

Primary Sources: George Mason

George Mason played a major role in the creation of Virginia's Constitution and declaration of rights and was, therefore, an important figure at the Constitutional Convention as well. However, Mason found the final document to be fatally flawed and refused to sign it. He put his objections in writing, and they were published in November 1787. Below is an excerpt from Mason's "Objections to the Constitution of Government Formed by the Convention".

There is no Declaration of Rights; and the Laws of the general Government being paramount to the Laws and Constitutions of the several States, the Declaration of Rights in the separate States are no Security. Nor are the people secured even in the Enjoyment of the Benefits of the common-Law: which stands here upon no other Foundation than its having been adopted by the respective Acts forming the Constitutions of the several States.

In the House of Representatives there is not the Substance, but the Shadow only of Representation; which can never produce proper Information in the Legislature, or inspire Confidence in the People: the Laws will therefore be generally made by Men little concern'd in, and unacquainted with their Effects and Consequences.*

The Senate have the Power of altering all Money-Bills, and of originating Appropriations of Money and the Sallerys of the Officers of their own Appointment in Conjunction with the President of the United States; altho' they are not the Representatives of the People, or amenable to them.

These with their other great Powers (vizt. their Power in the Appointment of Ambassadors and all public Officers, in making Treaties, and in trying all Impeachments) their Influence upon and Connection with the supreme Executive from these Causes, their Duration of Office, and their being a constant existing Body almost continually sitting, joined with their being one compleat Branch of the Legislature, will destroy any Balance in the Government, and enable them to accomplish what Usurpations they please upon the Rights and Libertys of the People.

The Judiciary of the United States is so constructed and extended, as to absorb and destroy the Judiciaries of the several States; thereby rendering Law as tedious[,] intricate and expensive, and Justice as unattainable, by a great part of the Community, as in England, and enabling the Rich to oppress and ruin the Poor.

The President of the United States has no constitutional Council (a thing unknown in any safe and regular Government) he will therefore be unsupported by proper Information and Advice; and will generally be directed by Minions and Favourites—or He will become a Tool to the Senate—or a Council of State will grow out of the principal Officers of the great Departments; the worst and most dangerous of all Ingredients for such a Council, in a free Country; for they may be induced to join in any dangerous or oppressive Measures, to shelter themselves, and prevent an Inquiry into their own Misconduct in Office; whereas had a constitutional Council been formed (as was proposed) of six Members; vizt. two from the Eastern, two from the Middle, and two from the Southern States, to be appointed by Vote of the States in the House of Representatives, with the same Duration and Rotation of Office as the Senate, the Executive wou'd always have had safe and proper In-

formation and Advice, the President of such a Council might have acted as Vice President of the United States, pro tempore, upon any Vacancy or Disability of the chief Magistrate; and long continued Sessions of the Senate wou'd in a great Measure have been prevented.

From this fatal Defect of a constitutional Council has arisen the improper Power of the Senate, in the Appointment of public Officers, and the alarming Dependence and Connection between that Branch of the Legislature, and the supreme Executive.

Hence also sprung that unnecessary and dangerous Officer, the Vice President; who for want of other Employment, is made President of the Senate; thereby dangerously blending the executive and legislative Powers; besides always giving to some one of the States an unnecessary and unjust Pre-eminence over the others.

The President of the United States has the unrestrained Power of granting Pardon for Treason; which may be sometimes exercised to screen from Punishment those whom he had secretly instigated to commit the Crime, and thereby prevent a Discovery of his own Guilt.

By declaring all Treaties supreme Laws of the Land, the Executive and the Senate have in many Cases, an exclusive Power of Legislation; which might have been avoided by proper Distinctions with Respect to Treaties, and requiring the Assent of the House of Representatives, where it cou'd be done with Safety.

By requiring only a Majority to make all commercial and navigation Laws, the five Southern States (whose Produce and Circumstances are totally different from that of the eight Northern and Eastern States) will be ruined; for such rigid and premature Regulations may be made, as will enable the Merchants of the Northern and Eastern States not only to demand an exorbitant Freight, but to monopolize the Purchase of the Commodities at their own Price, for many years: to the great Injury of the landed Interest, and Impoverishment of the People: and the Danger is the greater, as the Gain on one Side will be in Proportion to the Loss on the other. Whereas requiring two thirds of the members present in both Houses wou'd have produced mutual moderation, promoted the general Interest, and removed an insuperable Objection to the Adoption of the Government.

