HIST 201 B – Lecture 3: Revolution and the Founding (1763–1789)

3.1



Ideology

Why did colonists who saw themselves as British subjects declare independence?

Conflict

How did they win a war against the strongest empire in the world?

Governance

How did a loose league of states agree on a unified Constitution?

Whose liberty did the Revolution secure—and whose did it leave out?

3.2

1763–1765: The Search for Imperial Revenue

Post-1763:
Parliament requires new revenue streams.

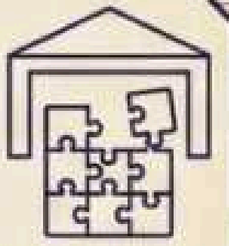
Sugar Act (1764)
Raised duties on colonial trade.

Stamp Act (1765)
Taxed printed materials (newspapers, legal documents).

Ideological
The rallying cry of "No taxation without representation" (colonists had no MPs in Parliament).



Political
The Stamp Act Congress convenes (9 colonies unite).



Physical
Grassroots mobilization as mobs actively attack stamp agents.



3.3

1766–1767: Retraction and Reassertion

Policy Loop

The Pivot (1766)

Parliament repeals the Stamp Act, BUT instantly passes the Declaratory Act, asserting its absolute right to make laws for the colonies "in all cases."

Grassroots Resistance

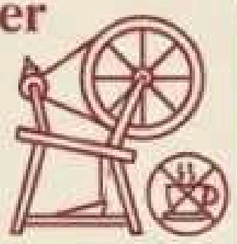
Colonists launch a widespread boycott of British goods to choke imperial revenue.

The New Tax (1767)

Parliament passes the Townshend Acts, placing heavy taxes on essential imports: glass, paper, and tea.

Women's Political Power

Women played a highly visible, role in sustaining the boycott by spinning their own cloth at home refusing imported British tea.



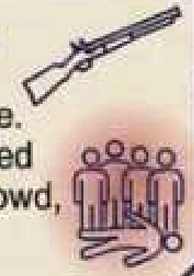
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1770–1773: Tensions Boil Over in Boston

Escalation Ladder

March 5, 1770

The Boston Massacre. British troops stationed in the city fire on a crowd, killing five people.



Legal Aftermath

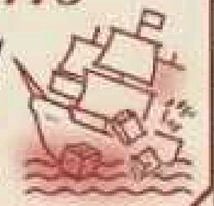
Patriot John Adams defends the British soldiers in court to uphold the rule of law; most are acquitted.

The Catalyst (1773)

Parliament passes the Tea Act, attempting to force colonial compliance.

December 16, 1773

Colonists strike back by dumping 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor (the Boston Tea Party).



1774: The Intolerable Acts and Colonial Unity

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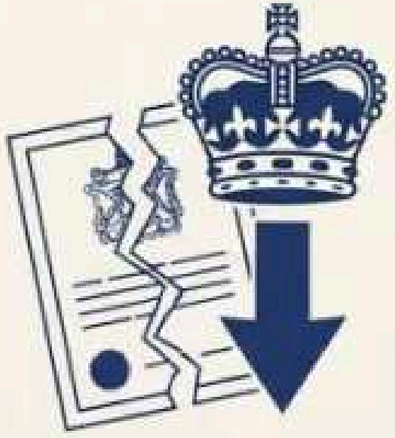
British Action

The Coercive Acts (1774)
Britain's harsh punishment for the tea dumping.



Mechanics:

- Closed the port of Boston entirely and aggressively curbed self-government in Massachusetts.



Colonial Reaction

Perception: Universally dubbed the **"Intolerable Acts"** by colonists.



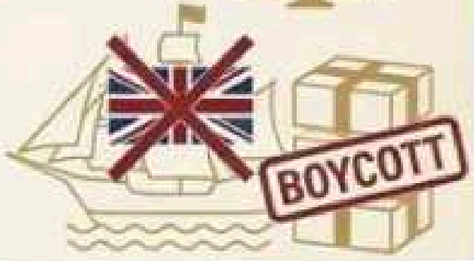
Solidarity: Rather than abandoning Massachusetts, other colonies rallied to its defense.



Organization: The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia (September 1774).



Strategy: Delegates from 12 colonies agree on a sweeping, coordinated boycott of all British trade.



1775: The Outbreak of Armed Conflict

3.6



April 19: Lexington & Concord

British troops march to seize colonial supplies but are met by armed militia. The first shots are fired.

May: Institutionalizing the Rebellion

The Second Continental Congress takes charge of the war effort, officially appointing George Washington as commander of the new Continental Army.

