

8.13 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you read about the Constitutional Convention, the historic meeting that replaced the Articles of Confederation with a new plan of government for the United States. You used an annotated drawing of the Assembly Room at Independence Hall to organize information about the convention.

Both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution that replaced it were attempts to realize the ideals of the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. Americans wanted a government that would protect their rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The challenge was to create a government that was strong enough to guarantee these rights, yet not so strong that it could take them away.

The Articles of Confederation, which were America’s first attempt at self-government, created a loose union of states under a weak central government. This government saw the new nation through the Revolutionary War. It also established a procedure for settling western territories. But, as Shays’s Rebellion showed, it was too weak in peacetime to keep order or protect its own property.

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention quickly agreed to create a new constitution. For four long months, they argued in secret over a number of issues that often threatened to destroy the meeting. In the end, the framework they created included a series of compromises.

One of these agreements, the Great Compromise, established how the states were to be represented in the legislative branch of government. The three-fifths compromise settled how slaves were to be counted in determining a state’s population. A third set of compromises created a single chief executive, to be chosen by the Electoral College.

The labors of the framers were only the beginning. Their new Constitution had to be ratified by the people through special state conventions. Federalists, who supported the Constitution, were opposed by Anti-Federalists, who feared the power of the proposed national government. Now it was up to the people to decide.

During the convention, Benjamin Franklin wondered if the sun painted on the back of George Washington’s chair was rising or setting. At the conclusion of the convention, Franklin optimistically concluded it was a rising sun.

