

# TRANSCRIPT: THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION - CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION - EXTRA HISTORY - #4

**i** *The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

In far away Paris, diplomats put pen to paper  
and signed the treaty that would end  
the American Revolutionary War.

A copy of this document sailed across the ocean,  
where it would need delegations from nine states  
to ratify it under the Articles of Confederation  
and accept their victory...

Only seven states showed up.

[Intro Music]

One month after the Confederation's  
embarrassing failure to bring the states together  
long enough to sign their own peace treaty,  
they reconvened with just enough people to get it done.  
The war had ended, peace had come.

George Washington had welcomed this with open arms.

He had won the love of the nation  
and the respect of its statesmen.

Some speculated, or even hoped,  
that he would use his popularity  
(and the army he controlled)  
to install himself as the new leader  
of this fledgling country.

Instead, he resigned:

he gave his power back to Congress  
and declared that he wanted to return home  
and live out the rest of his life in peace  
as an ordinary citizen.

All he asked was that they find a way to pay his soldiers.

He hoped that they would be able to do that  
by giving his soldiers free land in the West,  
to build new homes.

This was the same issue that,  
years ago, had divided the states so badly  
that it almost tore the Confederation apart.

Back when Maryland had first

raised a stink about the Western Territory,  
Virginia had decided to assert its control  
over the region by selling land to settlers  
so that good Virginia citizens  
could spread into the West.  
But those eager settlers  
had soon run into a teeny-tiny problem.  
There was still a war going on,  
and the British held military forts in the West.  
When those settlers had asked their home state  
to send troops to defend them, Virginia said  
'We're kinda busy fighting this war back home,  
and we don't have any troops we can spare for you, so...  
...good luck.'  
Those settlers were not happy.  
They learned to fend for themselves,  
but, by the time the war ended,  
many considered themselves  
to be independent from both sides  
and a few had even discussed joining Spain, or France.  
The West, was a mess.  
But it also represented an opportunity  
for the states to finally get Congress  
off their backs about those debts they owed.  
Little old Rhode Island, whose last-minute refusal  
had killed the tax amendment,  
eagerly pointed out that selling land in the West  
could go a LONG way toward paying off that debt.  
Rhode Island banded together with the other states  
and pressured Virginia to give up their claims on the West.  
And, since that territory had turned  
into a giant mess for them anyway,  
Virginia agreed.  
Now that Congress controlled the West,  
they set up rules for how land  
would be divided up and sold.  
And even for how the towns should be built  
to include public services  
like schools and government buildings.  
Once these new territories  
reached a population of 20,000,  
they would join the confederation and become states.  
These laws promised security  
that Western settlers had never had before.  
and this not only helped shape new communities,  
but also helped convince the settlers

(formerly known as Virginians)  
that Congress cared about them too.  
Yet, this victory did not reverse  
the confederation's declining fortunes.  
Those forts that the British held in the West?  
Well, the British had agreed to leave them  
when they signed the peace treaty  
and, in return, Congress had agreed  
not to punish British citizens  
who had remained loyal to the crown.  
Unfortunately,  
the states repeatedly ignored this agreement  
by kicking British loyalists off of their land.  
and repeatedly ignored Congress's requests  
that they stop it.  
The Articles of Confederation  
had made Congress responsible  
for enforcing foreign treaties  
but, once again, they had no power to make it happen.  
And the British argued that,  
if the Americans wouldn't uphold their end of the treaty,  
then they didn't have to go it either.  
The British stayed in their forts  
perfectly positioned to sweep in and pick up the pieces  
when the United States fell apart.  
Both Europe and America  
had begun to take bets on when that would be,  
since it seemed inevitable at this point.  
The Western land sales hadn't come close  
to paying off the national debt,  
and now the states were making it even worse  
by printing their own money in open defiance  
of the confederation rules stating that they couldn't.  
They had even begun to fight among themselves,  
literally: the states of Connecticut and Pennsylvania  
were at war over a border dispute.  
Newspapers had begun openly calling  
for the States to break apart  
and form new, regional confederations.  
Many early revolutionaries  
saw this as the natural order of things.  
They had built their revolution on distrust  
for British Parliament and they had never intended  
the confederation Congress to step in and take its place.  
Their states were their home countries:  
not some vague idea of a continental union.

But the revolution that they had begun  
had grown out of their control  
and the new generation of American statesmen  
saw things very differently.  
Men like Alexander Hamilton had fought in the war  
alongside soldiers from all thirteen states.  
and the one thing that had brought them together  
was this idea of America:  
a country that belonged to all of them.  
Hamilton refused to let his new country fall apart.  
But years of serving in Congress had convinced him  
that this weak confederation government  
could not be fixed.  
It had too many fundamental flaws.  
It couldn't fund itself, it couldn't enforce laws,  
heck, it couldn't even get it's own delegates  
to show up half the time.  
Convincing the states to replace the Articles of Confederation  
with an untested new Constitution  
that had even more power?  
That would be an uphill battle, but  
Hamilton had won tough fights before.  
He just needed an opportunity.  
So, he decided to make one.  
In 1786 a small convention of states  
gathered to discuss trade policies.  
The Articles of Confederation left each state free  
to decide how to manage trade across their borders  
And the result had been a compeccated mess  
of competing state laws.  
Everyone expected to hash out  
some new specific policies at this convention,  
but Hamilton insisted that  
they all look at the bigger picture.  
Did they REALLY want to meet like this  
again and again, over every river and every trade route  
they shared with their neighbors?  
Wouldn't it be easier if they had some  
central authority whose job it was  
to decide these matters? Someone like...  
I dunno, Congress?  
By the end of the week,  
the states had made Hamilton their spokesperson,  
and authorized him to call for another convention  
to reform the Articles of Confederation.  
But only five of the thirteen states