June: Bunker Hill

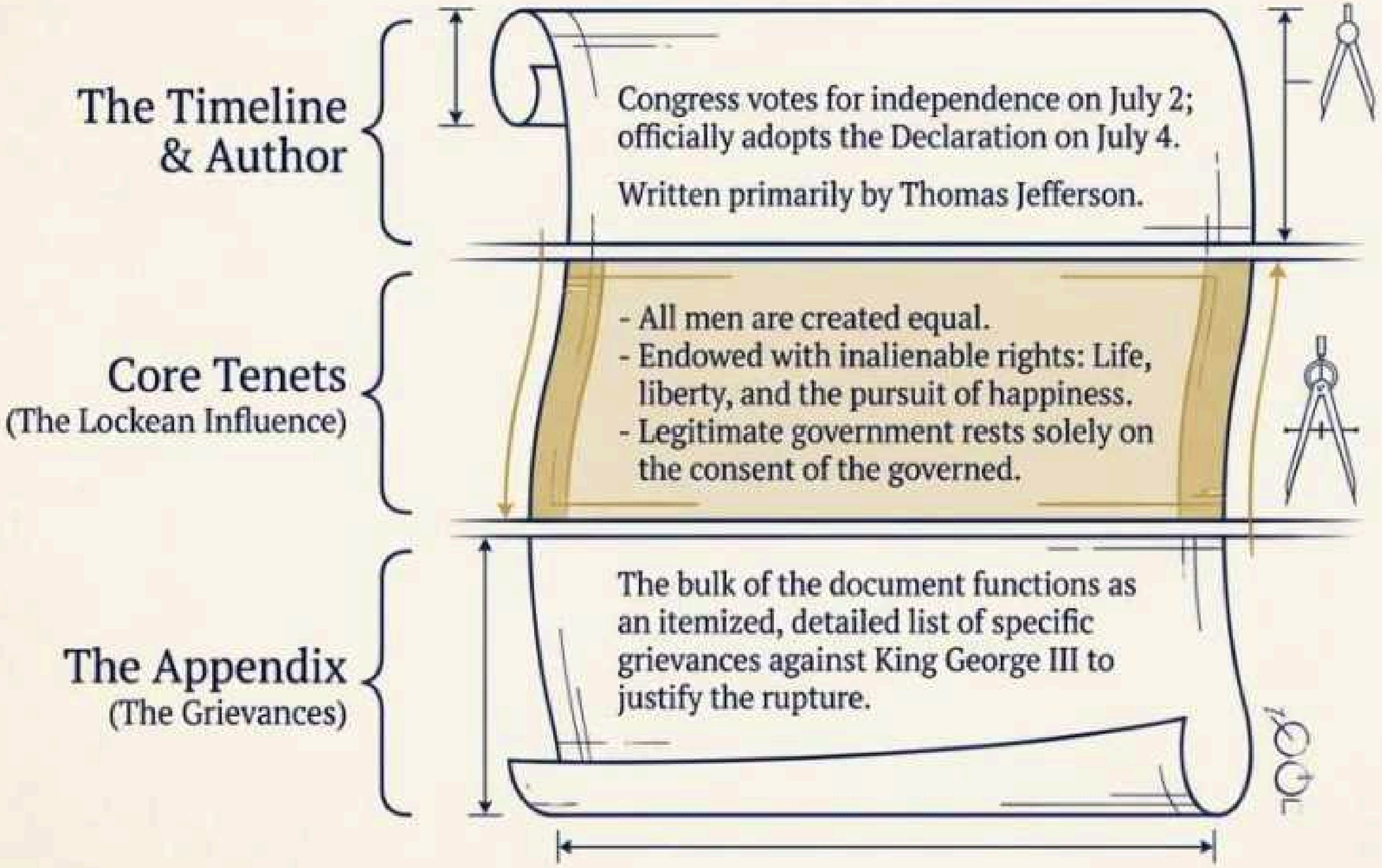
A brutal engagement. The British win the battlefield but suffer devastatingly heavy losses.

Insight: The Hesitation

Despite the active bloodshed and formation of an army, many colonists still actively hoped for a royal reconciliation with the king.

July 1776: The Anatomy of Independence

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The Tension of Universal Ideals

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Ideological Dissonance Matrix

The Ideal (Universal Language)

"All men are created equal."

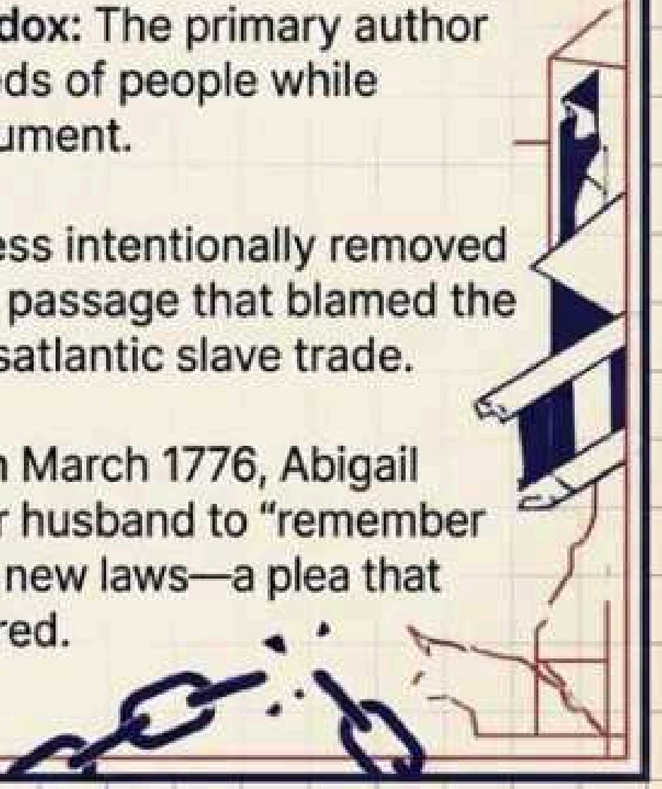
These sweeping terms created a standard that future generations would continually hold the nation to.

