

## LESSON 2

1775

1780

1786 1787

1790

1795

# THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

### READ ALOUD

*In 1786 Congress wrote to George Washington asking him to attend a meeting. The letter said, "Commissioners to meet at Philadelphia on the second Monday in May next, to take into consideration the situation of the United States." Washington had "retired forever" from public life. Yet his country needed him again.*

### THE BIG PICTURE

In September 1786 **Alexander Hamilton** from New York and **James Madison** from Virginia attended a meeting of the Congress held in Annapolis, Maryland. They met to discuss problems between the states. As the meeting went on, everyone agreed that a second meeting was needed.

The delegates asked Hamilton to write a letter inviting delegates from all 13 states to this second meeting. George Washington was invited to this meeting. The meeting came to be known as the **Constitutional Convention**.

Hamilton had to be careful about what he said in the letter. The government under the Articles of Confederation was not working. But many leaders were not ready to get rid of the Articles. The letter was about making changes to them. What actually happened, however, was very different.

### Focus Activity

#### READ TO LEARN

What was the result of the Great Compromise?

#### VOCABULARY

Constitutional  
Convention

Virginia Plan  
legislative branch  
executive branch  
judicial branch

Supreme Court

New Jersey Plan

Great Compromise

House of Representatives  
Senate

#### PEOPLE

Alexander Hamilton

James Madison

George Mason

Roger Sherman

## THE DELEGATES MEET

In May 1787 the delegates began arriving in Philadelphia for the meeting. Newspapers called it "The Grand Convention." Fifty-five delegates came.

### The Constitutional Convention

The meeting began on May 25, 1787. It took place in the Philadelphia State House.

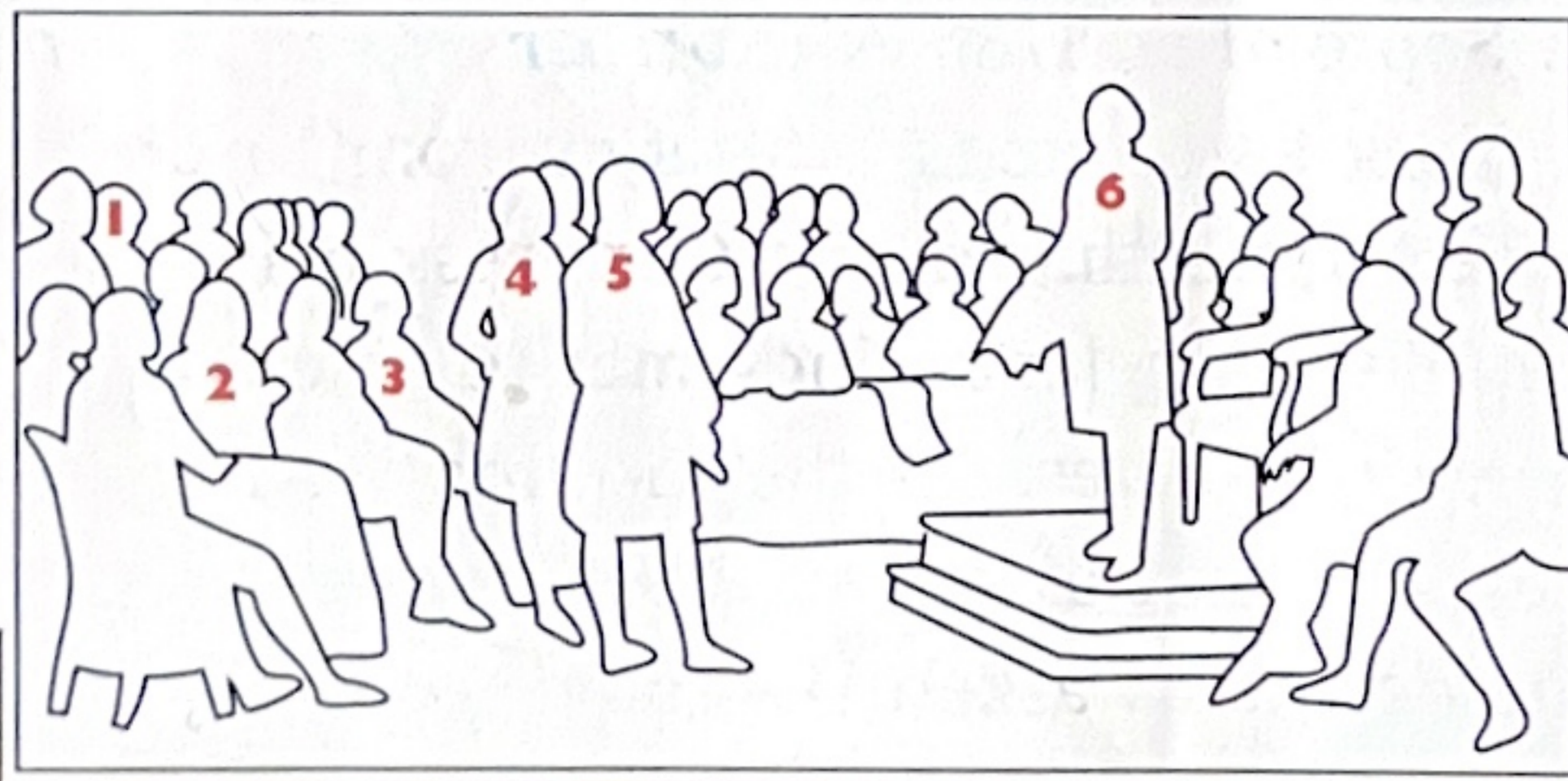
The delegates included Hamilton, Madison, and Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania. Other delegates included **George Mason**, who had helped write Virginia's constitution, and Gouverneur Morris, who was from New York.

