

Primary Source

James Bowdoin's Account of Shays' Rebellion

James Bowdoin was governor of Massachusetts during Shays' Rebellion. In this document, he recounted the event and its significance.

Directions: Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

The rebels, under Daniel Shays, Luke Day, and Eli Parsons, soon gathered a force in that vicinity [of Springfield], of 2000 men, and on the 25th of January advanced in a menacing manner towards the arsenal [warehouse]. Gen. Shepard sent an aid-de-camp [officer] to inquire the design of the movement, and to warn Shays of his danger. The answer was, that they *would have* possession of the barracks [warehouse]; and they immediately marched to within 250 yards of the arsenal. They were again warned that if they approached nearer, they would be fired on; still they advanced. He then ordered the artillery to be pointed at the centre of their column [group]. The cry of murder then arose from the rear of the insurgents, and the whole were struck with panic and confusion. Shays lost all control over them, and they fled . . . 10 miles, leaving 3 dead and 1 wounded. . . .

Good frequently springs from evil. Shays's Rebellion served to impress on the public mind a belief of the necessity of a new form of National Government. It may be doubted, whether the present United States Constitution would have been adopted, if that rebellion had not predisposed the minds of the people in favor of an energetic [powerful] government.

1. How many men did Shays gather together?

2. What were the rebels going to do? How were they stopped?

3. Draw Conclusions Why did Governor Bowdoin state that "good frequently springs from evil"?

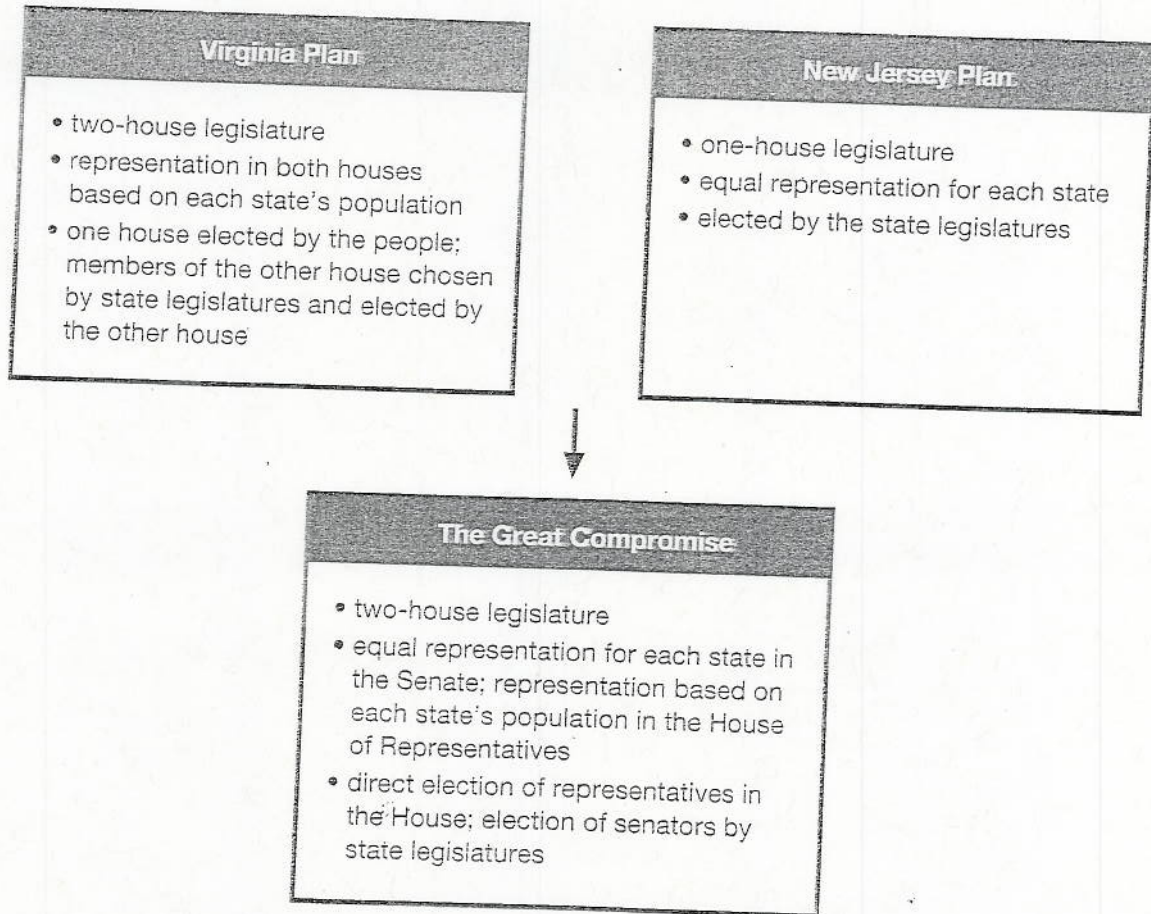
Creating the Constitution

Reading a Chart

The Great Compromise

The chart below shows key features of the Virginia and New Jersey plans. It also shows how the Great Compromise incorporated parts of each plan.

Directions: Study the chart. Then answer the questions that follow.



1. What features of both the Virginia Plan and New Jersey Plan ended up in the Constitution?

2. How was the selection of representatives similar and different in the two earlier plans?

3. Compare How did the Great Compromise address the wishes of supporters of both the Virginia and New Jersey plans?

Creating the Constitution

Reading a Chart

The Articles of Confederation and the Constitution

The chart below lists features of government under the Articles of Confederation and under the Constitution.

Directions: Study the chart. Then answer the questions that follow.

Articles of Confederation	Constitution
Only a loose agreement among the states; power was in each state.	A formal union; power was centered in the national government.