The Reality (Systemic Exclusions)

Jefferson's Paradox: The primary author enslaved hundreds of people while drafting the document.

The Edit: Congress intentionally removed Jefferson's draft passage that blamed the king for the transatlantic slave trade.

The Blindspot: In March 1776, Abigail Adams urged her husband to "remember the ladies" in the new laws—a plea that was largely ignored.

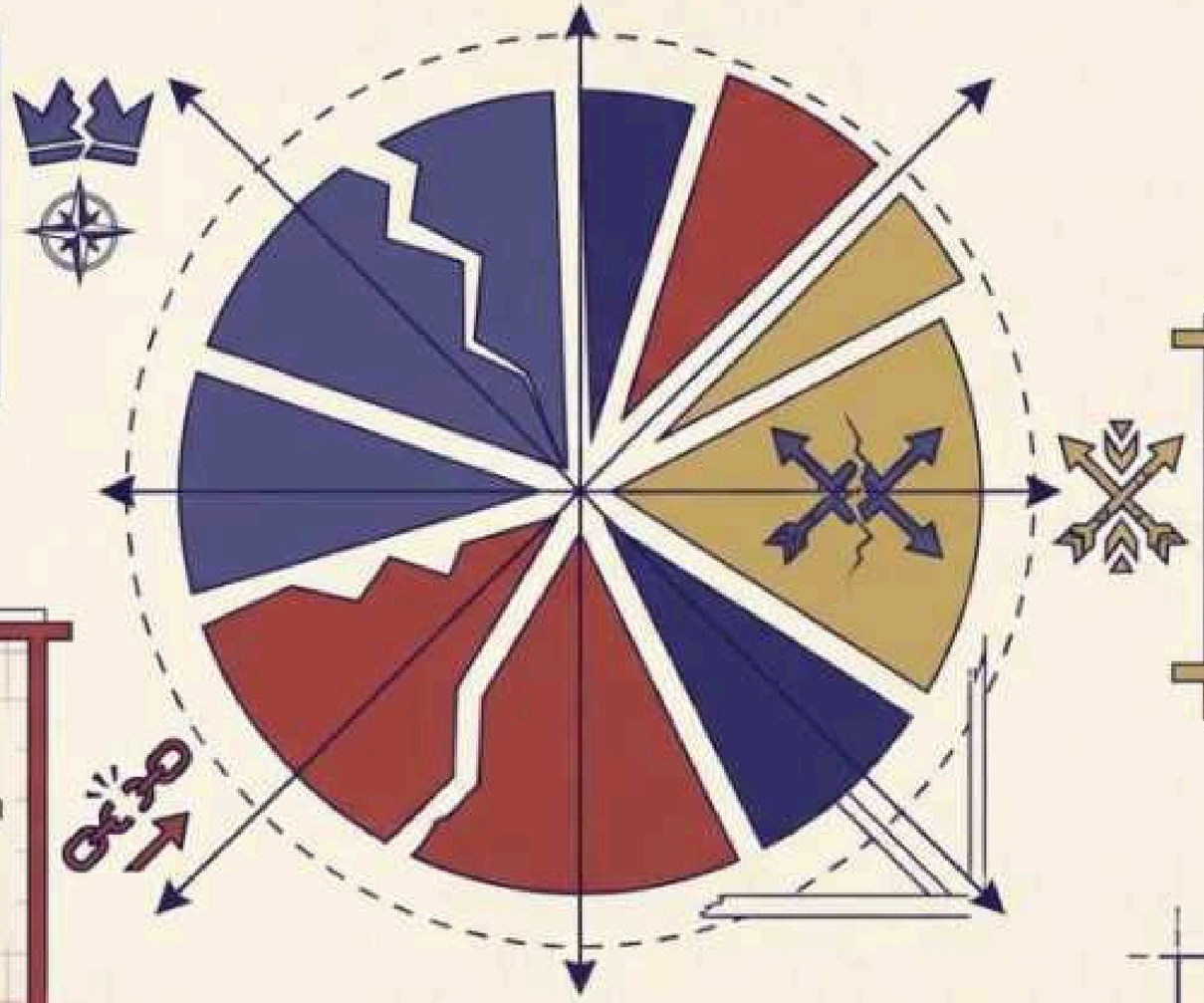


A Fractured Population

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The Loyalists

Approximately 20% (1 in 5) of white colonists remained loyal to the Crown. Tens of thousands were forced to leave during or after the war.