Under their own Construction of the general Clause at the End of the enumerated powers the Congress may grant Monopolies in Trade and Commerce, constitute new Crimes, inflict unusual and severe Punishments, and extend their Power as far as they shall think proper; so that the State Legislatures have no Security for the Powers now presumed to remain to them; or the People for their Rights.

There is no Declaration of any kind for preserving the Liberty of the Press, the Tryal by Jury in civil Causes; nor against the Danger of standing Armys in time of Peace.

The State Legislatures are restrained from laying Export Duties on their own Produce.

The general Legislature is restrained from prohibiting the further Importation of Slaves for twenty odd Years; tho' such Importations render the United States weaker, more vulnerable, and less capable of Defence.

Both the general Legislature and the State Legislatures are expressly prohibited making ex post facto Laws; tho' there never was, or can be a Legislature but must and will make such Laws, when necessity and the public Safety require them; which will hereafter be a Breach of all the Constitutions in the Union, and afford precedents for other Innovations.

This Government will commence in a moderate Aristocracy; it is at present impossible to foresee whether it will, in its Operation, produce a Monarchy, or a corrupt oppressive Aristocracy; it will most probably vibrate some Years between the two, and then terminate in the one or the other.

Mason also communicated his feelings about the Constitution to fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson, who serving as minister to France was at the time. May 26, 1788.

... I make no Doubt that you have long ago received Copyes of the new Constitution of Government, framed last Summer by the Delegates of the several States, in general Convention, at Philadelphia. Upon the most mature Consideration I was capable of, and from Motives of sincere Patriotism, I was under the Necessity of refusing my Signature, as one of the Virginia Delegates; and drew up some general Objections; which I intended to offer, by Way of Protest; but was discouraged from doing so, by the precipitate, & intemperate, not to say indecent Manner, in which the Business was conducted, during the last Week of the Convention, after the Patrons of this new plan found they had a decided Majority in their Favour, which was obtained by a Compromise between the Eastern, and the two Southern States, to permit the latter to continue the Importation of Slaves for twenty odd Years; a more favourite Object with them than the Liberty and Happiness of the People.

These Objections of mine were first printed very incorrectly, without my Approbation, or Privity; which laid me under some kind of Necessity of publishing them afterwards, myself. I take the Liberty of enclosing you a Copy of them. You will find them conceived in general Terms; as I wished to confine them to a narrow Compass. There are many other things very objectionable in the proposed new Constitution; particularly the almost unlimited Authority over the Militia of the several States; whereby, under Colour of regulating, they may disarm, or render useless the Militia, the more easily to govern by a standing Army; or they may harrass the Militia, by such rigid Regulations, and intollerable Burdens, as to make the People themselves desire its Abolition. By their Power over the Elections, they may so order them, as to deprive the People at large of any Share in the Choice of their Representatives. By the Consent of Congress, Men in the highest Offices of Trust in the United States may receive any Emolument, Place, or Pension from a foreign Prince, or Potentate, which is setting themselves up to the highest Bidder. But it wou'd be tedious to enumerate all the Objections; and I am sure they cannot escape Mr. Jefferson's Observation. Delaware—Pennsylvania—Jersey—Connecticut—Georgia, and Maryland have ratified the new Government (for surely it is not a Confederation) without Amendments. Massachusetts has accompanied the Ratification with proposed Amendments. Rhode Island has rejected it. New Hampshire, after some deliberation, adjourned their Convention to June. The Convention of South Carolina is now sitting. The Convention of new York meets in June—that of North Carolina in July—and the Convention of Virginia meets on the first Monday in June. I shall set out for Richmond this Week, in order to attend it. From the best information I have had, the Members of the Virginia Convention are so equally divided upon the Subject, that no Man can, at present, form any certain Judgement of the Issue. There seems to be a great Majority for Amendments; but many are for ratifying first, and amending afterwards. This Idea appears to me so utterly absurd, that I can not think any Man of Sense candid, in Proposing it. . . .

