

The Legacy of Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great conquered much of his known world in merely 10 years. After his sudden death, those who followed him founded a violent but creative new world based on Greek culture.

King Phillip II of Macedonia, a kingdom north of Greece, conquered all of the Greek city-states. When he was assassinated in 336 B.C., his 20-year-old son, Alexander, assumed the throne. Greek teachers, including the great philosopher Aristotle, had educated the young king. Already a seasoned warrior, he had accompanied his father on military campaigns as a cavalry commander.

King Alexander solidified his authority at home and violently crushed a revolt by the Greek city-state of Thebes.

Then, he made plans to liberate the Greek cities in Asia Minor (now Turkey) from Persia and to punish the Persians for destroying Athens about 150 years earlier. The Persians were ruled by Darius III, known as the “Great King.”

In the spring of 334 B.C., Alexander led a Macedonian force of 35,000 men across the Hellespont, the narrow strait that separates Europe from Asia. When he reached the other side, he drove his javelin into the ground, symbolizing that his new empire would be “won by the spear.”

Alexander had little trouble defeating the Persians in Asia Minor, where Darius did not personally command his troops. But when Alexander and his army reached the city of Gordium, he confronted a confounding puzzle.

In Gordium, there was a chariot with a complicated knot tied by an ancient king. According to legend, the one who could untie this knot would rule the world. Many had tried, but all had failed to untie the Gordian Knot. Alexander solved the puzzle in his own direct way: He sliced the knot in two with his sword.



Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.) created a vast empire and spread Greek culture to many lands. (Library of Congress)

Alexander then led his army south through Jerusalem and into Egypt, which surrendered without a fight. There he consulted an Egyptian oracle (speaker for the gods) who, Alexander said, referred to him as the son of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods.

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Centralized vs. Decentralized Rule

This edition of *Bill of Rights in Action* looks at problems of putting together a strong central government. The first article examines the legacy Alexander the Great, who conquered much of his known world, died suddenly, and left his successors to govern his massive empire. The second article explores the first U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation, its achievements, and ultimate failure. The last article examines the European Union and its prospects for unifying Europe.

World History: The Legacy of Alexander the Great

U.S. History: The Articles of Confederation

Current Issue: The European Union: Toward a “United States of Europe”?

Before leaving Egypt, Alexander ordered the building of a new city named Alexandria. Later, it would become the center of a large Greek-based, or Hellenistic, civilization (Hellas = Greece).

Alexander's Empire

In 331 B.C., Alexander invaded Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and decisively defeated Darius III, who fled the battlefield. The conquering king soon captured the Mesopotamian capital of Babylon and proclaimed himself “King of Babylon, King of Asia, King of the Four Quarters of the World.”

Alexander next entered the Persian homeland. He spared Susa, Persia's capital, when it surrendered. He burned, however, the great palace city of Persepolis in revenge for the Persian destruction of Athens.

The threat from Darius was removed when he was murdered by his own provincial governors (called satraps), hoping to gain favor with Alexander. In turn, Alexander married Roxane, the daughter of one of Darius' satraps.

With no major army to oppose him, Alexander conquered lands near the Caspian Sea. Continuing his conquests, he drove eastward into what is now Afghanistan and finally across the Indus River into western India. Alexander wanted to go farther, but he stopped when his men complained they would never see home again.

Having conquered the known world in only 10 years, Alexander led his men back to Persia. At Susa, he organized a mass marriage ceremony between thousands of his men and Persian women. Although already married to Roxane, he married a daughter of Darius. The mixed marriages at Susa were part of Alexander's idea to fuse the Macedonian, Greek, and Asian peoples into one “universal empire.”

Like the Greeks, Alexander considered the Asians to be “barbarians.” Even so, he attempted to adopt some of their customs to smooth the way for his new Hellenistic empire.

Alexander began to wear Persian clothing and required his men to do the same. He insisted that everyone follow the Persian practice of prostrating themselves (lying flat on the floor) when approaching him on the throne. He also appointed some of Darius' satraps as provincial officials and even included some Persian soldiers in his Macedonian army.

In 323 B.C., Alexander returned to Babylon and declared himself an “invincible god.” He planned to conquer Arabia and North Africa, build great cities, and merge all his conquered peoples into a great “brotherhood of mankind.” His dreams ended, however, when he came down with a fever (probably malaria) and died suddenly at age 33.