A one-house Congress, with one vote per state, no matter what its population.	A two-house Congress; the House of Representatives based on population and the Senate based on equal representation—two votes per state.
Congress had no power to tax.	Congress could tax.
Congress could not regulate foreign or interstate trade.	Congress could regulate foreign and interstate trade.
No executive to enforce laws made by Congress.	An executive branch led by the President could carry out and enforce national laws.
No national system of courts.	A judicial branch, with a supreme court, to review laws and settle interstate conflicts.

- How was the change in Congress under the Constitution an improvement?

- What were two changes in the powers of Congress?

- Draw Inferences** Why was it important to have a judicial branch at the national level?

Creating the Constitution

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James Madison's Speech Proposing the Bill of Rights

After the Constitution was ratified, many Antifederalists insisted that a bill of rights be added. Amending the Constitution became the focus of the new Congress in 1789. James Madison was a Federalist who supported a strong federal government but recognized that the nation's success depended on unanimous approval of the Constitution. The following two excerpts are from James Madison's 1789 speech explaining the purpose of the Bill of Rights.

Directions: Read the excerpts below. Then answer the questions that follow.

There have been objections of various kinds made against the Constitution: Some were leveled [made] against its structure, because the President was without a council; because the Senate, which is a legislative body, had judicial powers in trials on impeachments; . . . because it grants more power than is supposed to be necessary for every good purpose; and controls the ordinary powers of the state governments. I know some respectable characters who opposed this government on these grounds; but I believe that the great mass of the people who opposed it, disliked it because it did not contain [a sufficient clause] against encroachments [violations] on particular [individual] rights . . .

. . . I do conceive that the Constitution may be amended; that is to say, if all power is subject to abuse, that then it is possible the abuse of the powers of the general government may be guarded against in a more secure manner than is now done . . .

1. What did the people object to about the President? the Senate? the power of the government?

2. What was the objection of the majority of people?

3. What would amending the Constitution guard against?

4. **Apply Information** Since Madison already supported the Constitution, how does this speech represent the Federalists' willingness to compromise?
