

Virginia & New Jersey Plans

James Madison was one of the prominent delegates to the Constitutional Convention. However, he was thinking about the convention before he even got there. It was clear at the time that the current government under the Articles of Confederation was just not cutting the mustard, and something had to be done to remedy the situation. So, he drafted a plan for a new national government, which was presented at the convention as "The Virginia Plan" (see table for details). Essentially, the Virginia Plan proposed a strong national government that could make and enforce laws, and collect taxes. The people would be governed by two governments - the state and national. A system such as this is known as a Federal system of government. Additionally, both houses of the legislature would feature proportional representation; basically, this means that the more people a state has, the more representatives it gets in the legislature. Clearly, larger states favored this plan.

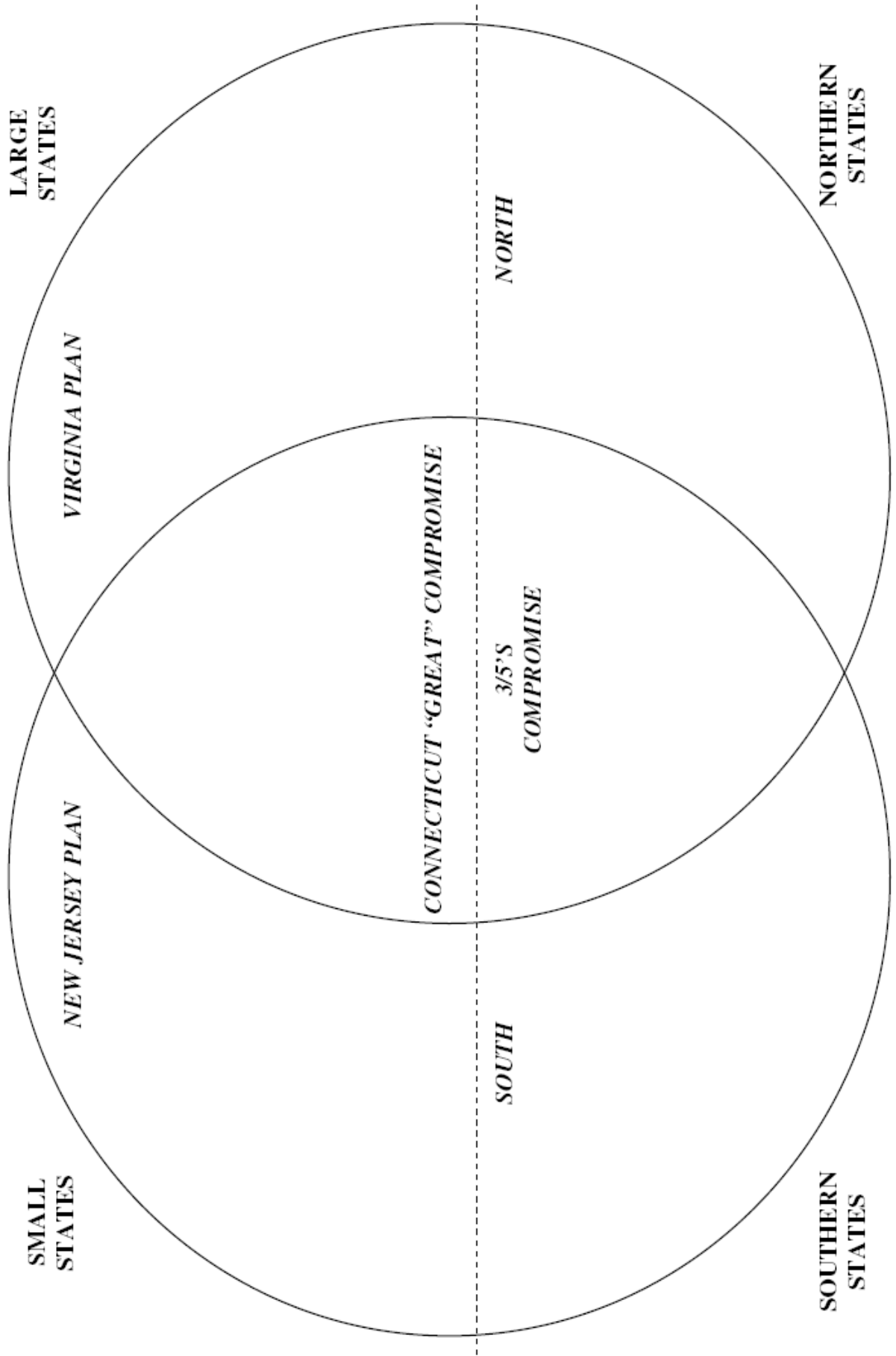
The Virginia Plan	
Branches	Three - legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislature was more powerful, as it chose people to serve in the executive and judicial branches.
Legislature	Two houses (bicameral). The House of Representatives was elected by the people and the Senate was elected by the state legislatures. Both were represented proportionally.
Other Powers	The legislature could regulate interstate trade, strike down laws deemed unconstitutional and use armed forces to enforce laws.

The New Jersey Plan	
Branches	Three - legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislature appoints people to serve in the executive branch, and the executive branch selects the justices of the Supreme Court.
Legislature	One house (unicameral). States would be represented equally, so all states had the same power.
Other Powers	The national government could levy taxes and import duties, regulate trade, and state laws would be subordinate to laws passed by the national legislature.

Smaller states were pretty scared about it, though. If this plan passed, it would mean that smaller states would have almost no say in the government. The debate over the Virginia Plan grew quite heated, and finally the small states asked for time to draw up their own plan, known as the New Jersey Plan (see table for details). Its legislature only had one house which featured equal representation - each state gets the same number of representatives. This way, smaller states had the same power in the legislature as larger states.

Ultimately, the New Jersey Plan was rejected as a basis for a new constitution. It was really a continuation of the old style of government under the Articles of Confederation. However, some ideas from it were used in the new constitution. The Virginia Plan was used, but many delegates felt that any new government would need new powers and a new organization to exercise those powers fully.

COMPROMISES THAT LEAD TO THE CREATION OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



Name _____
Period _____