

**CHAPTER FIVE: A VIRTUOUS REPUBLIC:  
CREATING A WORKABLE GOVERNMENT, 1783–1789**

**READING AND STUDY GUIDE**

- I. Republicanism and the Politics of Virtue
  - A. George Washington: The American Cincinnatus
  - B. The Politics of Virtue: Views from the States
  - C. Democracy Triumphant?
  - D. Debtors versus Creditors
  
- II. Life under the Articles of Confederation
  - A. No Taxation without Representation
  - B. Diplomacy: Frustration and Stalemate
  - C. Settling the Old Northwest
  - D. Shays's Rebellion
  
- III. The Movement for Constitutional Reform
  - A. The Road to Philadelphia
  - B. Large States versus Small States
  - C. Conflict over Slavery
  - D. Filling out the Constitutional Design
  
- IV. The Great Debate
  - A. Federalist versus Anti-Federalists
  - B. The Theory of the Large Republic: The Genius of James Madison
  - C. Ratification
  - D. The Creation of a Loyal Opposition

In 1776, patriot leader John Adams wrote that “public virtue is the only foundation of Republics. There must be a positive passion for the public good, the public interest.” Adams echoed many Americans’ views when he wrote that republican government depended on the concept of public virtue, which meant pursuing the public good and placing it ahead of personal interest or local attachments. Men were expected to serve in the militia, sit on juries, and, if they were truly virtuous and wise, take on the burden of public service as elected representatives. Women, too, were expected to play a major role in the political life of the new republic, assuming the role of republican mothers and wives who would instill patriotism and virtue in their children and spouses.

Americans of the revolutionary generation took their cues from the lessons of history, particularly the example of the Roman Republic and its ideal of public virtue. When Dr. Joseph Warren, physician and Patriot leader, addressed Bostonians on the fifth anniversary of the Boston Massacre in 1775, he literally donned a Roman toga, the long flowing gown that symbolized freedom and citizenship. Warren’s dramatic gesture, linking himself with Roman republicanism, was mirrored in the pages of nearly every American newspaper of the day, where

letters and essays on political matters were signed with pen names drawn from Roman history, such as the politicians Brutus and Cato, and the great Roman general Cincinnatus.

To mold a new generation of virtuous citizens, Americans looked to education, religion, and even architecture. No American was more enthusiastic about architecture's capacity to instruct than Thomas Jefferson. Public buildings, Jefferson wrote, "should be more than things of beauty and convenience, above all they should state a creed." Rather than emulate contemporary Georgian-style buildings such as the Pennsylvania State House, the building in which the Declaration of Independence was drafted, Jefferson argued for a return to the purity of Roman architecture. In his design for the Virginia State Capitol, Jefferson succeeded in re-creating the simple beauty of Roman architecture. He believed that the Virginia State Capitol would inspire citizens to emulate the ideals of the ancient Roman Republic, which included an emphasis on civic participation and public virtue.

In the decade following independence, Americans' faith in their ability to create a virtuous republic was severely challenged. An aborted coup led by disgruntled Continental Army officers, conflicts between debtors and creditors, and an uprising in western Massachusetts drove the nation to a political crisis. The events of the postwar period tested America's faith in republicanism and led some leaders to abandon traditional republican theory, with its emphasis on virtue, and to embrace a new approach to constitutional government that relied on a balance of conflicting interests and a system of checks and balances. The culmination of this struggle between the two competing visions of constitutional government was the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

### **Learning Objectives**

After a careful examination of Chapter 5, students should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the American philosophy of republicanism embraced during the Revolution.
2. Describe the generally held beliefs in America regarding who should vote and who should hold political office. Explain the differences in the qualifications for the two.
3. Describe the status of women in America after the Revolution.
4. Understand the Revolution's impact on slavery and the issue of emancipation.
5. Explain the impact of the Revolution on Native Americans.
6. Describe the characteristics of the state constitutions that emerged after 1776.
7. Describe the provisions of the Articles of Confederation. Explain the meaning of the term *confederation* and comment on why Americans chose this form of government during the Revolution.
8. Identify the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation as a tool of government and connect the weaknesses of the document to its eventual failure.

