

## 4 Forging a Republic

### ★ Section Focus

★ **Key Terms** republic ■ Articles of Confederation ■ republicanism ■ Northwest Territory ■ Northwest Ordinance ■ inflation

★ **Main Idea** With independence, Americans faced the difficult task of creating stable governments.

**Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. What important ideas lay behind the state constitutions?
2. How did the American Revolution encourage social change?
3. What problems did the new national government face?

Harrison Gray Otis of Boston was eighteen when news of the peace treaty with Britain arrived. This nephew of James Otis and Mercy Otis Warren undoubtedly read the triumphant words of Thomas Paine: “The times that tried men’s souls are over and the greatest and completest revolution the world ever knew gloriously and happily accomplished.”

So it must have seemed to those who fought for one objective—independence. But with independence won, new struggles began to take shape. These struggles focused on how the ideals of the Declaration of Independence were to be realized both in law and in practice. Years later Otis wrote a friend: “You and I did not imagine when the first war with Britain was over that the revolution was just begun.”

**“You and I did not imagine when the first war with Britain was over that the revolution was just begun.”**

—Harrison Gray Otis

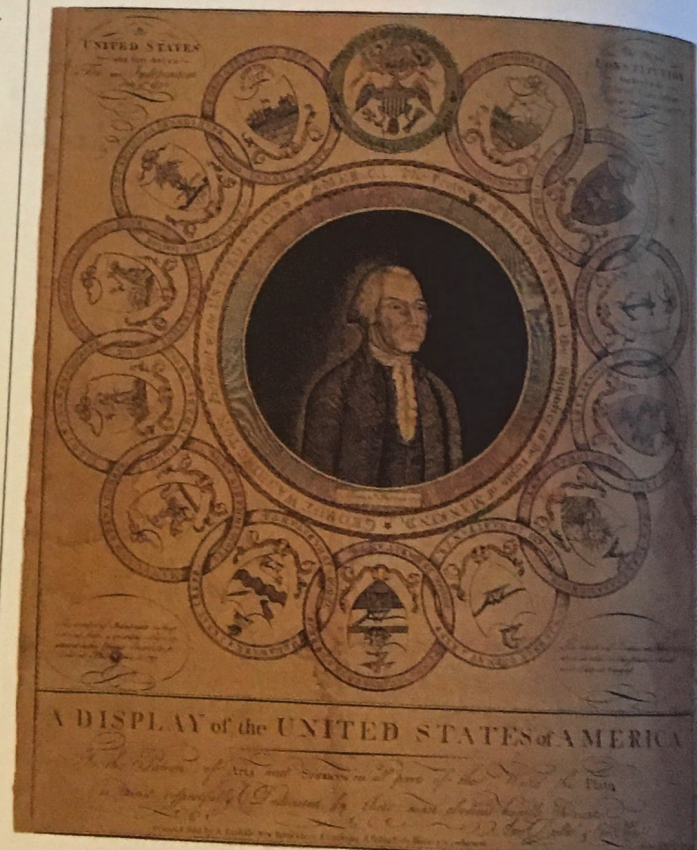
### THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS

Most Americans agreed that their new nation should be a **republic**, that is, a nation ruled by elected representatives of the people. Between 1776 and 1780, therefore, eleven of the thirteen former colonies drew up a constitution, a plan for government. Connecticut and Rhode Island rewrote their colonial charters.

Several important ideas underlay the American

constitutions. One was the idea of compact, of people making an agreement for the common good. Another was that a good government derives its authority from the consent of the governed. A third idea was that there are fundamental laws that are different from ordinary laws. Fundamental laws cannot be changed by mere lawmakers.

In 1776 the Continental Congress had also ap-



This display features George Washington surrounded by the seals of the thirteen states and the national seal (top). Which state had the most inhabitants at the time? What was the nation's population? **NATIONAL IDENTITY** Describe the relationship between the states and the central government in 1781.



pointed a committee to come up with a plan for the national government. In 1781 the states accepted that plan of government, the **Articles of Confederation**. The Articles formalized an arrangement already in effect, an arrangement in which the states held most of the power.