Absent from the convention were Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Patrick Henry. Jefferson and Adams were abroad, doing their jobs as

ambassadors. An ambassador is a representative sent by one country to another. Henry refused to attend the convention. "I smell a rat," he said, believing the delegates would try to take power away from the states.

The delegates had many things in common. All were white men who owned land. More than half of them were lawyers. Most of the delegates had fought in the war. Many had helped write the constitutions of their states.

George Washington was voted president of the convention. He asked that the meeting be secret. It would be easier to work without pressure from the public. The delegates nailed the windows shut and closed the doors. Not even the terrible summer heat made them open the windows.



*Washington Addressing the Constitutional Convention, by Junius B. Stearns, includes portraits of 1. Gouverneur Morris, 2. Benjamin Franklin, 3. James Madison, 4. John Rutledge, 5. Alexander Hamilton, and 6. George Washington.*



## MADISON AT THE CONVENTION

James Madison came to the convention 11 days early. He liked to be prepared.

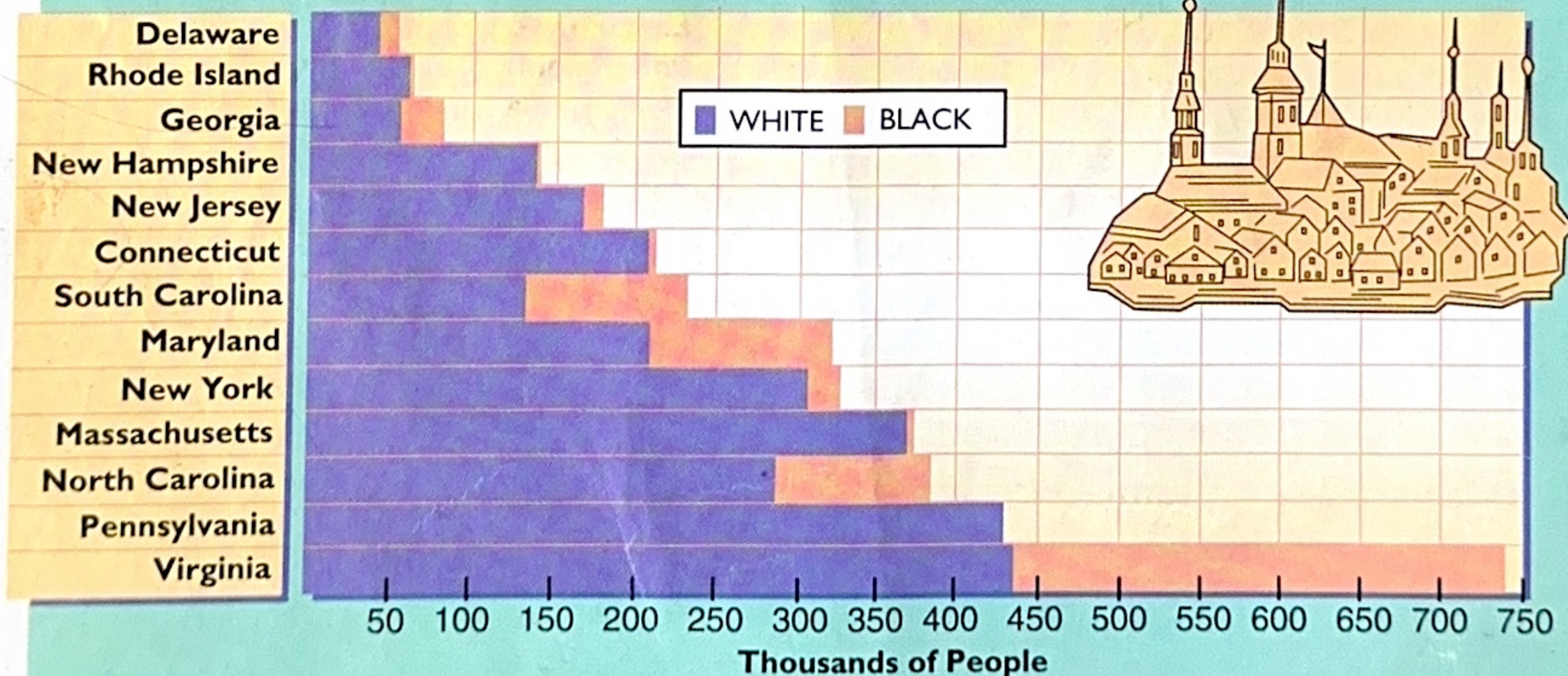
Madison spent all his daylight hours reading books about other governments. Delegate William Pierce of Georgia wrote that Madison was "the best informed man on any point in a debate."

Today we know a great deal about the Constitutional Convention because of the notes kept by James Madison. He chose a seat in front so he could hear and write down everything that was said. "I was not absent a single day," wrote Madison, "nor more than a fraction of an hour in any day."

This portrait of James Madison, made at age 23 or 24, is set in a brooch that is now kept in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.



### POPULATION OF THE THIRTEEN STATES IN 1790



Source: United States Census, 1790.

### GRAPH WORK

The year 1790 was the date of our country's first census.

1. Which state had the largest population of black people in 1790?
2. Which states had populations between 300,000 and 450,000?
3. Why do you think Virginia had the largest population and Delaware the smallest?