Native Nations

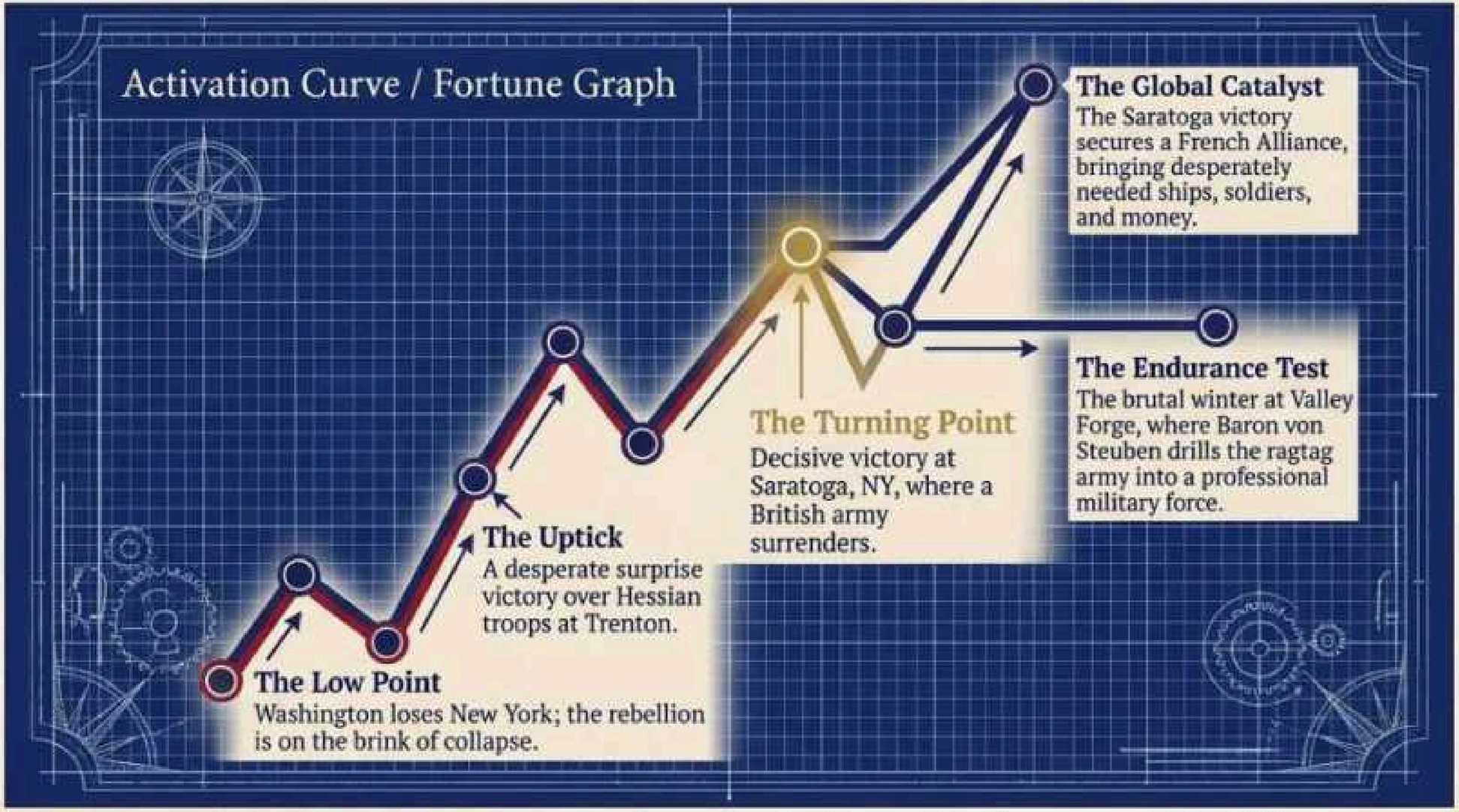
Forced to choose sides in a proxy war. The powerful Haudenosaunee league was structurally splintered by the conflict.

Enslaved People

In 1775, Lord Dunmore (royal governor of VA) promised freedom to enslaved people of rebel owners who joined the British cause. Thousands fled to British lines to secure their liberty.

The Arc of the War (1776–1778)

3.10



1781–1783: Victory and The Treaty of Paris

3.11

The Final Trap (1781)



A French fleet combined with American and French ground armies corner General Cornwallis at Yorktown, VA. (He surrenders October 19).

The Treaty of Paris (1783)



- Britain formally recognizes American independence.
- The new nation's western border is established at the Mississippi River.

Critical Omission

Native nations, despite actively fighting on both sides of the conflict, were entirely excluded from the peace table.

Post-Revolution Society: The Divergence on Slavery

3.12

States write new constitutions; several expand white male suffrage.

The North (Abolition Begins)

Vermont (1777): Bans adult slavery entirely.

Pennsylvania (1780): Passes a gradual abolition law.

Massachusetts (1783): State courts effectively end slavery.

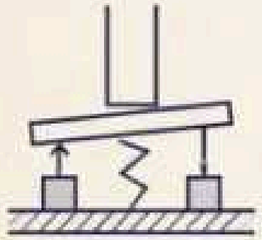
The South (Entrenchment)

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric of liberty, the institution of slavery remains firmly protected and deeply entrenched in southern society and economics.

