



The Constitutional Convention

(also known as Philadelphia
Convention)

Tobias Doerffel, April 21st 2009

General facts

- When? May 25 to September 17, 1787
- Where? Philadelphia in Pennsylvania
- What? creation of the United States Constitution
- Who? 55 delegates (most of them were also part of the Founding Fathers)



Some more details

- in 1786: James Madison invited to a meeting in Annapolis, Maryland to discuss ways to reduce interstate conflicts - only a few states attended so they decided to meet again in Philadelphia in 1787 -> improve the Articles of Confederation
- various different deliberations:
 - Virginia Plan (powerful bicameral legislature; upper/lower house)
 - Plan of Charles Pinckney (Senate+House of Delegates (one member/1,000 inhabitants), Congress elects President)
 - New Jersey Plan (limit smaller state's power, number of representatives in both houses of legislature proportional to population; very powerful Congress)
 - Hamilton's Plan (aka the British Plan) (similarities to the British system of government; consolidate states into a single nation)
 - Connecticut Compromise (one Senator per state, proportion of suffrage according to number of free inhabitants)

Slavery

- one of the most controversially discussed issues besides equality of representation for all states
- slaves accounted for about 1/5 of the population in the American colonies - most of them in the Southern colonies
- conflict between North and South (Southern states would refuse to join the Union)
- finally: Three-Fifths Compromise
- another issue: slave trade (postponed)

Drafting and signing

- in late July: appointment of a committee to draft a document based on agreements reached
- one month later second committee (C. of Style and Arrangement) produced final version and submitted for signing on September 17
- not everyone pleased with the results: delegates from Virginia and Massachusetts refused to sign
- Bill of Rights finally added and considered the final compromise of the Convention
- **Benjamin Franklin:** "There are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them. ... I doubt too whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution. ... It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies..."