

**1. Great Compromise:** The Articles of Confederation under which America operated from 1781-1787 provided that each state would be represented by one vote in Congress. When changes were being discussed for how states should be represented during the creation of a new Constitution, two plans were pushed forward. The Virginia Plan provided for representation to be based on the population of each state. On the other hand, the New Jersey Plan wanted equal representation for every state. **The Great Compromise, also called the Connecticut Compromise, combined both plans. The Senate would be based on equal representation and the House would be based on population.** Below are two viewpoints on the issue:

**Position A:** Representation in both houses should be based strictly on population. "As all authority is derived from the people, equal numbers of people ought to have equal numbers of representatives. This principle was improperly violated in the Confederation, owing to the urgent circumstances of the time. Whether wealth or numbers were to form the ratio, it would be the same." (Wilson, Pennsylvania.) "Whatever reason might have existed for the equality of suffrage when the Union was a federal one among sovereign states, it must cease when a national government is put in place. There is the same reasons for different numbers of representatives from different states as from counties of different populations within particular states." (Madison, Virginia.)

**Position B:** All states should have equal representation in the national legislature. "Proportional representation will strike at the existence of the smaller states. Since this convention was called...to revise the Articles, we...have no power to go beyond the federal scheme. We must follow the people; the people will not follow us. A confederacy supposes sovereignty in the members composing it and sovereignty supposes equality." (Paterson, New Jersey) "[The Federalists] insist that although the powers of the general government will be increased, yet it will be for the good of the whole; and although the three great states [Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts] form nearly a majority, they will never hurt or injure the lesser states. I do not trust you, gentlemen. If you possess the power, the abuse of it could not be checked; and what then would prevent you from exercising it to our destruction?" (Bedford, Delaware)

**2. Three-Fifths Compromise:** Once it was decided that representation in the House of Representatives as to be based on population, delegates from Northern and Southern states had a difference of opinion on how slaves should be counted. Delegates for the Northern states where the economy did not rely heavily on slavery, felt that slaves should not be counted towards representation. This would provide the South with a greater number of representatives. On the other hand, Southern states fought for slaves to be counted in terms of representation. The compromise between the two became known as the three-fifths compromise because out of every five slaves, three would be counted in terms of representation. So,  $\frac{3}{5}$  of a state's total slave population would be counted toward the representation. Below are two viewpoints on the issue:

**Position A:** Slaves should be counted in determining representation. "Blacks must be included in the rule of representation equally with whites. The labor of a slave man in South Carolina is as productive and valuable as that of a freeman in Massachusetts. Since wealth is the great means of defense and utility to the nation, the slaves are equally valuable to it with freemen.

Consequently, an equal representation ought to be allowed for them.” (Butler, South Carolina)  
“Slaves are valuable, they raise the value of the land, increase the exports and imports, supply revenue and the means of feeding and supporting an army. They ought not to be excluded from the estimate of representation.” (Mason, Virginia)

**Position B:** Slaves should not be counted in determining representation. “I can regard negroes in no light but as property. They are not free agents, have no personal liberty, no faculty of acquiring property and like other property are at the will of their master. Has a man in Virginia a number of votes [in state elections] proportional to the number of his slaves? If negroes are not represented in the states to which they belong, why should they be represented in the national government? What is the true principle of representation? It is an expedient by which an assembly of certain individuals chosen by the people is substituted in place of the inconvenient meeting of the people themselves. If such a meeting of the people themselves was actually to take place, would the slaves vote? They would not. Why then should they be represented?” (Paterson, New Jersey)

**3. US. Slave Trade Compromise:** Those who opposed slavery in the northern states wanted to bring an end to the importation and sale of slaves. On the other hand, southern states felt that slavery was vital to their economy and did not want the government interfering in the slave trade. In the end, the North agreed to wait until 1808 before Congress would be able to ban the slave trade in the US. Below are two viewpoints on the issue:

**Position A:** The slave trade should be abolished. “Slavery is the curse of heaven on the state where it prevails. Compare the free regions of the middle states where a rich and noble cultivation marks the prosperity and happiness of the people, with the misery and poverty which overspread the barren wastes of Virginia, Maryland and the other states having slaves. The inhabitants of Georgia and South Carolina go to the coast of Africa and in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tear away their fellow creatures from their dearest connections. Domestic slavery is the most prominent feature in the aristocratic countenance of the proposed Constitution. The vassalage of the poor has ever been the favorite offspring of aristocracy.” (Morris, Pennsylvania)

**Position B:** The national government should not interfere with the slave trade. “Let every state import what it pleases. The morality or wisdom of slavery are considerations belonging to the states themselves. What enriches a part enriches the whole and the states are the best judges of their particular interest.” (Ellsworth, Connecticut.) “South Carolina can never receive the Constitution if it prohibits the slave trade. In every proposed extension of the powers of Congress, that state has expressly and watchfully excepted that of meddling with the importation of negroes.” (Pinckney, South Carolina) “Religion and humanity have nothing to do with this [the slave trade]. Interest alone is the governing principle with nations.” (Rutledge, South Carolina)

**4. US. Election of the President:** The Articles of Confederation did not provide for a Chief Executive of the United States. Therefore, when delegates decided that a president was

necessary, there was a disagreement over how he or she should be elected to office. While some delegates felt that the president should be popularly elected, others feared that the electorate (voters) would not be informed enough to make a wise decision. They came up with other alternatives such as having a president appointed by Congress or having three people serve as president, rather than one person. In the end, the two sides compromised with the creation of the Electoral College. The president is not chosen directly by the people but by a group of officials known as the Electoral College. The Framers of the constitution in 1787 rejected both the election of the president by Congress and election by direct popular vote, on the grounds that people would vote for their local candidate and the big states would dominate. The Southern states favoured the electoral college system because while slaves had no votes, under the constitution  $\frac{3}{5}$  of the slave population counted in the census (a population count). Thus, the citizens vote for electors who then vote for the president. Below are three opinions on the issue:

**Position A:** An elected president should serve for life. “I am of the opinion of so many of the wise and good that the British government is the best in the world. There can be no good government without a good executive. The English model is the only good one on this subject. The hereditary interest of the king was so interwoven with that of the nation that he was placed above the danger of being corrupted from abroad—and at the same time both sufficiently independent and sufficiently controlled to answer the purpose of the institution at home. Let the Executive also be for life.” (Hamilton, New York)

**Position B:** The executive should be appointed by and responsible to the national legislature. “The Executive magistracy is nothing more than an institution for carrying the will of the Legislature into effect. The persons or person ought to be appointed by and accountable to the Legislature only, which is the depository of the supreme will of the society. The Legislature are the best judges of the business which ought to be done by the Executive and the number should not be fixed, but the Legislature should be at liberty to appoint one or more as experience might dictate.” (Sherman, Connecticut)

**Position C:** A national leader should be elected by the people for a fixed term. “It may sound fanciful, but I am for an election of the executive by the people. Experience, particularly in New York and Massachusetts, showed that an election of the first magistrate by the people at large has been a convenient and successful mode. The objects of choice in such cases must be persons whose merits are well known. The term should be three years with reelection possible.” (Wilson, Pennsylvania.) “I favor a term of at least seven years with a prohibition on reelection. This will prevent a temptation on the side of the Executive to intrigue with the Legislature for a reappointment.” (Mason, Virgin)