Alexander did not have a plan for who would inherit his empire. His Persian wife, Roxane, gave birth to a son shortly after Alexander died. Alexander also had an illegitimate half-brother, but he was mentally incompetent. Alexander's generals in Babylon, called his “Successors,” arrived at a compromise. They named Alexander's newborn son and his half-brother “co-kings” with one of the Successors temporarily ruling in their names.

What followed was nearly a half century of violence. Civil war broke out. Alliances were formed and broken. Both co-kings were murdered. At one point, six Successors proclaimed themselves king. Finally, by about 280 B.C., three major Hellenistic kingdoms had formed—one in Egypt, one in Southwest Asia, and another in the Macedonian homeland.

The Ptolemies in Egypt

One of Alexander's Successors, Ptolemy, carved out his kingdom in Egypt. Alone among the Successors, he did not attempt to regain control of Alexander's entire empire. He did, however, proclaim himself divine and gave himself the title of “Savior.”

Ptolemy I established a centralized bureaucracy. It imposed burdensome taxes, set up state monopolies, and regulated the economy. He and the dynasty he founded needed lots of money to finance military adventures in the eastern Mediterranean and six wars with the neighboring Seleucid Kingdom.

Egypt's capital, Alexandria, was the largest of the new Hellenistic cities. It had a double harbor, which soon made Alexandria the center of trade between the Mediterranean countries and Asia.

Alexandria was also a center for Hellenistic science. Astronomers, mathematicians, geographers, and other scientists made discoveries, using Aristotle's “scientific method” of observation to learn the truth about the natural world. For example, Herophilus dissected bodies to gain knowledge about human anatomy.

The Library of Alexandria was the jewel of the city and the entire Hellenistic world. Over a half-million



At its height, Alexander's empire spread from Greece east to India and south to include Egypt. (Perry-Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas)

cataloged papyrus scrolls contained the writings of Greek and non-Greek philosophers, historians, playwrights, poets, scientists, and others. Athens sent Aristotle's personal library there after he died. The great library also held translations of the first books of the Hebrew Bible.

The Seleucids in Southwest Asia

Another of Alexander's Successors, Seleucus, formed a kingdom that included Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia in Southwest Asia. The largest part of Alexander's conquered lands, it contained peoples with many different languages, religions, and traditions.

The Seleucid rulers, like the other Hellenistic kings, abandoned Alexander's idea of including conquered peoples in helping govern the kingdom. Macedonians and Greeks made up the ruling class.

The Seleucid kings considered themselves absolute, even god-like, monarchs. Their primary goal was to hold on to power while defending and expanding the kingdom by constant warfare.

The Seleucids built many more cities than the other Hellenistic monarchs. Built on a grid, their cities brimmed with large buildings featuring the first widespread use of arch and vault architecture. Huge outdoor theaters, holding up to 20,000 people, were a trademark of Seleucid cities.

Immigrants from Macedonia and Greece colonized many of the new cities. Macedonian and Greek women often owned businesses and took on a more active role in public affairs than in their homeland. Ethnically diverse native peoples, including slaves, also populated these cities. While frequently proclaimed as "free" or even "democratic," Seleucid cities remained under the tight control of the king.

Prosperity grew as new trade routes opened up from India and China. A standard weight for coins stimulated a money economy. Even so, as in all the Hellenistic monarchies, the land belonged to the king, who exploited the common people by forcing them to pay him high rents, taxes, and tribute.

The Antigonids in Macedonia and Greece

Back home in Macedonia, civil war continued until Antigonus seized the throne in 277 B.C. and established the Antigonid dynasty. The Antigonids were absolute rulers, but they never claimed divine status. Although Macedonian cities had democratic assemblies, final power rested with the king. Ironically, due to its geographic isolation, the Macedonian homeland suffered economically when trade routes shifted to the other Hellenistic kingdoms.

The Macedonian kings still controlled Greece. But most Greek city-states had long abandoned monarchies as barbaric, and they yearned to return to self-rule. They

attempted to assert their independence by forming leagues, or confederacies, of city-states.

In 245 B.C., the Achaean League, consisting of 10 Greek city-states, revolted against Macedonia. King Antigonus crushed the uprising as he had done earlier when Athens and Sparta had rebelled. The Achaean League revolt was the last major effort by the Greeks to regain their freedom from Macedonia.

Spreading Hellenistic Culture

Although war often divided the Hellenistic world, the Greek language unified it. Greek became the universal language of government, commerce, education, science, literature, and even religion.

