



0. A NEW CONSTITUTION - Story Preface
1. A BACKGROUND OF WAR
- 2. A NEW CONSTITUTION**
3. FEDERALIST PAPER 78
4. RATIFICATION of the U.S. CONSTITUTION
5. FEDERALISTS LOSE POWER
6. MIDNIGHT JUDGES
7. JEFFERSON SAYS NO
8. JOHN MARSHALL
9. THE DECISION
10. THE CASE for JUDICIAL REVIEW

This illustration, by Henry Hintermeister, depicts some of America's founding fathers as they are about to sign the country's new constitution into law.

After declaring independence from Great Britain, America's leaders initially created a document called Articles of Confederation which established a "firm league of friendship" between the thirteen states. Without a central government, however, the system did not work well. After the war was fought, and won, the country needed a new Constitution.

Drafting a Constitution was not as quick, or as easy, as one might think. A key issue involved how much power to give a central government.

Should important policies be decided locally or nationally? How could people running a central government, in a distant city, know what was best for people in other states? And ... who would say whether laws in the new republic were constitutional?

During the Constitutional Convention of 1787, held in Philadelphia at the State House (where an American flag was first raised and is known today as Independence Hall), delegates from each of the thirteen states, except Rhode Island, fiercely debated, in closed sessions, the powers a central government should have.

Supporting their various positions, convention attendees also relied on arguments and themes stated (or written) by previous thinkers. Once again, the delegates compromised on the issue of slavery.

At the start of the convention (on May 14, 1787), the various representatives had all kinds of differing ideas. By the end of July, that year, delegates were ready to have a "committee of detail," working in secret, put the various resolutions into a written constitution. Edmund Randolph (from Virginia) prepared a rough draft.

The working draft was finely tuned by the "committee of style," principally Gouverneur Morris (known today as the "penman of the Constitution"). After the committees finalized it, and the convention delegates (on September 17, 1787) approved the Constitution - then without a Bill of Rights - John Dunlap and his partner, David Claypoole, first printed the document so the public could assess it.

To become law, nine of the thirteen colonies (now called states) had to approve.

To persuade voters in New York to ratify the new constitution, which created a strong central government and federal courts, three of America's founding fathers (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay), writing under the pseudonym "Publius," published essays (this first edition was once owned by Thomas Jefferson) collectively known as The Federalist Papers. In Federalist 78, Hamilton examines the issue of federal courts.

They would be, he assures his readers, the "least dangerous" branch of a new federal government.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-NEW-CONSTITUTION-Marbury-vs-Madison)

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Founders Sign the U.S. Constitution

This illustration, by Henry Hintermeister, depicts some of America's founding fathers as they are about to sign the country's new constitution into law.

Entitled "The Foundation of American Government," Hintemeister's art work is his interpretation of a key event in American history.

The document which begins "We the People" sets the tone for American democracy. It was once hilariously featured in an "Andy Griffith" episode when [Barney Fife, the lovable detective, tries—in vain—to remember](#) what he'd learned in school about the famous Preamble.

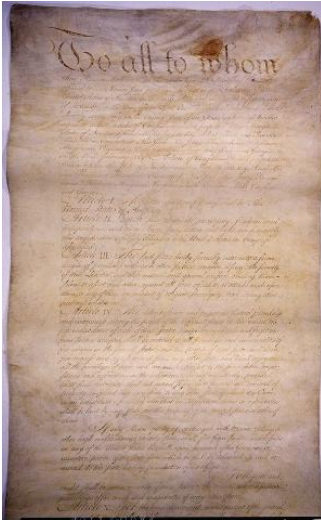
The Library of Congress, where this illustration is maintained, provides the following additional information about it:

Reproduction of painting of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and others signing the U.S. Constitution in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Illustration by Henry Hintermeister; online via the Library of Congress. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-995 (b&w film copy neg.) LC-USZC4-2541 (color film copy transparency) LC-USZCN4-220 (color film copy neg.).

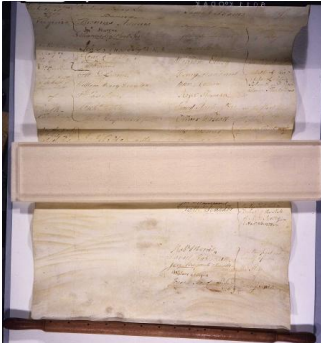
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Articles of Confederation

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. PD

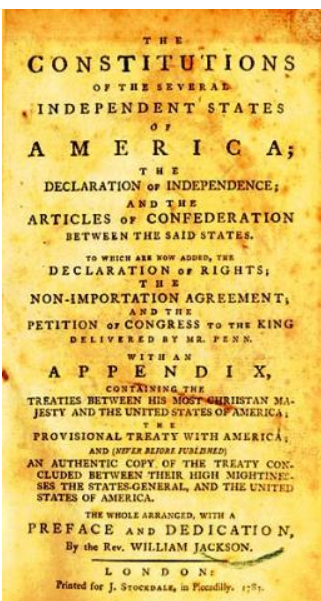
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Articles of Confederation, Page 2

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. PD

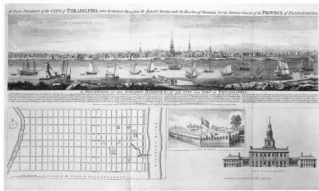
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Constitutions of the States

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress. PD

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Philadelphia - View of City in 18th Century

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress. PD

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State House in Philadelphia - 18th-Century Scene

Image, described above, online courtesy Library of Congress. PD

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American Flag - First Raised at the Philadelphia State House

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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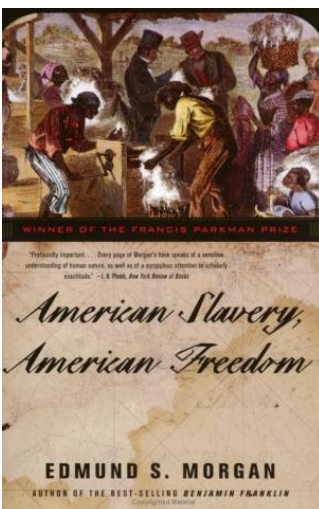
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/American-Flag-First-Raised-at-the-Philadelphia-State-House>



Independence Hall - Philadelphia

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Park Service (NPS). PD

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American Slavery, American Freedom - by Edmund S. Morgan

Image of book cover, online courtesy Google Books.

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Edmund Randolph

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress. PD

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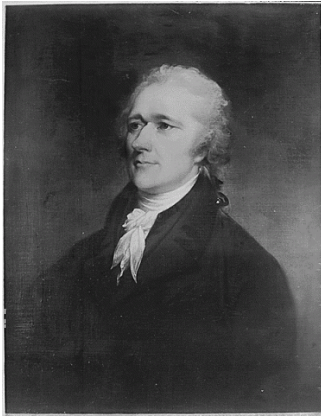
GOVERNEUR MORRIS ESQ.
Member of Congress.
— *Portrait by Morris, for R. Williams, N. at Goodell, Lond.* —

Gouverneur Morris - Penman of the Constitution

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress. PD

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Alexander Hamilton

Image based on a painting of Hamilton (by John Trumbull, in 1806); online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Approving the U.S. Constitution

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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John Dunlap

Image online, courtesy Dunlap family records.

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State House in Philadelphia

Image online, Library of Congress.

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The Thirteen Original Colonies

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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