

## A.P. UNITED STATES HISTORY

### #3 DISCUSS THE UNITED STATES AS IT EXISTED UNDER THE ARTICLES OF THE CONFEDERATION, WHAT WERE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CONFEDERATION GOVERNMENT? HOW DID THE CONSTITUTION CORRECT THESE FLAWS?

#### CONFEDERATION GOVERNMENT 1781-87 "Critical Period"-Morgan Birth of the Republic

- Evolved from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental Congress of the Revolution.
- Created a "League of Friendship" for 13 sovereign independent states.
- Articles of Confederation establish a federal gov't. consisting of a one branch legislature, no executive and no judiciary.
- Power of the gov't is vested in the states, federal gov'ts only role is coordinate activities of the states, federal proposals subject to the acceptance by the states.
- Federal gov't possesses few powers, States have sole sovereignty within their own borders.
- Amendments to the Articles of the Confederation require the unanimous consent of the states.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Brought the revolution to a successful conclusion.
- Signed an advantageous treaty in 1783.
- weathered a post war economic depression.
- passed the Land Ordinances of 1785 & 1787

#### STRENGTHS:

- Democracy is focused on local self government, most decisions local.
- A limited federal gov't. means no worries about a distant tyrant.  
(fear of a European type monarch here was a real concern)
- A type of government that was least likely to threaten their liberty.

#### WEAKNESSES:

- No Federal law enforcement, no Federal Courts to settle state disputes.
- States are free to do as they please resulting in few cohesive national policies. Amendments require unanimous vote. 9/13 for a law.
- No national currency, impedes commerce between the states.
- Federal Gov't. can not generate revenue (tax) to fund itself properly. must rely upon the states for appropriations which they can refuse to pay. (75% of these requests for funds were ignored).

- Individual states can veto Federal mandates, (example) enforcement of the Treaty of Paris 1783 in which we promised payment of pre-war debt to British merchants, return of confiscated land to Tories/Loyalists.
- \*National embarrassment.
- States openly disregard the Articles of Confederation which they signed, not to build their own navy or send ambassadors to foreign courts.
- Shay's Rebellion exemplified weakness of federal control to the extreme. Raised the possibility of larger rebellions and a threat to all of the states. No power to raise a national army.
- State disputes are not settled by the Confederation Gov't, shots fired between Pennsylvania and New York militias over border claims disturb the foundation of the gov't. No central courts to settle disputes.
- Impotent Federal Gov't cannot negotiate commercial treaties as European nations know we cannot enforce them. (No control over states)
- States do not send their "best men", ("errand boys", Edmund Morgan)
- British Parliament refuses to send an ambassador, their comment, "we would have to send 13 ambassadors". No respect in Europe.
- Foreign gov'ts. Waiting to move back in when we implode.

### CONSTITUTION CORRECTS FLAWS:

Gives Federal Gov't:

- sovereignty over interstate affairs
- state laws are subservient to federal laws.
- power to raise taxes and military forces
- executive branch to oversee foreign policy and oversee gov't. work such as Federal law enforcement
- a federal judiciary to resolve state and citizen conflicts –later 3<sup>rd</sup> branch
- checks and balances to prevent one branch from dominating the other.
- bicameral legislature to protect the interests of both the large and small states.
- respect amongst nations. "The First Salute" Barbara Tuchman

The Constitution and Bill of Rights creates a working balance between the federal and state gov'ts. with protections for the individual citizen.

### THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Compare the Confederation Gov't. 1781-87 to the Confederacy 1861-65