

The Three Fifths Compromise for kids ***

Events leading to the Three Fifths Compromise of 1787: The Virginia Plan (Large State Plan)

The events leading to the Three Fifths Compromise arose at the Constitutional Congress (aka the Philadelphia Congress) related to the plans submitted containing ideas for the power and structure of the United States system of government. Fifteen resolutions were made in the [Virginia Plan](#) (Large State Plan) that was written by James Madison and proposed by Edmund J. Randolph. The Virginia Plan was strongly supported by the large, more populous states because of the resolution suggesting proportional representation.

Three Fifths Compromise: Resolution 2 of the Virginia Plan

The Resolution 2 of the Virginia Plan advocated that the right vote in the national legislature, ought to be proportioned to the share of contribution, or to the number of free inhabitants in the state. This form of proportional representation meant that the more people a state had, the more representatives it would get in the legislature (government). The real question was should slaves, who had no vote, be counted as a part of the population? Large States who had lots of slaves answered "yes" but small states with few slaves naturally disagreed and said "No".

Three Fifths Compromise: State Populations

The Constitutional Convention was attended by delegates representing 12 of the 13 first colonies. (Rhode Island declined to attend because it was fearful of losing its states' rights).

- The large, more populous, states were Virginia, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts

- The small, less populous, states were New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire and New York
- Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina were small states in terms of population but hoped to increase their numbers by importing slaves and attracting more immigrants and people from other states

Three Fifths Compromise: The Slave States

The slave states particularly in the South wanted slaves to count as part of the population, but the free states of the North feared that the South would increase its power in Congress by importing more slaves.

- The Southern states were South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia and Georgia
- In 1787 approximately 90% of slaves lived in the South and accounted for about 30% of the southern population

Three Fifths Compromise: James Wilson and Roger Sherman

The opposing sides of the argument needed to make concessions to enable the convention to continue - a compromise was needed. James Wilson, a delegate from Pennsylvania and Roger Sherman a delegate from Connecticut proposed the Three Fifths Compromise. James Wilson (1742–1798) was one of the Founding Fathers and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was a farmer, lawyer and a leading legal theorist. (James Wilson would become one of the six original justices appointed by President George Washington to the Supreme Court of the United States). Lawyer Roger Sherman (1721 – 1793) was also a Founding Father and had the great distinction of being the only man to sign all four of the greatest U.S. documents: the Continental Association, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and eventually the Constitution.

The Three Fifths Compromise: Apportionment of representation

These extremely able men proposed the Three Fifths Compromise. The Three

Fifths Compromise was:

Every five slaves would be counted as three individuals in terms of apportionment of representation and taxes

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention finally agreed the Three Fifths Compromise, that slaves should be counted at three fifths of their real number. The Three Fifths Compromise resolved the issue of counting slaves towards population in regards to representation in the House of Representatives.

The Three Fifths Compromise: Tax Burden

The Three Fifths Compromise was also used to determine what percentage of the nation's direct tax burden the state would have to bear. The Three Fifths Compromise is also referred to as the "federal ratio" - one slave will count for 3/5 of a free man when counting population for seats by state in the house.

The Three Fifths Compromise: Other Major Compromises

The Three Fifths Compromise had skirted around the dangerous issue of slavery and the importation of slaves. This was tackled in the [Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise](#). The [Great Compromise](#) related to the idea of proportional representation in the lower house (House of Representatives) and equal representation of the states in the upper house (Senate).

The Three Fifths Compromise: The Constitution

The references to Three Fifths Compromise in the Constitution are as follows:

- The Three Fifths Compromise is included in [Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3](#) of the United States Constitution
- The slave trade compromise is detailed in [Article 5](#) which allowed the slave trade to continue until 1808
- The Three Fifths Compromise was made obsolete by the [13th Amendment](#) which abolished slavery

- Article 1, Section 9, Clause 4 that relates to taxes in proportion to numbers of people in a state was eventually changed by the [16th Amendment](#)

The Three Fifths Compromise: The Fugitive Slave Law

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was an act of the Congress of the Confederation forbade slavery in the territories and new states. As a concession to the South, the Northwest ordinance included a Fugitive Slave Law to ensure runaway slaves would be returned to their owners if caught in the northwest.

Significance and Importance of the Three Fifths Compromise

The importance of the Three Fifths Compromise cannot be underestimated. The issues of apportionment, representation and slavery threatened to destroy the convention. The Significance of the Three Fifths Compromise was that:

- The Three Fifths Compromise ensured the continuance of the Constitutional Convention
- The Three Fifths Compromise determined what percentage of the nation's direct tax burden on each state
- It was included in the United States Constitution
- The Three Fifths Compromise was one of the reasons for the American Civil war (1861-1865) between the North and the South