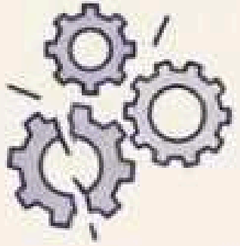
The First Blueprint: The Articles of Confederation (1781)

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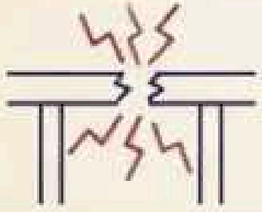
Systemic Weaknesses (The Flaws)



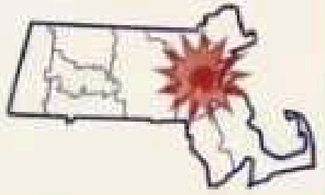
- No federal power to levy taxes.
- No federal power to regulate trade.
- Equal voting power (one vote per state) regardless of population size.



Symptom of Failure (The Breaking Point)



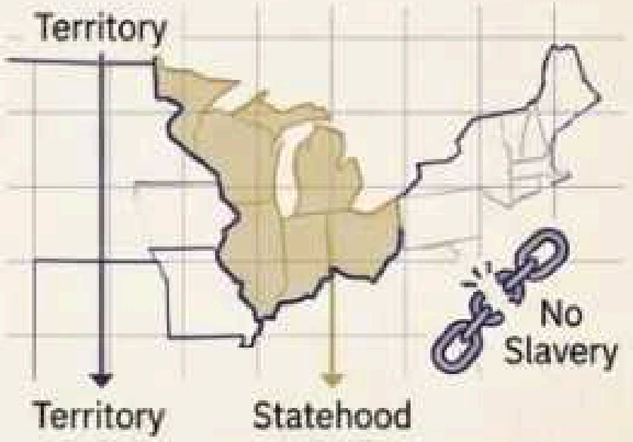
Mounting national debts and domestic disputes trigger Shays' Rebellion (1786–1787), deeply alarming national leaders.



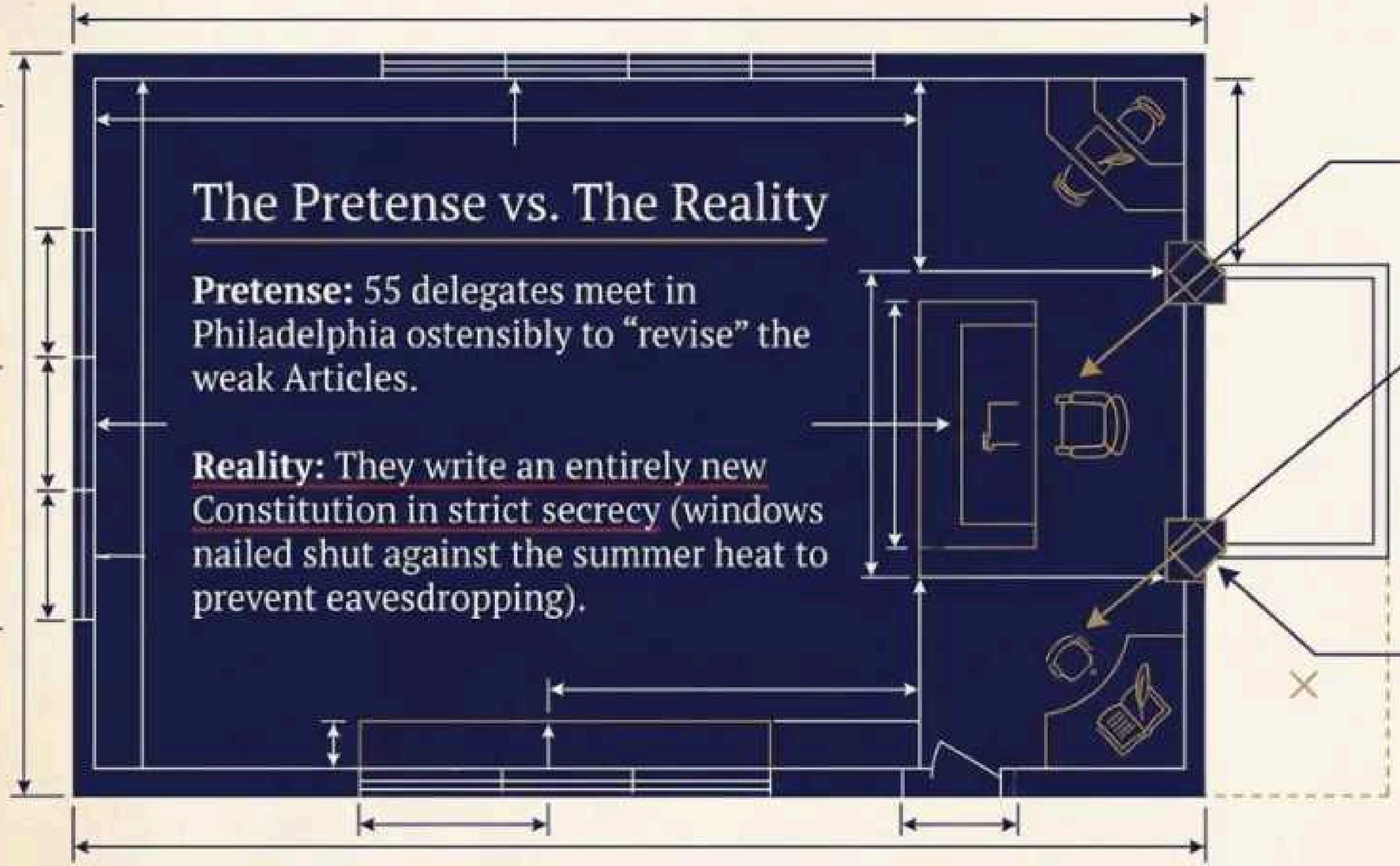
Sole Major Success

The Northwest Ordinance (1787)

