

Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed, the first attempt at a national or federal government was made. This attempt was named the *Articles of Confederation*, and it became the basic law for all the colonies during the Revolutionary War.

The Articles of Confederation acted as the first constitution for the United States. The Articles were drawn up by the Second Continental Congress and were in use until the Constitution was signed in 1787. The Articles were weak because the colonists were reluctant to give much power to a central government. This was because they feared that a new central government might be no better than the English king had been. The states themselves had governments at this time, most with state constitutions.

When it became necessary to have a national or federal government for conducting the Revolutionary War, the states made the government weak. The Articles were so weak that the government could not even pay its bills. It did have limited powers to make war or peace, but other powers were lacking. Robert Morris stated that getting money from the states was like "preaching to the dead." To raise money, the central government could only ask the states for funds; it could not tax.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, the American government was in serious financial trouble. Soldiers who had served without pay were granted western land certificates in lieu of money, but most had to sell their certificates for money to live on. Farmers with large debts rebelled against the courts that were taking away their farms. An example of such a rebellion was the *Shays' Rebellion* by farmers in Massachusetts. Jails were crowded with debtors. States were taxing each other harmfully and arguing about land claims to the west. Tariff laws were needed for business and industry. Prices soared and credit disappeared. It became increasingly evident that the only solution was a stronger central government.

Weaknesses of the Articles

Listed below are weaknesses identified by the colonists:

- No national courts, only state courts.
- No power to tax.
- No real power to regulate commerce.
- All changes in the Articles had to be approved by all of the states.
- All important laws had to be approved by nine states.
- No real president, only a president of Congress who was like a chairman.

Civil Rights & the Articles of Confederation

Civil rights are those rights which are considered to be unquestionable; deserved by all people under all circumstances, especially without regard to race, creed, color or gender. These personal rights are guaranteed and protected by the Constitution.

The fight for civil rights didn't wait until the 1950s to happen. Some started as early as the Articles of Confederation! Paul Cuffee was a free black from Massachusetts. When he discovered he did not have the same property rights as whites, he refused to pay his taxes and was jailed. Cuffee later became a successful trader, with his own fleet of ships, and continued to fight for equal rights throughout his lifetime.

QUESTIONS

MATCH THE STATEMENT IN SECTION A WITH THE TERM IN SECTION B.

A

- ___ 1. Started by farmers in Massachusetts who were losing their farms.
- ___ 2. Form of government during the American Revolution.
- ___ 3. Had to approve important acts under the Articles.
- ___ 4. Fear of this was in the minds of many American colonists in the 1780s.
- ___ 5. This power was lacking in the Articles of Confederation.

B

- a. states b. Shays' Rebellion c. taxation
d. strong central government e. Articles of Confederation

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

- ___ 1. The Articles of Confederation acted as the first U.S. Constitution.
- ___ 2. The Articles were weak because of the fear of a strong central government.
- ___ 3. Shays' Rebellion was carried out to support a weak central government.
- ___ 4. The Declaration of Independence was signed before the Articles of Confederation were written.
- ___ 5. The Articles were drawn up by the Second Continental Congress.
- ___ 6. Freedom from discrimination is considered an example of a civil right.

SHORT ANSWER

Explain what Morris meant by his statement "preaching to the dead." _____