The gymnasium became the key institution for spreading Hellenistic culture. Centers for physical and military training, the gymnasiums also served as hubs for learning philosophy, music, poetry, and science. They evolved into a sort of high school for Macedonian and Greek boys and young men in all the Hellenistic kingdoms and beyond. In addition to training grounds, a gymnasium facility often included a swimming pool, a covered running track, a stadium for athletic games, a library, and lecture rooms.

Art and literature also helped spread Hellenistic culture. Painting, sculpture, and mosaics tended to portray ordinary life and decorated private homes as well as public buildings. Hellenistic art was not especially original, but it combined styles from different cultures. Psychological elements became a greater part of Greek drama and poetry. A form of the novel developed in Alexandria.

Greek philosophy flourished in all parts of the Hellenistic world, but the ancient religion of Greece did not. It was difficult to convert foreigners to the Greek religion with its emphasis on rituals and ceremonies rather than a set of beliefs to guide life. As a result, native religions like Judaism and Mithraism thrived.

The Coming of the Romans

After 200 B.C., the rise of a new power in the west, the Roman Republic, signaled the decline of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The Antigonid king unwisely sided with Carthage against Rome in the Second Punic War. Rome then went to war against Macedonia, making it a Roman province in 148 B.C. No longer controlled by Macedonia, the Greek city-states were absorbed into a Roman province.

Weakened by civil wars and assassinations, the Seleucids suffered defeats by the Roman legions in Asia Minor and Syria. Rome made this part of the Seleucid Kingdom a province in 64 B.C.

Only the Ptolemies in Egypt remained independent. In 47 B.C., however, Julius Caesar invaded Egypt. During the turmoil, fire destroyed the magnificent Library of Alexandria with its collection of knowledge from the ancient world.

Later, the Roman general Mark Anthony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra tried to break away from Roman control. In 31 B.C., Octavian (later called Caesar Augustus) defeated them in a naval battle. A year later, he occupied Egypt and made it his personal kingdom.

Caesar Augustus thus became the heir of the Hellenistic world and went on to found the Roman Empire. He and his successors fulfilled, for a time, Alexander's dream of unifying the known world in one empire. Augustus was also the first to recognize Alexander's legacy by calling him Alexander "the Great."

For Discussion and Writing

1. Do you agree with Augustus that Alexander should be called "the Great"? Explain.
2. How were the Ptolemy, Seleucid, and Antigonid kingdoms similar? How were they different?
3. What do you think was the single most important accomplishment of the Hellenistic world after Alexander's death? Why?

For Further Reading

Chamoux, Francois. *Hellenistic Civilization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Mosse, Claude. *Alexander, Destiny and Myth*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

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The “Good Life”

Hellenistic philosophers were concentrated in Athens and developed four major schools of philosophy. All followed different versions of the “Good Life.”

1. Choose one of the Hellenistic philosophies below that you think is the best at describing the “Good Life.”
2. Write an essay, explaining why you think this philosophy is better than the other three.
3. Join with the others in your class who chose the same philosophy as you did. Then, participate in a class debate on which philosophy is the best.

Stoicism

Key Philosopher: Zeno of Cyprus (335–263 B.C.)

The “Good Life”: Stoics sought a disciplined simple life modeled after nature. They avoided excesses, attended to duty, and attempted to control their emotions.

Other Ideas:

- The senses and reason alone reveal the truth.
- All people possess a divine spark and are therefore equal.
- The world is like a great city whose citizens must play an active role in public affairs.

Meaning Today: Stoics today are those who have a high degree of self-control against pain and adversity.

Epicureanism

Key Philosopher: Epicurus (341–270 B.C.)

The “Good Life”: Epicureans sought pleasure in moderation, which meant “freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind.”

Other Ideas:

- “Sober reasoning” banishes mental confusion.
- The world runs on its own without gods intervening in human affairs.
- Privacy and personal friendships are more important than being involved in human affairs and the “noise of the world.”

Meaning Today: Epicureanism has been corrupted over time and today usually refers to those who enjoy gourmet food.

Skepticism

Key Philosopher: Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–c. 272 B.C.)

The “Good Life”: Skeptics sought the truth by doubting all knowledge beyond what they could sense or experience and by challenging the assumptions made by others.

Other Ideas:

- “Certain knowledge” can never be known because of the variation in human perceptions.
- One should doubt religious beliefs.
- A Skeptic is an inquirer who is never satisfied with “facts” and achieves happiness by not committing to any opinion.