Set a structured path to statehood for lands north of the Ohio River and explicitly banned slavery in that territory.



Summer 1787: The Constitutional Convention 3.14



The Pretense vs. The Reality

Pretense: 55 delegates meet in Philadelphia ostensibly to "revise" the weak Articles.

Reality: They write an entirely new Constitution in strict secrecy (windows nailed shut against the summer heat to prevent eavesdropping).

The Players

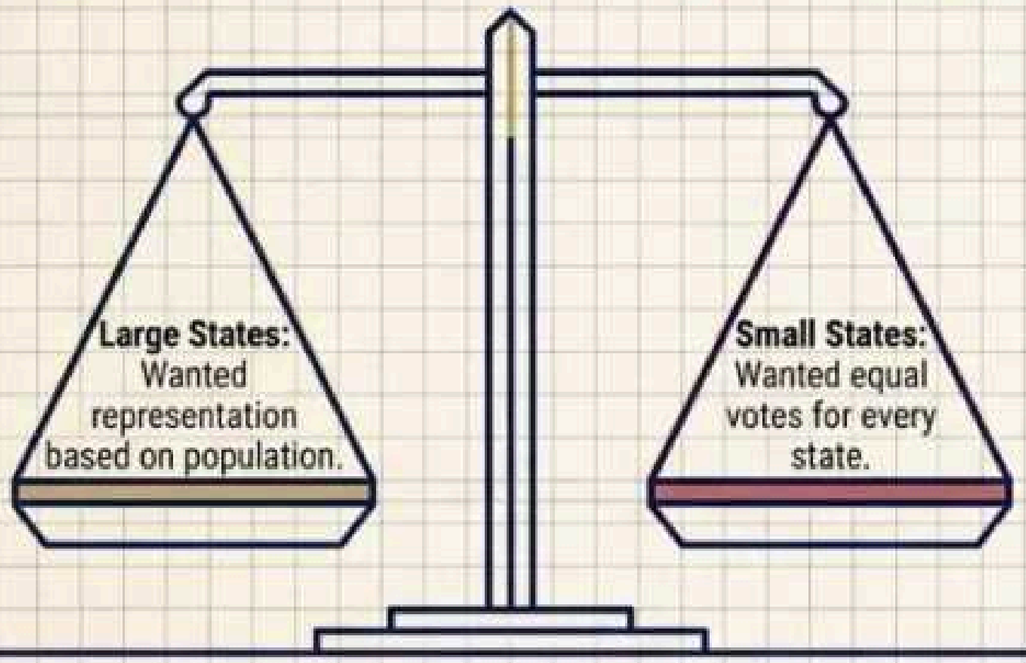
- **Presiding Officer:** George Washington (lending critical legitimacy).
- **Chief Architect:** James Madison (took careful notes, proved the most influential thinker).
- **The Holdout:** Rhode Island (refused to send any delegates).

The Nation's Blueprint

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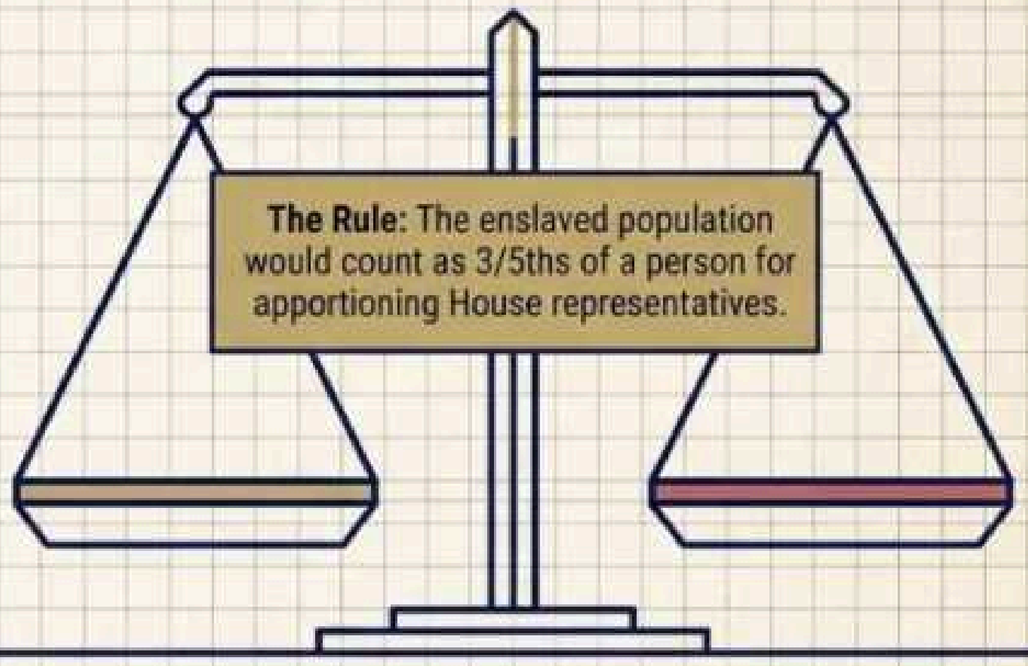
Forging the Document: The Great Compromises