## The Virginia Plan

Madison left nothing to chance. He arrived at the meeting with a plan of government already written. He made sure his plan was the first one discussed. Because it was presented by Virginia's governor, Edmund Randolph, it was to be called the **Virginia Plan**. The plan would establish a republic. One part of the plan said "that a national government ought to be established."

In the Virginia Plan it said that the central government should have three branches, or parts. A **legislative** (LEJ ihs lay tihv) **branch**, or law-making body, called the Congress, would make laws for the country and raise money for the central government.

The **executive** (eg ZEK yuh tihv) **branch** would be headed by one President. The role of the President would be to carry out the laws made by Congress.

The third branch was a **judicial** (joo DIHSH ul) **branch** that would decide the meaning of laws. It would be headed by a body of judges called the **Supreme Court**.

On May 30 the delegates voted to accept part of the Virginia Plan. This was important to Madison because it meant that the delegates were not going to bother trying to change the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they were going to form a new central government under a new plan. From that point on, the meeting was a Constitutional Convention. James Madison became known as the "Father of the Constitution."

## The New Jersey Plan

The Virginia Plan asked for a Congress based on population. States with a lot of people would have more members than states with few people.

The large states liked this plan. It would give them more representatives than the smaller states. The small states did not like this plan. If they had fewer representatives than the large states, they would have less power in making laws.

The small states presented the **New Jersey Plan**, which gave all states the same number of representatives. Look at the graph on page 348. You see that Virginia, with a population of over 700,000, would have the same number of representatives as Delaware, which had a population of about 59,000.

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**Eliza Powel, wife of a former mayor of Philadelphia, was among those who greeted the convention delegates.**

