

America: The Land of Failure?

America: the land of the free and the home of the brave. America: the land of opportunity and prosperity. America: the land of failure. Even though failure is often viewed in a negative light, it's been our ability to admit our missteps that that makes this country so great. From the Embargo Act of 1807 to The Kansas-Nebraska Act, and perhaps the most striking presidential failure in American History President William Howard Taft unsuccessfully trying to exit a bathtub, we as a country have grown stronger because we are not afraid to admit our shortcomings and learn from them. The perfect example of this idea is the Articles of Confederation. Many people may dismiss the Articles as our first haphazard attempt at government, but really, they reveal so much more than that. Fundamentally, the Articles showed us when the government isn't meeting our needs; we can change it and make it better.

Following the Declaration of Independence, members of the Continental Congress realized that it would be necessary to set up a national government. After months of disagreements, and the British capture of Philadelphia, the delegates finally formulated the Articles of Confederation. When the Articles were first drafted, they were far from perfect. They left the issue of state claims to western lands completely unresolved, the national government couldn't coin money, and they didn't provide a national court system to protect the rights of US citizens. The weaknesses within the Articles cause states to have frequent arguments between themselves, and eventually refuse to financially support the national government. In short, the Articles were doomed to fail. In fact, as George Washington articulated in a letter to Rev. William Gordon written on July 8th, 1783, "It now rests with the Confederated Powers by the line of conduct they mean to adopt, to make this Country great, happy, and respectable, or to sink it into littleness ? worse perhaps, into Anarchy and Confusion ? for certain I am that unless adequate Powers are given to Congress for the general purposes of the Federal Union that we shall soon molder into dust and become contemptible in the Eyes of Europe."

After it was clear that the Articles were going to fail, the states sent 55 delegates to Philadelphia to revise them, but when the delegates convened at the Federal Convention on May 25, 1787 they quickly rejected the idea of revising the Articles of Confederation and instead constructed a new framework for our government. But the idea to create a new state didn't start in that stuffy Philadelphia statehouse, instead the movement for a new national government actually began in September 1786 at the Annapolis convention. Representatives of Maryland and Virginia invited delegates from all the States to Annapolis to discuss the issues regarding commercial affairs under the Articles. Even though only delegates from five states were able to make it, at the meeting the group realized that the country might be better off without the articles. To everyone's surprise, when the delegates exited that Federal Convention at the end of the summer of 1787, something amazing had occurred: they drafted the Constitution of the United States of America.

To me and many other Americans, that's the most important thing that came out of the Revolutionary War period; the idea that our government was truly made by the people for the people. It showed us that we as a nation not only can, but should use our ability to control our state to discuss and fix the problems within it. In the instance of the Articles of Confederation the delegates thought that the best way to fix it was by drafting a new government, and they were right. Over 220 years later we are still standing here united by the Constitution. In most other nations, that would have been impossible because it's the leaders who solely decide how the nation will grow, not the people. Take 18th century Britain as an example: the Kings ruled and when the people tried to change certain policies they were forced to start a new nation on the other side of the Atlantic. Even in contemporary nations this notion of a government controlled by the people is foreign. Look at Middle Eastern countries; wars are raging over this very issue.

After looking at other nations, it's easy to see how lucky we truly are to live in a country where it is okay to admit and correct our mistakes. With our government seemingly in a perpetual gridlock, it's easy to lose sight of those basic principles that built our nation, but we can't forget the lessons that we learned while getting here. We need to remember that our mistakes have allowed us to become who we are today: the United States of America - impossibly strong, illogically optimistic, eternally hopeful. We are the people who shouted and died for an opportunity to live freely. And because of our ability as citizens to change our nation for the better, we can be whoever we want to be, dare to be, and dream of being.