

Challenges of the Articles of Confederation

Explain the relationship between key provisions of the Articles of Confederation and the debate over granting the federal government greater formerly reserved to the states.

1. Historians have labeled the years following the victory over the British in the American Revolution the “critical period.” What made these years so critical?

- a. Debates and disputes over “good government”
- b. The French and Spanish were planning an imminent invasion
- c. Gold prices plummeted after the war
- d. The British, plotting reprisals, never fully surrendered

2. The first national charter, a government blue print, that established a “firm league of friendship” between the thirteen original colonies after the American Revolution was called the

- a. Federalist Papers
- b. Mayflower Compact
- c. Articles of Confederation
- d. U.S. Constitution

3. A rowdy Shays’ Rebellion in Massachusetts following the American Revolution exposed the weaknesses of our first United States government. What weakness of that early central government was exposed the most by Shays’ Rebellion?

- a. The lack of a national standing army to put down the rebellion
- b. The inability of state governments to forgive debt
- c. Porous borders that allowed for unsustainable numbers of immigrants
- d. Irresolvable disputes between northern and southern states

4. During the “critical period” George Washington wrote to a friend saying, “The disinclination of the individual States to yield competent powers to Congress for the Federal Government – their unreasonable jealousy of that body and of one another – and the disposition which seems to pervade each, of being all-wise and all-powerful within itself, will, if there is not a change in the system, be our own downfall as a Nation. This is as clear to me as the A.B.C.”

This quote clearly shows that George Washington

- a. As a Federalist knew that the Articles of Confederation created an inadequate central government
- b. As a Federalist advocated keeping the Articles of Confederation in order to protect liberty
- c. As an Anti-Federalist feared that a strong central government threatened states’ rights
- d. As an Anti-Federalist knew early on that state debts would threaten public school systems

5. John Dickinson, a Founding Father and contributor to the new U.S. Constitution in 1787, wrote: “Let our government be like the sun and the states the planets, repelled yet attracted, and the whole moving regularly and harmoniously in several orbits.” What founding principle is Dickinson’s metaphor describing?

- a. Popular sovereignty
- b. Federalism
- c. Separation of powers
- d. Checks and balances

6. Weaknesses found in the Articles of Confederation were addressed in the new U.S. Constitution in all of the following ways EXCEPT

- a. A legislative branch that could regulate interstate commerce
- b. Creation of an energetic president
- c. Creation of a Congress that could levy taxes
- d. The elimination of unequal state courts

7. The Articles of Confederation, the first governing charter of the U.S., succeeded in ending the war with England and proposing territorial rules for expansion but maintaining order it could not. All of the following were fatal flaws in the Articles EXCEPT

- a. There was no executive branch
- b. Congress could not regulate trade
- c. Inability to pacify rebellions
- d. The central government was too strong

8. Which of the following was the most important effect of replacing the Articles of Confederation with a new constitution?

- a. The addition of a Bill of Rights
- b. Establishment of a strong national government
- c. The creation of strong state governments
- d. The creation of a strong judiciary

9. If the United States were still governed by the Articles of Confederation, issues like health care and education would be primarily handled by

- a. The President
- b. Congress
- c. The Supreme Court
- d. The States

10. The first governing charter of the United States, the Articles of Confederation, failed. Why?

- a. The central government was too weak
- b. The central government overtaxed the people
- c. The central government overregulated commerce
- d. The central government suppressed the votes

Critical Thinking Prompt

Find a contemporary issue. How would this issue have been addressed under the Articles of Confederation? How is it being addressed today? Explain the differences. In what ways was the Articles of Confederation a better charter than today's U.S. Constitution?