9. Identify Robert Morris and explain his proposals to improve the nation's financial condition.
10. Explain the historical significance of Shays's Rebellion and why historians consider it a catalyst in the movement toward a new United States constitution.
11. Discuss the Confederation Congress's policy regarding western land. List the three major ordinances that were designed to regulate the land in the Northwest Territory.
12. Understand how provisions in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Southwest Ordinance of 1790 will contribute to sectionalism during the nineteenth century.
13. Discuss the issues surrounding American access to the Mississippi River.
14. Explain the historical significance of the Annapolis Convention as a prelude to the Constitutional Convention.
15. Comment on the socioeconomic backgrounds of the framers of the United States Constitution.
16. Explain the provisions of the Great Compromise and point out the ways in which it drew from both the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan.
17. Discuss the impact of sectionalism and slavery on the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention.
18. Describe the constitutional provisions for a national executive.
19. Compare and contrast the fundamental provisions of the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution.
20. Explain the meaning of the term *checks and balances* and point out how they are provided for in the Constitution.
21. Explain the concept of *federalism* and understand how both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution provided for federal forms of government.
22. Identify the two factions that emerged during the debate over the ratification of the Constitution.
23. Explain how the Republican virtues of womanhood were used in needlework.

### **Key Terms & Definitions**

**Articles of Confederation** America's first constitutional government in effect from 1781–1788. The articles created a weak decentralized form of government that lacked the power to tax and compel state obedience to treaties it negotiated. (138)

**Treaty of Paris (1783)** Treaty between the newly created United States of America and Britain that officially ended the war between the two and formally recognized American independence. (138)

**Old Northwest** The region of the new nation bordering on the Great Lakes. (139)

**Northwest Ordinance of 1787** One of several laws adopted by the Confederation Congress designed to provide a plan for the orderly settlement of the Northwest Territory (the area north of the Ohio River and west of Pennsylvania). In addition to providing for a plan for self-governance, the Ordinance also prohibited slavery from the Northwest Territory. (141)

**Shays's Rebellion** Uprising in western Massachusetts in which farmers organized themselves as local militia units and closed down courts to prevent their farms from being seized by creditors. (142)

**Virginia Plan** A plan framed by James Madison and introduced in the Constitution Convention by Edmund Randolph that called on delegations to abandon the government of the Articles and create a new, strong national government. (145)

**New Jersey Plan** Proposal made by William Patterson of New Jersey as an alternative to the more nationalistic Virginia Plan that would have retained the principle of state equality in the legislature embodied in the Articles of Confederation. (146)

**Great Compromise** Compromise plan proposed by Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut that called for equal representation of each state in the upper house and a lower house based on population. (146)

**Federalists** The name adopted by the supporters of the Constitution who favored a stronger centralized government. (149)

**Anti-Federalists** The name reluctantly adopted by opponents of the Constitution who insisted that they, not their opponents, were the true supporters of the ideal of federalism. Anti-Federalists opposed weakening the power of the states and feared that the Constitution yielded too much power to the new central government. (149)

### **Study Questions:**

What did virtue mean to the Founders of the American Republic? (128)

Why did Americans believe Washington was the modern Cincinnatus? (130)

What was the Newburgh Conspiracy? (131)

How did changes in furniture design reflect the influence of republican ideas? (132)

Why was education so important to the Founders of the American Republic? (133)

How did republican ideas change notions about women's roles? (134)

Why did many supporters of republicanism fear democracy? (135)

Why did William Smith's portrait cast him as a country gentleman rather than an urban merchant? (136)

How did the composition of the state legislatures change after the American Revolution? (137)

Why did the Articles of Confederation lack the power to tax? (138)

What diplomatic frustrations hampered the new American nation? (139)

What was the conquest theory and how did it influence diplomatic relations with Indian peoples? (140)

What republican features distinguish the Northwest Ordinance? (141)

What was Shays's Rebellion? (142)

Whose view of Shays's Rebellion was more realistic, Washington's or Jefferson's? (143)

What were the main features of the Virginia Plan? (144)

Why did small states oppose the Virginia Plan? (145)

How did the conflict over slavery shape the debates of the Constitutional Convention? (146)

How did the electoral college strengthen the powers of the states and further the ideals of republicanism? (147)

Identify the most important differences between the federal Constitution and the typical state constitutions of this period. (148)

Why did Federalist and Anti-Federalist authors adopt names such as Publius and Brutus? (149)

How does *The Looking Glass for 1787* portray the Anti-Federalists? (150)

Why did traditional republican theorists believe that republics needed to be small to survive? (151)

How did the argument of The Federalist No. 10 change republican theory? (152)

Why did urban artisans support the Constitution? (153)

What does the Grant Federal Procession tell us about popular Federalist beliefs? (154)

Why was there no anti-Constitution movement after ratification? (155)