Scale 1: The Great Compromise (Representation)



The Fix: A Bicameral legislature
(House = Population, Senate = 2 members per state).

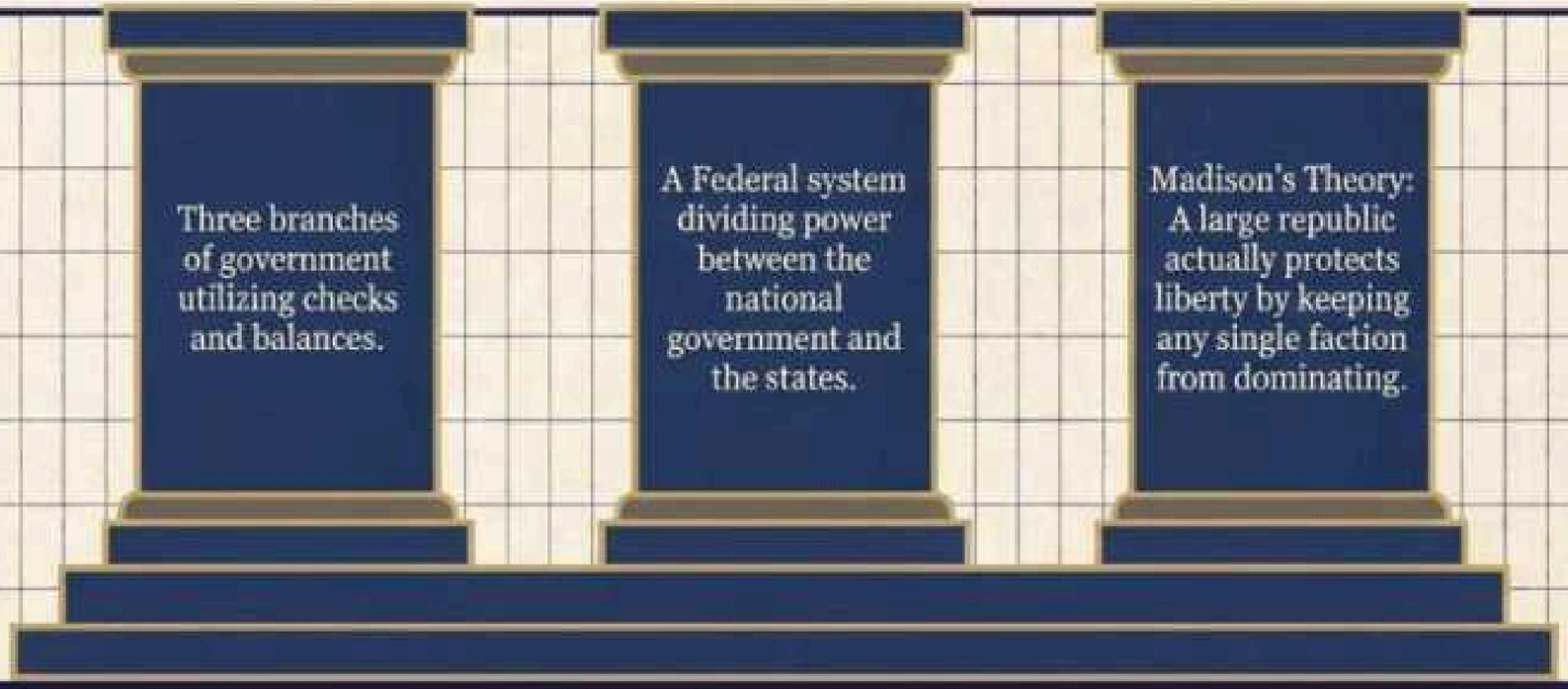
Scale 2: The Three-Fifths Compromise (Power & Slavery)



The Impact: Massively and artificially inflated Southern political power in the new government.
(Note: The Constitution intentionally never used the word 'slave').

3.16

Government Structure & Slavery's Influence



The Hidden Foundation (Slavery Provisions)

- The Importation Clause: Congress was explicitly banned from ending the importation of enslaved people before 1808.
- The Fugitive Clause: Constitutionally mandated that people who escaped slavery must be returned.