Meaning Today: Skeptics continue today to voice doubts about everything from science to religion.

Cynicism

Key Philosopher: Diogenes (c. 412–320 B.C.)

The “Good Life”: Cynics were the philosophical rebels of their day, violating laws and exposing hypocrisy, vice, and corruption in society.

Other Ideas:

- Diogenes once looked in vain for an “honest man” while carrying a lantern in the daylight.
- People should live a simple and self-sufficient life as nature intended.
- Laws, religion, and customs like marriage are creations of society that prevent people from living a “natural life.”

Meaning Today: Cynics today tend to find fault with almost everything and believe people are mainly motivated by selfishness.

The Articles of Confederation

During the American Revolution, Americans drafted the Articles of Confederation to set up a new government independent of Britain. The Articles served as the constitution of the United States until 1789, when a new constitution was adopted.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, tension grew between the colonists and Britain. In 1765, 27 delegates from nine colonies met to oppose legislation passed by Parliament imposing a stamp tax on trade items. The delegates to the Stamp Act Congress drew up a statement of rights and grievances and agreed to stop importing goods from Britain. Parliament repealed the Stamp Tax Act. But it continued to impose new taxes on the colonies, and hostility to Britain kept growing. In 1773, some colonists protested a tax on tea by dressing up as Indians, boarding three British ships, and dumping their cargo of tea into the harbor. In response to the Boston Tea Party, Britain closed the Port of Boston.

In turn, colonists convened the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in September 1774. There was significant disagreement among the delegates. Many had supported efforts to repeal the offensive laws, but had no desire for independence. Even after battles broke out at Lexington and Concord in 1775 and the colonies began assembling troops to fight the British, many delegates remained loyal to the king.

John Hewes, a delegate from North Carolina wrote in July 1775: “We do not want to be independent; we want no revolution . . . we are loyal subjects to our present most gracious Sovereign.”

Many delegates felt a strong sense of loyalty to the empire. But they also opposed independence because they saw a need for strong central control. Without the authority of a Parent State, wrote Joseph Galloway, a delegate from Pennsylvania, “many subjects of unsettled disputes . . . must involve us in the horrors of civil war.”

A second Continental Congress met in May 1775, and Congress began advising the colonies on how to set up new state governments without royal governors and judges. On July 4, 1776, Congress issued the Declaration



In 1774, the First Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia. (Library of Congress)

of Independence. The tie with Britain was now formally cut. But the challenge of developing a central authority for the newly independent states remained.

Creating a Constitution

Congress had appointed a committee to draft a plan of confederation. The chairman of the committee was John Dickinson, a former opponent of independence. He had spoken in favor of a strong central government. On July 12, 1776, Dickinson’s committee presented its draft of a federal constitution to Congress.

After a few days of debate, Congress was deeply divided. One major issue was representation: whether each state should have an equal vote, or, as John Adams wrote, “whether each shall have a weight in proportion to its wealth, or number, or exports and imports, or a compound ratio of all?” Another issue was taxation. And the third and most contentious issue was determining the boundaries of colonies that

claimed to own land west of the Allegheny Mountains “to the South Seas.”

Congress continued debating the Articles of Confederation, but the war was putting tremendous demands on the delegates. Some delegates lost interest in a confederation now that the revolution had begun. But others felt strongly that a formal confederation was necessary to make foreign alliances. In frustration, one delegate wrote: “No foreign court will attend to our applications for assistance before we are confederated. What contract will a foreign State make with us, when we cannot agree among ourselves?”

Finally, in November 1777, Congress agreed on an amended version of the Articles. Congress urged the states to ratify the Articles of Confederation by March 10, 1778.

The states did not comply. The issue in contention was the ownership of the land west of the Alleghenies. Three “landless” states, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, insisted that Congress should have the power to set the disputed boundaries. They also demanded that land unsettled before the war should be common property, and Congress should eventually divide it into new states. When New York and Virginia finally agreed to cede their claims to western territory, the three holdout states agreed to sign. The Articles of Confederation were finally ratified on March 1, 1781.

How the New Confederation Worked

During the months of debate, Congress made many changes to the original draft. One was offered by Thomas Burke, a leader from North Carolina who opposed having a strong central government. Because of their experience with the British government, many delegates agreed with him. Burke thought “that unlimited power cannot be safely trusted to any man or set of men on Earth.” He believed that Dickinson’s draft undermined the independence of the states. To prevent that, he introduced an amendment, which was approved by 11 states and stands as Article II of the Confederation. (Article I named the union as “The United States of America.”) In its final form, the amendment reads:

Each State retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the united states in Congress assembled.

Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation set up the first government of the United States. Here is a summary of the government it set up.

Executive Branch. No executive branch.

Judicial Branch. No judicial branch. Each state had its own court system.

Legislative Branch. Congress. Each state had one vote. The Congress elected a president to preside over Congress.

Passing a Law. Nine of the 13 states must vote in favor of it.

Amending. To change the Articles, every state had to agree.

Raising an Army. No power to raise an army. Could only ask states to send soldiers.

Taxing. No power to tax. Could only ask states for tax money.

Controlling Trade. No power to control trade between the states or with other nations.

Bill of Rights. None.

With the addition of Article II, Congress could exercise only the powers expressly delegated to it. Those included the control of war and foreign affairs and the power to regulate trade with Indians. It had the power to regulate the value of its coinage (and that of the states), but no control over states printing paper money. Congress was also empowered to provide a board of arbitration to settle disputes between states and between individuals claiming land under different grants.

But many important powers were not assigned to Congress. It lacked the power to regulate trade, the power to levy and collect taxes, and the authority to limit the powers of the individual states. Nor did the Articles create any federal courts.

The states retained all powers not expressly delegated to Congress. Each state had only one vote (but was required to have at least two representatives in Congress and could have as many as seven). No one could be a member of Congress for more than three out of every six years. No one could be president of Congress for more than one year out of any three.

(Continued on next page)

Citizens of each state were allowed to move freely to any other state. And states were required to extradite criminals and to give “full faith and credit” to the judicial proceedings of other states.

Thus the Articles created a union of equal states. The central government was subordinate to the member states, and no individual was likely to assume the power and prestige that come from serving long terms in office.

Depression and Rebellion

On November 5, 1781, Congress unanimously elected John Hanson the first president of the United States. The Articles of Confederation did not specifically define the powers of the president. Hanson and the seven other men served as president under the Articles of Confederation. They formed various departments including a Department of War, an office of Foreign Affairs, and a national post office.

Congress created a national land policy and set up a territorial administration to handle the vast western lands. The Land Ordinance of 1784 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 set criteria for statehood in the western territories. These acts were significant achievements for the Confederation Congress.

Congress also faced problems that ultimately it could not solve. The war with Great Britain had ended in 1783, and an economic depression followed. It lasted more than five years. War debts were accumulating, and many states had not paid what they owed. Seven of the 13 states had issued their own paper money. Many debts were being paid with this money, which had little, if any, value. Anger and bitterness grew among merchants, wealthy planters, and others who were owed money. Some states began levying duties on goods. New York, for example, taxed cabbages from New Jersey. These duties outraged merchants.

Members of Congress tried to address the war debt by introducing amendments that would allow Congress to impose import duties. In 1781, one such amendment almost passed, but it was defeated because one state, Rhode Island refused to give the unanimous consent required to amend the constitution. A similar



On July 4, 1776, members of Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. The new nation needed to set up a central government. (Library of Congress)

amendment in 1786 was defeated when New York would not consent.

The economic depression and disputes over paper money also caused problems for state governments, particularly in New England. Massachusetts tried to solve its financial problems by increasing the poll tax and adopting a stamp tax. These taxes outraged farmers, who felt they were overtaxed and underrepresented. In August 1786, a mob of angry farmers interrupted a meeting at Hampshire County Court. The farmers were led by Daniel Shays, a bankrupt farmer who had served in the Continental Army. The uprisings continued throughout the fall until the state recruited an army of 1,200 volunteers and defeated Shays and his band of rebels.

Toward a Stronger Union

Shays' rebellion was crushed, but the uprising worried many wealthy men who had feared democracy even before the revolution. After the rebellion broke out, Noah Webster penned an article that appeared in many newspapers. He stated that he would “definitely prefer a limited monarchy” because he would rather be subject to the “caprice of one man than to the ignorance of a multitude.” Some leaders grew convinced that the new nation needed a strong central government to crush rebellions and to control the actions of states and their citizens.

Faced with opposition within Congress, these leaders decided to convene a convention to discuss issues of commerce and trade. In January 1786, the Virginia legislature invited states to send delegates to Annapolis in September. The delegates met for four days and concluded that it would not be possible to give Congress the power to regulate trade without changing the Articles. Accordingly, they sent a report to Congress recommending another convention.

