velvet-lined container. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books & Special Collections.



**James Madison, 1792** (age 41), portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, oil on canvas, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 0126.1006; reproduced by permission.



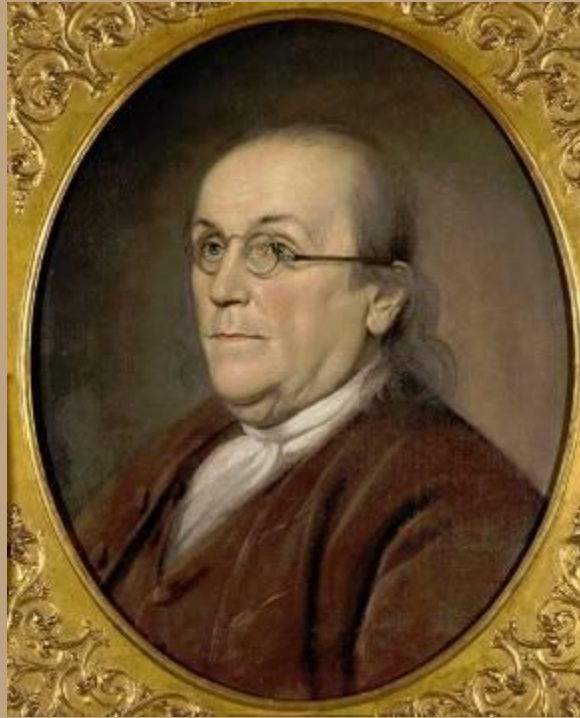
**Alexander Hamilton, ca. 1780** (age 23 or 25), miniature portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, watercolor on ivory, Columbia University Libraries, Special Collections; reproduced by permission.



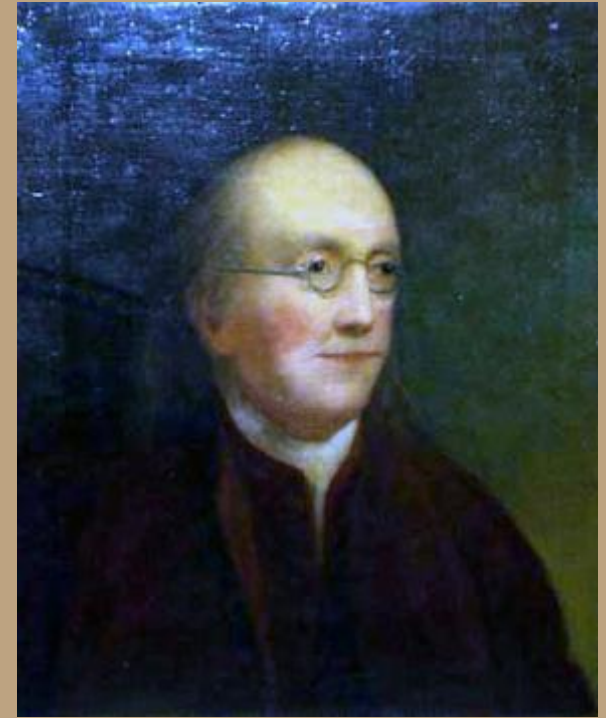
**Alexander Hamilton, ca. 1790-1795** (age 33/35-38/40), portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, oil on canvas, Independence National Historical Park, INDE11877; reproduced by permission.



**Benjamin Franklin, 1785** (age 79), portrait by Joseph-Siffred Duplessis (Paris), oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, NPG.87.43; reproduced by permission.



**Benjamin Franklin, 1785** (age 79), portrait from life by Charles Willson Peale, oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Bequest of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr., Collection), 1912.14.2; reproduced by permission.



**Benjamin Franklin, ca. 1787** (age 81), portrait, likely from life, attributed to Robert Edge Pine, oil on canvas, The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, 3329; reproduced by permission.

## Discussion Question

Why did the convention meet in secret?

On Tuesday, May 29, 1787—the 4th day of the convention—Madison recorded the passage of these rules establishing the secrecy of the convention:

That no copy be taken of any entry on the journal during the sitting of the House without leave of the House.

That members only be permitted to inspect the journal.

That nothing spoken in the House be printed, or otherwise published or communicated without leave.

## Discussion Questions

What were some of the problems that had shaken the Confederations “to its foundations”?

What is Washington’s sense of the mood of the convention?  
Optimistic? Anxious?

**George Washington to Thomas Jefferson,  
May 30, 1787:**

**“...The business of this convention is as yet too much in embryo to form any opinion of the result. Much is expected from it by some, but little by others, and nothing by a few. That something is necessary, all will agree, for the situation of the General Government (if it can be called a government) is shaken to its foundations...In a word, it is at an end, and unless a remedy is soon applied, anarchy and confusion will inevitably ensue....”**

## Discussion Question

What problems have arisen throughout American history that are directly related to federalism?

Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent political units [ie, in the US, the states]. Federalism was the only innovation in the U.S. constitution when it was created in 1787. The colonists had proposed a division of sovereignty between the British parliament and an American parliament in 1775, with both legislatures loyal to the King. British political leaders considered this an absurd proposition. Sovereignty, it was generally believed, could not be divided.

## Discussion Question

What other problem would arise in the 18th century from a popular election of the president?

How to elect the president was a real problem for the delegates. Some, like Elbridge Gerry, opposed a popular election of the executive because the people were uninformed and could be easily manipulated. As Gerry put it:

“A popular election in this case is radically vicious. The ignorance of the people would put it in the power of some one set of men dispersed through the Union & acting in concert to delude them into any appointment.”

## Discussion Question

Why would Adams fear ‘foreign influence’?

**John Adams to Thomas Jefferson,  
December 1787:**

**“You are afraid of the one—I, of the few...You are apprehensive of Monarchy; I, of Aristocracy...You are apprehensive of the President when once chosen, will be chosen again and again as long as he lives. So much the better as it appears to me...as often as Elections happen, the danger of foreign Influence recurs.”**



## Discussion Question

Why didn't the convention include a Bill of Rights?

**Thomas Jefferson to James Madison,  
December 20, 1787:**

**...[A Bill of Rights] is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth...and [which] no just government should refuse or rest on inference.”**



Final slide.

Thank You