The Battle for Ratification

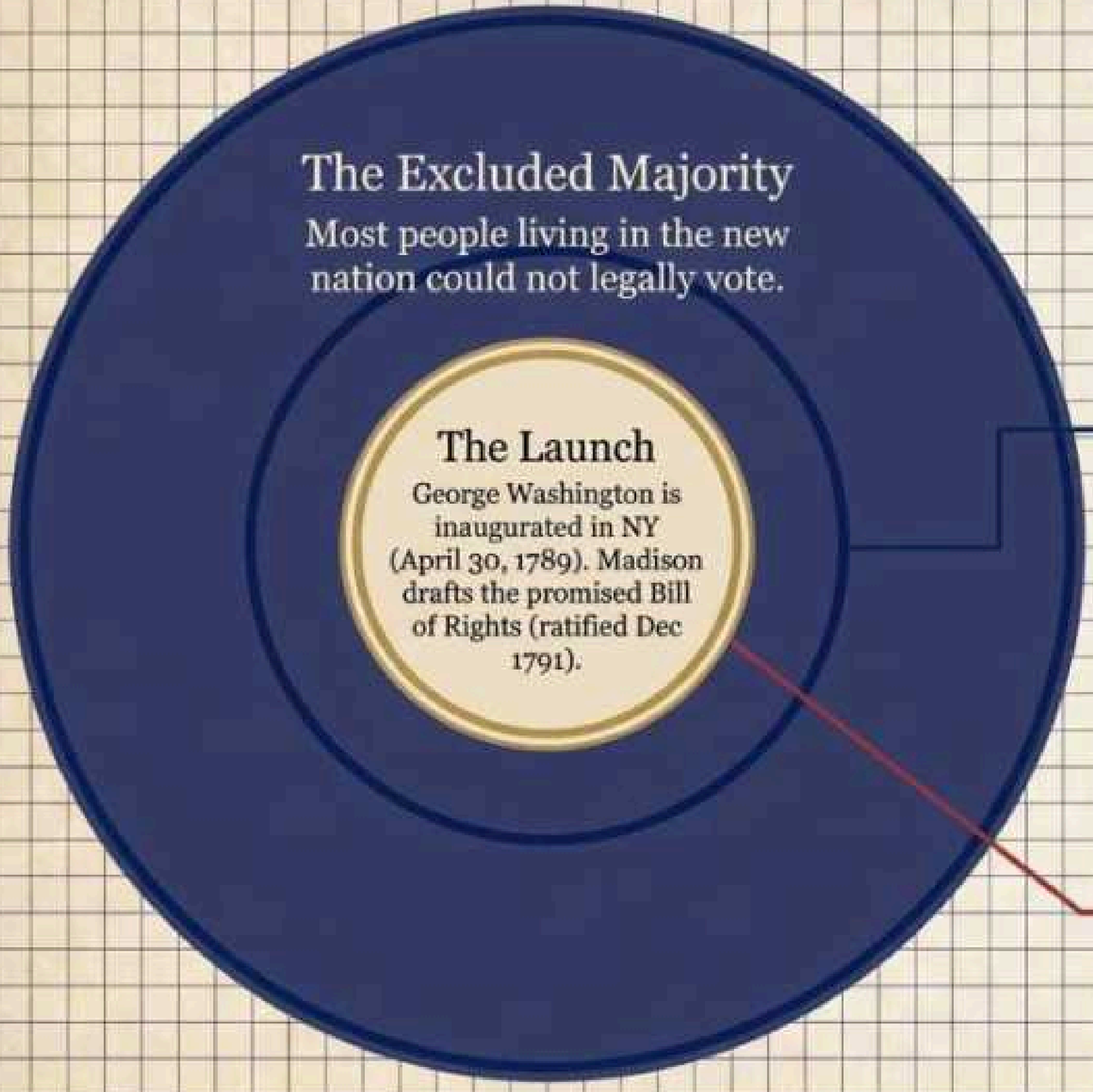
3.17

Federalists (Pro-Constitution)	Anti-Federalists (The Skeptics)
• **Key Figures:** Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay. • **Strategy:** Wrote 85 persuasive essays (The Federalist Papers) under the pseudonym Publius to sway public opinion toward a strong central government.	• **Core Fear:** A distant, overly powerful central government that would trample rights. • **Core Demand:** A formal Bill of Rights to explicitly protect individual liberties.

The Result (June 1788): The Constitution takes effect when New Hampshire becomes the crucial 9th state to approve it.

3.18

1789–1791: The New Nation and Its Exclusions



The Marginalized

Women, enslaved people, Native peoples, and (in most places) free Black men were entirely excluded from the democratic mechanics.

The Seeds of Change

Excluded groups did not remain silent; many immediately began utilizing the universal language of the Revolution to demand their rights.

Closing Synthesis: The Foundational Paradox

3.19

Document A (The Ideal)	**Document B** (The Compromise)
The Declaration of Independence	The U.S. Constitution
"All men are created equal..."	Article One: The Three-Fifths Clause."

Analytical Exercise

How do these two foundational documents fit together, and how do they fatally conflict?

The Historical Echo: Abolitionist Frederick Douglass famously raised this exact question in his 1852 address, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

Looking Ahead: In Lecture 4, we will follow these unresolved tensions into the early republic.