When Congress met again in January 1787, it agreed to call a convention to meet in Philadelphia in May. The convention was to meet for “the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation” and recommending changes to “render the federal constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and the preservation of the union.”

The stated purpose of this convention was to revise the Articles of Confederation. When the delegates met, however, they abandoned the idea of amending the Articles of Confederation (which required the unanimous agreement of the states). They decided instead to write a new constitution that would go into effect when nine states had ratified it.

The new constitution upended the balance of power between the central government and the states. Under the Articles, states could pass any laws they wished to. Under the new constitution, the powers of both Congress and the state legislatures were limited. The new constitution gave the central government more powers, but it also provided safeguards against unchecked democracy. Faced with a choice between a league of sovereign states or a stronger union, the country’s leaders chose to create a nation.

For Discussion

1. Why were the Articles of Confederation created?
2. What were the accomplishments and failures of the Articles of Confederation?
3. What do you think accounted for the failures?

A C T I V I T Y

Comparing the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution

In this activity, students make charts comparing the governments set up by the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.

The chart on page 7 briefly explains the government that the Articles of Confederation set up. The headings from the chart are listed below and next to each is the section in the Constitution that deals with that part of the government. Use the chart on page 7, the information below, and a copy of the Constitution to create a chart comparing the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.

Executive Branch. Article II, Section 1.

Judicial Branch. Article III, Section 1.

Legislative Branch. Article I, Sections 1, 2, and 3.

Passing a Law. Article I, Section 7.

Amending. Article V.

Raising an Army. Article I, Section 8.

Taxing. Article I, Section 8.

Controlling Trade. Article I, Section 8.

Bill of Rights. Amendments I–X.



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The European Union: Toward a “United States of Europe”?

After World War II, European leaders vowed to stop the endless cycle of wars on their continent. To achieve this goal, they began a process of economic and political unification that some hoped would lead to a “United States of Europe.”

Since the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476, leaders have dreamed of unifying Europe. Conquerors like Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Hitler tried and failed. Two disastrous world wars in the 20th century ravaged Europe. After World War II, many European leaders sought a way to prevent war from ever taking place again on their continent.

America’s leaders also resolved to help Europe secure economic stability and permanent peace. In 1949, the United States worked with the Europeans to produce the Marshall Plan. This economic-aid program aimed to strengthen Western European nations threatened by communist takeovers.

As the United States helped rebuild Western Europe, it also strongly pressed the Europeans to eliminate national trade barriers like tariffs. Americans pointed to their own successful experience in forming a common market when the states adopted a federal union in 1789. This idea, however, seemed too radical for the highly nationalistic Europeans, and they resisted it at first. But gradually they came to view economic cooperation as a way to end national rivalries that so often had led to war in Europe.

In May 1950, the foreign minister of France, Robert Schuman, sought to defuse a dispute over coal, which was needed to rebuild Europe’s steel industry. Schuman boldly called for a limited common market, eliminating national tariffs, customs duties, and other barriers to trade on coal and steel. To do this, Western European nations would have to surrender some of their sovereignty (supreme authority) over their economies.

Backed by the United States, the European Coal and Steel Community began in 1952. Six European nations joined as members: France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the



More than 600 members sit in the European Parliament. Each is elected to a five-year term. (European Union Press Office)

Netherlands, and Italy. Schuman remarked that this cooperative economic effort would be “a first step in the federation of Europe.”

Of the major Western European nations, only Britain refused to join the Coal and Steel Community. The British opposed any weakening of their national sovereignty. Even so, the Coal and Steel Community quickly proved to be an economic success. It also removed the traditional hostility between France and Germany, which had fought three major wars in less than 100 years.

The European Union

The success of the Coal and Steel Community encouraged further economic and political unification in Western Europe. In 1957, the six member nations signed treaties in Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC). The EEC created a much

broader common market fostering the free movement of goods, services, workers, and capital investment across the borders of the member nations.

The EEC also set up a structure of political bodies, appointed by the six nations, to propose, approve, and rule on laws. Most of the political power, however, remained firmly in the hands of the national governments.

The EEC established a European Parliament. Member governments appointed all its representatives, and its power was limited. The Parliament could only express an opinion on proposed bills. The bills only became law when the Council of Ministers, representing the six national governments, approved.

With the limited power of the European Parliament, critics claimed the EEC had a “democratic deficit.” In other words, many resented that a small elite group of national government leaders was deciding the future of Europe rather than elected representatives of the European people.