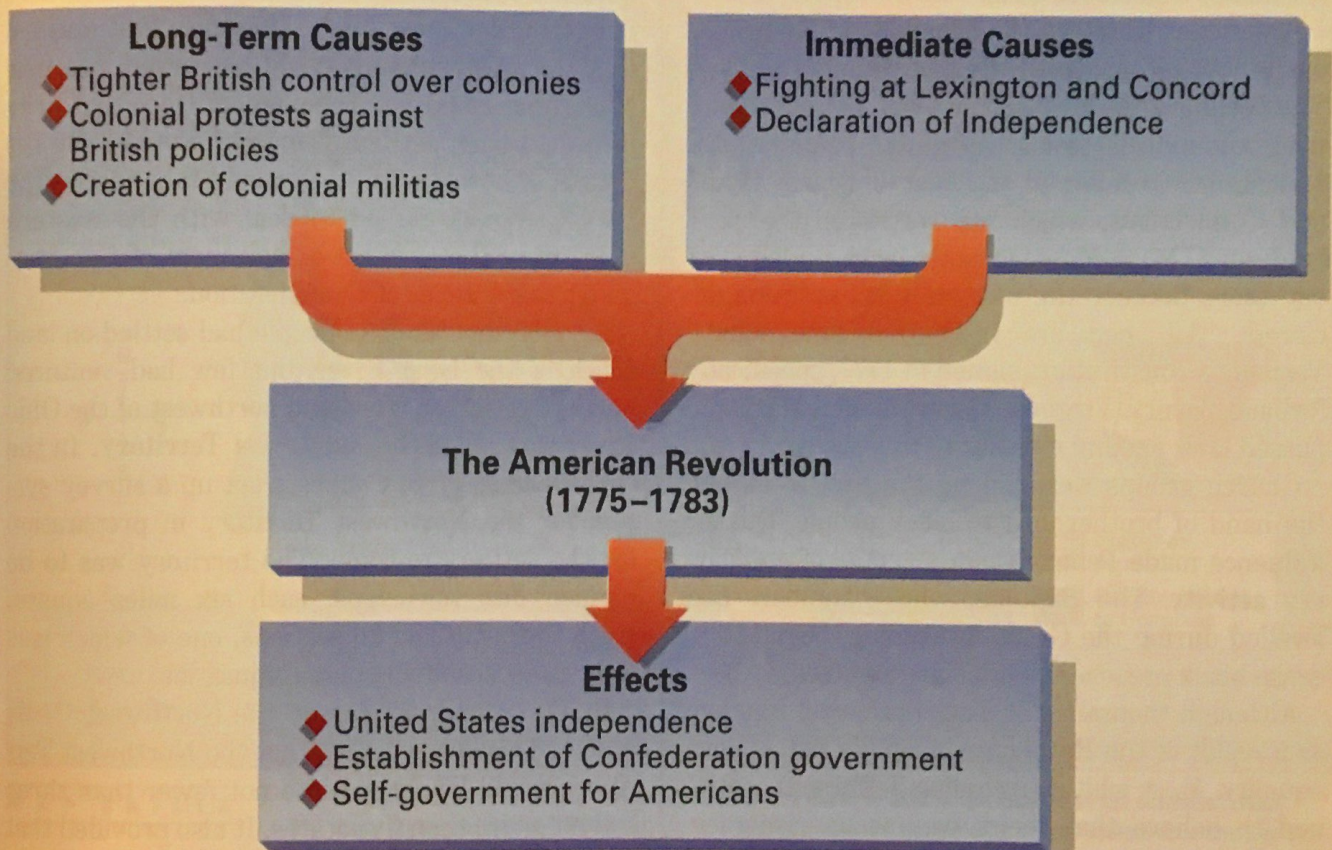
The Articles of Confederation, reflecting the people's suspicion of authority, placed severe restrictions on the power of the central government. Because Americans had learned to fear the power of kings and royal governors, the executive branch was a three-person committee elected by the Confederation Congress, with few powers. Congress had power to make war and peace, but it could not levy taxes or enforce laws. Each state had one vote, and it took a vote of nine states to make a major decision. To prevent the development of a privileged elite, the Articles forbade anyone from

serving more than three years in Congress. Amending the Articles required a unanimous vote of the states. In sum, the Articles of Confederation created a league of independent states, a league with very limited powers.

### REPUBLICANISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

While the states remained largely separate from one another, they did share certain ideas. One such idea came from Jefferson: "All men are born equal. . . ." For many this meant that no person was born either to rule or to obey. In the army the men often insisted on choosing their own leaders, and some of the best officers thus came from the ranks. Before the Revolution an artisan would never have held public office. After the war, artisans achieved a new position in society. Many were elected to the new state legislatures.

## CAUSE AND EFFECT: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



### CHART SKILLS

Colonial resistance to Britain's attempts to tighten its control led to the American Revolution. **CRITICAL THINKING** Could the Revolution have been avoided? Why or why not?



This sense of equality among people was part of **republicanism**. Republicanism was a belief that, if their nation were to thrive, its citizens had to possess certain qualities and virtues. These included a sense of equality, simplicity, and sacrifice for the public good.

Republicanism also included a belief in freedom of conscience. Among the most important of the reforms brought by the Revolution was the effort to end religious discrimination. Although some states still prevented Catholics, Jews, and atheists from officeholding, other states began to remove such restrictions. Beginning with Virginia, state after state also stopped supporting churches with government-collected taxes.