had even bothered to attend this first meeting.  
If Hamilton wanted to change the government,  
he needed to convince them ALL to attend the next one.  
He needed to make it a show!  
To prove to the states that the one American they  
all respected, took this convention seriously.  
He needed Star Power.  
He needed George Washington.  
Washington had wanted to replace  
the Articles of Confederation since watching  
his soldiers nearly starve to death at Valley Forge.  
But he had since retired home to Virginia  
and sworn off public life.  
He didn't want to use his fame as  
'America's first General' to become a dictator.  
But if he attended,  
Hamilton knew that important people  
from every state would wanna be there.  
Even Benjamin Franklin might take a break  
from his new hobby of inventing bifocals  
to pick up his old hobby of writing Constitutions.  
Hamilton turned to his friend  
and fellow Congressman, James Madison, for help.  
Madison came from the same state  
as George Washington, but he had always been  
the odd-man-out in Virginia politics  
Where other statesmen loved  
to showboat and brag about their accomplishments,  
Madison worked quietly to get things done  
and let others take the credit.  
He had pushed for the tax amendment,  
he had helped convince Virginia  
to give up its Western land claims,  
and he had organized the small convention  
that Hamilton had used  
to call for the reform of the Confederation.  
Now, the time had come at last,  
for him to step into the public eye  
and earn a place in history.  
He started telling everybody that George Washington  
had agreed to attend this new convention  
as one of the delegates from Virginia.  
Now, Washington had agreed to no such thing,  
but Madison had met with him privately and said:  
'Hey, be cool, I'm not expecting you to actually be there  
you just TELL everybody that you'll be there,

so they show up, because, we both agree,  
this meeting NEEDS to happen, right?  
And after they have already committed to showing up,  
you can just cancel and, I'll look like an idiot,  
but that's okay, because we can still get what we want.'  
Washington agreed to go along with this.  
But Madison's plans extended even farther.  
While pretending that he was merely  
keeping Washington updated about the convention,  
Madison started to send him information  
about everyone who would attend  
He sought Washington's advice  
on what to do about the Articles of Confederation,  
gradually allowing Washington to feel like  
replacing the Article with an entirely new Constitution  
was HIS idea.  
Little by little,  
he persuaded Washington that,  
not only would the convention be a success,  
but that it would actually look really bad  
if the 'hero of the revolution' decided to not attend  
this historic Constitutional convention.  
And so, Washington, ever mindful of his legacy,  
decided 'alright, you know what?  
I'm actually going to go to this thing.'  
Now that he and Hamilton had their star guest,  
Madison left nothing to chance.  
He read philosophies and histories that helped him  
to build an exhaustive counter-argument  
to every possible objection  
about the evils of central government  
He compiled a list of every failure  
under the Articles of Confederation:  
a scathing thirteen-page record of starving troops,  
broken treaties, and failed legislation.  
When the convention met,  
he sat down with his fellow delegates from Virginia  
(including Washington) and convinced them all  
to adopt his so-called 'Virginia Plan.'  
A plan that called for the Articles of Confederation  
to be abolished, and replaced with a new Constitution.  
Some hesitated to accept this bold idea,  
but as soon as they realized that Washington endorsed it  
none of them wanted to oppose him.  
Finally, on May twenty-fifth, 1787,  
delegates from all thirteen states

met and chose George Washington  
to lead the Constitutional convention  
Immediately, the Virginia delegation  
laid out their plan to replace the Articles of Confederation  
Over the next few months,  
Alexander Hamilton and James Madison  
lead debates that picked apart the article's flaws  
and recast them into a centralized government  
with powers specifically granted  
to deal with all of the issues  
the Confederation Congress has struggled to resolve  
Together, they created the United States Constitution.  
But, that's a story for another time!  
\*click\*

???: But what if that story never happened?  
What if the Articles of Confederation never got replaced?  
And the U.S. never got a new Constitution?

Dan: Ah... hello...

Who're you?

???: I'm Cody, from the Alternate History Hub.

Cody: Someone on YouTube told me  
that you guys like to leave your studio open  
so guests like me can drop by the show!

Dan: \*sigh\* Okay, that... not... quite true...

Cody: It COULD be true! That's kinda what I do.

I talk about what might've happened

if things went little bit differently:

the 'what if's of the world. Like:

What if the Articles of Confederation stuck around?

What might have happened to the United States?

Dan: That... actually does sound really interesting.

Cody: Then come by my channel, the Alternate History Hub,  
and I'll tell you all about it!

Dan: You know what? I will do that.

Thanks for dropping by.

And thanks to all of you for watching,  
we will see you next time!

(Lil, would you PLEASE lock the door.)

♪ Music ♪