



The Development of American Nationality

Carl Russell Fish

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Excerpt from book: CHAPTER II THE HISTORY OF THE CONFEDERATION The chief claim of the national government under the Confederation lay in its ownership and control of lands west of the mountains, and its permanent contribution to American development was the enactment of regulations for the survey and government of this area. The manner in which it became possessed of this immense territory was as follows. Seven of the colonies, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Land York, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, had claimed, cessions- on the basis of charters and of Indian treaties, land stretching westward to the Mississippi. The British government had wished to make the mountains the western boundary of the several colonies, and itself to direct the development of the Mississippi valley on imperial lines. The resulting dispute was a minor cause of the Revolution. The Continental Congress took up this claim of the British government, and the first draft of the Articles gave Congress the right of fixing state boundaries. This power was cut out before the Articles were presented to the states for adoption. Maryland, thereupon, in behalf of the landless states, fearing the size and power that its neighbors might attain if their claims were granted, refused to accept the Articles unless the western lands were granted to the central government. In 1781 New York, whose claim was the most dubious, led the way with a cession. Maryland at once accepted the Articles, and negotiations began which ended in cessions by the other states.

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