The economic advantages of the European common market led to its enlargement (see box on page 13). Britain joined in 1973 mainly for economic reasons. It remained skeptical about further political union.

In 1979, the EEC held its first elections to choose members of the European Parliament. The following year, Parliament won authority to vote its opinion on proposed EEC laws before the Council of Ministers could act. This forced the Council to consider Parliament’s views and reduced the “democratic deficit.”

In 1992, the EEC members took a bold step to unify Western Europe both economically and politically. The treaty signed at Maastricht, a city in the Netherlands, created the European Union (EU). The Maastricht Treaty provided for European citizenship, handed more authority to Parliament, and reserved some policy areas like agriculture to the EU rather than to the member nations. Another agreement scheduled the transition to a single EU currency, the euro.

To become law, all member nations had to ratify the Maastricht Treaty by either parliamentary action or voter referendum. For the first time, the French, who had led the European unification process, expressed doubts about yielding more sovereignty to a stronger European organization. French voters barely approved the treaty in a referendum, 51 percent to 49 percent.

What Is the EU Today?

The European Union today consists of 25 member nations (see box). Recently, eight former communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe have joined the EU. Bulgaria and Romania are on track for admission in 2007. Turkey, a Muslim country with barely a toehold on the map of Europe, has also applied.

The EU is stronger and more democratic than it was when six nations established the European Economic Community in 1957. Yet, the EU is still not a federalized “United States of Europe.” Its main institutions consist of:

The Commission: Headed by 20 commissioners appointed to five-year terms by the national governments, the Commission has the sole authority to propose legislation. The Commission also consists of more than 20 departments that work with national governments to implement EU laws. This institution most reflects the desire for European unification.

The Council of Ministers: This body consists of top officials from the national governments with the exclusive authority to vote on EU legislation and policies. A few votes must be unanimous; some are by a simple majority; others require a weighted ballot based on national population. This institution most reflects the desire to retain national sovereignty.

The European Parliament: This one-house legislature has more than 600 members organized by political parties on a multinational basis. European citizens elect members for five-year terms. The Parliament, now considered a “co-decision maker” with the Council of Ministers, still cannot propose legislation. This is the most democratic EU institution.

The European Court of Justice: Consisting of 15 judges appointed by the national governments for six-year renewable terms, the court makes rulings on EU treaties and laws. It also decides disputes among EU institutions, member nations, corporations, and individuals. The court has significantly ruled that member nations have limited their own sovereignty in some areas, making EU treaties and legislation supreme over national constitutions and laws. This institution, in effect, has created a “supremacy clause,” which specifically appears in the U.S. Constitution (Article VI), but does not appear in any of the treaties that established the EU.

The European Council:

National heads of government, foreign ministers, and representatives of the Commission meet two or more times a year to set the EU agenda. They may also override decisions of the Council of Ministers. This institution operates somewhat above the regular EU structure as a sort of “board of directors.”

A federal union is a political system of shared sovereignty with significant central government powers and others that the states exercise. The United States is a federal union. Most agree that the EU is not yet one. Its member nations have mainly given up only some economic authority to enjoy the benefits of a common market. The EU still has no elected president, no military force, no foreign policy, and no real power to enforce its laws.

Toward a “United States of Europe”?

Since World War II, Europe has grown more unified. There is, however, widespread disagreement today on the future of the European Union.

In modern times, the sovereign nation-state has dominated Europe. Europeans who oppose a more federalized EU argue against surrendering their sovereignty to a bland and undemocratic “super state.” Margaret Thatcher, former prime minister of Great Britain, once described such a federal European Union as a “remote, centralized, bureaucratic” organization unaccountable to the people. “Euroskeptics” like Thatcher agree with the idea of a common market, but believe that European nations should always have the right to “opt out” of any EU law or policy.

Those favoring an EU along the lines of the United States say that the idea of opting out is a recipe for destroying the EU. Currently, the combined economies of the 25-member EU equal that of the United States. To oppose further unification, say the “Eurofederalists,” will dangerously weaken Europe in the new era of global competition.



In 2005, Europeans voted on a constitution for the European Union. The proposed constitution included reforms to make the EU more efficient and democratic. It was also widely viewed as opening the door toward more federalization. The constitution could only become law if every member nation ratified it.

The “Eurofederalists” were disheartened when voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the constitution. Opponents cited a range of reasons for sinking the constitution—high unemployment, cheap immigrant labor, the fear of losing farm subsidies, and hundreds of pages of technical and confusing language in the document itself.