Educated citizens were essential to the survival of the republic, leaders like Thomas Jefferson believed. After the war, therefore, an expansion of educational opportunity took place. New secondary schools, colleges, and state universities opened. And for the first time women's education received attention with the founding of private secondary schools for girls.

Americans who took the meaning of liberty seriously now reconsidered the institution of slavery. The feeling grew that slavery was not consistent with republican ideals. Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland followed the lead of Rhode Island and Connecticut, which had restricted the slave trade in 1774. A Massachusetts court ended slavery there because the new state constitution declared: "All men are born free and equal." Vermont's constitution, signed in 1777, specifically forbade slavery. Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland passed laws making it easier to free slaves.

Church groups were among the first to extend the hand of brotherhood to black people. Quaker influence made Pennsylvania a center of antislavery activity. The Baptists, whose numbers had swelled during the Great Awakening, began to license black preachers, both slave and free.

Although thousands of blacks achieved freedom as a result of the Revolution, they did not achieve equality. Most whites (including Jefferson) continued to believe that theirs was a superior race. Freed blacks, not accepted as equals in white society, began to develop their own religious and educational institutions.

Republicanism emphasized that both men and women had important roles to play in society. Men were to be breadwinners and decision-makers in the republic. Women were to manage the home and raise virtuous children who would be good citizens. The purpose of women's education, therefore, was to encourage them to become dutiful wives and wise mothers.

### THE WESTERN LANDS

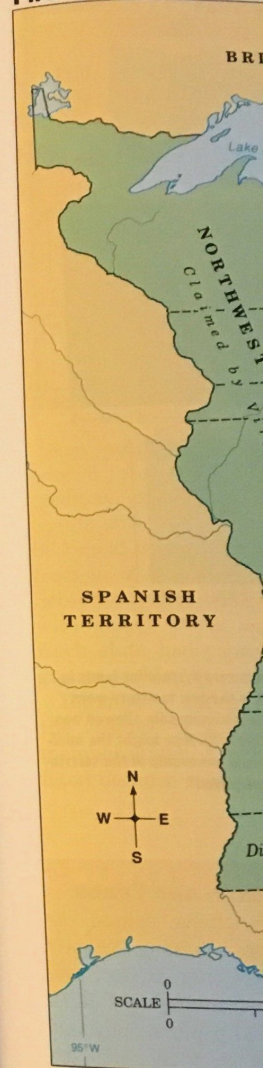
Many of the ideas behind republicanism received a testing in the lands west of the Appalachians. The original charters of some states gave them claims to those lands. Maryland, which had no land claims, had refused to ratify the Articles of Confederation until Virginia ceded its land claims. Virginia agreed to this request, and Maryland then ratified the Articles. In the years that followed, all other states gave up their land claims as well, thereby making sacrifices for the nation as a whole.

The Confederation Congress then faced the question of how to deal with the hordes of settlers hungering for these lands. Congress first decided that the western lands could be carved into new states that could join their union. Once that principle had been settled, Congress worked out the details of how this process would take place. The laws Congress passed to deal with the western lands were the greatest achievement of Congress under the Articles of Confederation.

By 1785 thousands of people had settled on land south of the Ohio River, but few had ventured north of the river. This land northwest of the Ohio River was called the **Northwest Territory**. In the Ordinance of 1785, Congress set up a survey system for the Northwest Territory in preparation for the settlers to come. The territory was to be divided into townships, each six miles square. Each township had 36 sections, one of which was to be used to support public education.

In 1787 Congress passed the **Northwest Ordinance**. This law specified that the Northwest Territory would be carved into not fewer than three and not more than five states. It also provided that a governor and judges appointed by Congress should rule until a territory was ready for statehood. In addition, the law guaranteed settlers

### THE STATES' WEST



### MAP SKILLS



# THE STATES' WESTERN LAND CLAIMS



## MAP SKILLS

This map shows the claims various coastal states made to land in the interior of the continent. How many states existed in 1790? **CRITICAL THINKING** How did the yielding of land claims ease the way to a unified government?



certain basic rights. Reflecting the growing anti-slavery sentiment, the Ordinance outlawed slavery in the territory. This meant that the future states of Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan would never know human bondage.

★ **Historical Documents**

For an excerpt from the Northwest Ordinance, see page R17 of this book.

**INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS**

Congress's record in dealing with other issues was not as successful as with the western lands. Congress could not pay its debts, reach trade agreements with other nations, or establish economic stability.

To fight the Revolutionary War, Congress had borrowed large sums of money. France had loaned the most, but Holland, Spain, and European banks had also advanced loans to the infant nation. With the war over, it was now time to pay back the loans. Yet the United States did not have the revenue to do so. Some proposed that Congress be allowed to impose an import duty to raise money. But opposition from the states killed the plan.

Congress also found that it did not have the power to earn the respect of other nations. Chief among the Confederation's problems was trade. Having fought their way out of the British Empire, Americans found themselves shut out of old trading patterns. Britain now discriminated against American shipping, particularly in the West Indies. Britain also refused to give up its forts in the western lands, and the new nation lacked the military muscle to remove the forts.

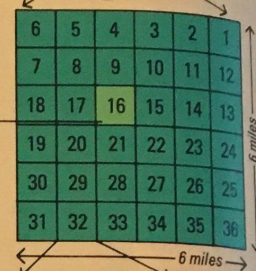
Relations with Spain were likewise poor. Like Britain, Spain put up barriers to American shipping in the West Indies. Spain and the United States also quarreled over the boundary of Florida. Even worse, Spain threatened to restrict American use of the lower Mississippi River even though the Treaty of Paris had guaranteed such access. Economic development of the western lands depended on this water link with world markets.

**THE ORDINANCE OF 1785**

Public lands were divided into townships

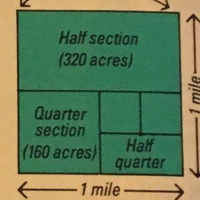


Each township was divided into 36 sections



One section reserved to support schools

Each section could be divided into smaller lots



**CHART SKILLS**

The Ordinance of 1785 established a survey system for lands in the Northwest Territory. Public lands in the new territory were divided as shown by this diagram. The minimum sale allowed was 640 acres at \$1 an acre. **CRITICAL THINKING** How might the minimum sale requirement have affected land ownership in the territories? What role might speculators have played?

**PROBLEMS OF DEBT, CURRENCY, AND TRADE**

Bad as problems with other nations seemed, domestic issues proved even more troubling. Nobody seemed to have money—not Congress, not the states, not the towns, not most individuals. Both Congress and the states issued paper money but without hard currency—gold or silver coin—to back it. As a result, the money lost value. By 1781 a coin shilling was worth 75 times more than a paper shilling. The result was severe **inflation**. In a time of inflation, prices rise because the value of money is dropping.

**SOCIAL HISTORY**  
*Famous*

- 1775 Continental money issued
- 1776 "United States" authorized a name, rather than "United States" (Sept. 9).  
Phi Beta Kappa founded and Mary (Dec. 5).
- 1777 American flag formalized Vermont first state to be repaid in paper money (July 8).
- 1782 Order of the Purple Heart (Aug. 7).
- 1786 "E Pluribus Unum" first used on state coin

How people viewed the debt depended to a large extent on whether they were creditors or debtors. Congress and the well-to-do states had to be repaid in paper money, a small fraction of the original value. Debtors stood to gain if they were repaid with money worth less than the debt. Each state had paper money and groups seeking to control it.

Yet another difficulty was the absence of a way to force member states. Arguments were complicated because each state

**CHAPTER 4 TIME**

1760



**SOCIAL HISTORY**  
*Famous Firsts*

- 1775** Continental money issued (June 22).
- 1776** "United States" authorized by Congress as a name, rather than "United Colonies" (Sept. 9).  
Phi Beta Kappa founded, College of William and Mary (Dec. 5).
- 1777** American flag formally adopted (June 14).  
Vermont first state to abolish slavery (July 8).
- 1782** Order of the Purple Heart established (Aug. 7).
- 1786** "E Pluribus Unum" first used, in New Jersey on state coin.

How people viewed the currency problem depended to a large extent on whether they were creditors or debtors. Creditors included merchants and the well-to-do. No creditor wanted to be repaid in paper money that was worth only a fraction of the original loan. On the other side, debtors stood to gain if they could pay back a debt with money worth less than the original loan. Each state had paper-money and hard-currency groups seeking to control government.

Yet another difficulty for the Confederation was the absence of a way to settle disputes among member states. Arguments and bad feelings escalated because each state had its own trade policy.

The northern states imposed duties on imported goods, but Delaware and the southern states did not. Furthermore, states began levying duties against the products of other states.

Increasing numbers of politicians, merchants, and manufacturers began to agree that the Confederation Congress needed power over commerce. The alternative, they feared, was that the thirteen states might become thirteen nations. If so, they could become prey to the imperial schemes of Britain and Spain. The United States had won the war. But could it survive the peace?

**SECTION REVIEW**

- 1. KEY TERMS** republic, Articles of Confederation, republicanism, Northwest Territory, Northwest Ordinance, inflation
- 2. COMPREHENSION** What three ideas were expressed in the new state constitutions?
- 3. COMPREHENSION** Why did Americans want a weak central government?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** How did the Confederation Congress provide for settlement of the Northwest Territory?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** When John Adams was trying to negotiate a trade treaty with Britain, he was asked, "Do you represent one nation or thirteen?" What was meant by the statement? Why would the British be reluctant to negotiate a treaty with Adams?

**CHAPTER 4 TIMELINE**