Right now, the European Union will continue as it is currently structured. The people of Europe will have to decide what sort of EU they want. Should it continue as it now operates? Should it go backward to an association of cooperating sovereign nations? Or, should it become a federal union, a “United States of Europe”? Despite uncertainty about the future, the process of creating the European Union has already achieved its most important goal. Europeans today hold little doubt that war will never again tear Europe apart.

EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER NATIONS

Original European Economic Community (EEC) Members (1957)

France
Germany
Belgium
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Italy

First Enlargement (1973)

Britain
Denmark
Ireland

Second Enlargement (1981)

Greece

Third Enlargement (1986)

Spain
Portugal

Fourth Enlargement (1995)

Austria
Finland
Sweden

Fifth Enlargement (2004)

Czech Republic	Latvia
Poland	Lithuania
Hungary	Slovakia
Estonia	Cyprus
Slovenia	Malta

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why did European leaders begin a process of economic and political unification after World War II?
2. How has the European Court of Justice become a force for the federalization of Europe?
3. Should the EU become the “United States of Europe”? How would “Euroskeptics” and “Eurofederalists” answer this question? What reasons would they give for their answers?

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A C T I V I T Y

Transatlantic Federal Union

Should the United States give up some of its sovereignty to join the EU nations in a “Transatlantic Federal Union”? The chart below shows how such a federal system might divide and share powers between a “Transatlantic Authority” and “Member Nations.”

EXCLUSIVE POWERS OF TRANSATLANTIC AUTHORITY

Operation of a common market
Labor standards
Environmental protection
Immigration regulations
One currency
One postal service
Human rights enforcement
Supremacy of Transatlantic treaties and laws

EXCLUSIVE POWERS OF MEMBER NATIONS

Type of national government
Type of economic system
Regulation of businesses
Civil and criminal courts
Police
Education
Family law and social welfare
Control of domestic natural resources

SHARED POWERS

Citizenship
Taxation
Health care
Military force

1. Meet in small groups to discuss the question above.
2. Each group should then report its conclusion along with the reasons for it to the rest of the class.

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Standards Addressed

Alexander

National High School World History Standard 8: Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 BCE. (5) Understands how conquest influenced cultural life during the Hellenistic era (e.g., the cultural diffusion of Greek, Egyptian, Persian, and Indian art and architecture through assimilation, conquest, migration, and trade; the benefits and costs of Alexander's conquests on numerous cultures, and the extent to which these conquests brought about cultural mixing and exchange) (6) Understands the characteristics of religion, gender, and philosophy in the Hellenistic era (e.g., . . . what different Greek philosophers considered to be a "good life").

California History-Social Science Content Standard 6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece. (7) Trace the rise of Alexander the Great and the spread of Greek culture eastward and into Egypt. (8) Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences . . .

California History-Social Science Content Standard 10.1 Students relate the moral and ethical principles in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, in Judaism, and in Christianity to the development of Western political thought.

Articles of Confederation

National U.S. History Standard 8: Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. (1) Understands events that led to and shaped the Constitutional Convention (e.g., . . . the grievances of the debtor class and the fears of wealthy creditors involved in Shay's Rebellion, the accomplishments and failures of the Articles of Confederation).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 8.2: Students analyze the political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and compare the enumerated and implied powers of the federal government. (2) Analyze the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, and the success of each in implementing the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

EU

National High School Civics Standard 23: Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the United States and other nations. (2) Understands the effects that significant world political developments have on the United States (e.g., . . . the emergence of regional organizations such as the European Union).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 10.9: Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.

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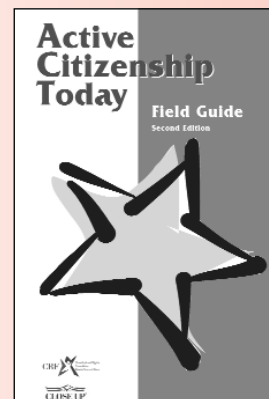


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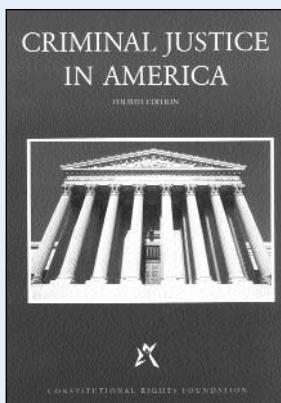
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