Primary Sources: Patrick Henry

Patrick Henry was well-known for his skills at oration and use of persuasive language during the American Revolution. After refusing to attend the Constitutional Convention, Henry used those same skills to attack the Constitution that was created. The following speech was delivered to the delegates at the Virginia Ratifying Convention on June 5, 1788.

THIS, sir, is the language of democracy--that a majority of the community have a right to alter government when found to be oppressive. But how different is the genius of your new Constitution from this! How different from the sentiments of freemen that a contemptible minority can prevent the good of the majority! If, then, gentlemen standing on this ground are come to that point, that they are willing to bind themselves and their posterity to be oppressed, I am amazed and inexpressibly astonished. If this be the opinion of the majority, I must submit; but to me, sir, it appears perilous and destructive. I can not help thinking so. Perhaps it may be the result of my age. These may be feelings natural to a man of my years, when the American spirit has left him, and his mental powers, like the members of the body, are decayed. If, sir, amendments are left to the twentieth, or tenth part of the people of America, your liberty is gone for ever.

We have heard that there is a great deal of bribery practised in the House of Commons of England, and that many of the members raise themselves to preferments by selling the rights of the whole of the people. But, sir, the tenth part of that body can not continue oppressions on the rest of the people. English liberty is, in this case, on a firmer foundation than American liberty. It will be easily contrived to procure the opposition of the one-tenth of the people to any alteration, however judicious. The honorable gentleman who presides told us that, to prevent abuses in our government, we will assemble in convention, recall our delegated powers, and punish our servants for abusing the trust reposed in them. Oh, sir! we should have fine times, indeed, if, to punish tyrants, it were only sufficient to assemble the people! Your arms, wherewith you could defend yourselves, are gone; and you have no longer an aristocratical, no longer a democratical spirit. Did you ever read of any revolution in a nation, brought about by the punishment of those in power, inflicted by those who had no power at all? You read of a riot act in a country which is called one of the freest in the world, where a few neighbors can not assemble without the risk of being shot by a hired soldiery, the engines of despotism. We may see such an act in America.

A standing army we shall have, also, to execute the execrable commands of tyranny; and how are you to punish them? Will you order them to be punished? Who shall obey these orders? Will your mace-bearer be a match for a disciplined regiment? In what situation are we to be? The clause before you gives a power of direct taxation, unbounded and unlimited--an exclusive power of legislation, in all cases whatsoever, for ten miles square, and over all places purchased for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, etc. What resistance could be made? The attempt would be madness. You will find all the strength of this country in the hands of your enemies; their garrisons will naturally be the strongest places in the country. Your militia is given up to Congress, also, in another part of this plan; they will therefore act as they think proper; all power will be in their own possession. You can not force them to receive their punishment: of what service would militia be to you, when, most probably, you will not have a single musket in the State? For, as arms are to be provided by Congress, they may or may not furnish them.

The honorable gentleman then went on to the figure we make with foreign nations; the contemptible one we make in France and Holland, which, according to the substance of the notes, he attributes to the present feeble government. An opinion has gone forth, we find, that we are contemptible people; the time has been when we were thought otherwise. Under

the same despised government we commanded the respect of all Europe; wherefore are we now reckoned otherwise? The American spirit has fled from hence: it has gone to regions where it has never been expected; it has gone to the people of France in search of a splendid government, a strong, energetic government. Shall we imitate the example of those nations who have gone from a simple to a splendid government? Are those nations more worthy of our imitation? What can make an adequate satisfaction to them for the loss they have suffered in attaining such a government--for the loss of their liberty? If we admit this consolidated government, it will be because we like a great, splendid one. Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire; we must have an army, and a navy, and a number of things. When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of America was different; liberty, sir, was then the primary object.

We are descended from a people whose government was founded on liberty; our glorious forefathers of Great Britain made liberty the foundation of everything. That country is become a great, mighty, and splendid nation; not because their government is strong and energetic, but, sir, because liberty is its direct end and foundation. We drew the spirit of liberty from our British ancestors; by that spirit we have triumphed over every difficulty. But now, sir, the American spirit, assisted by the ropes and chains of consolidation, is about to convert this country into a powerful and mighty empire. If you make the citizens of this country agree to become the subjects of one great consolidated empire of America, your government will not have sufficient energy to keep them together. Such a government is incompatible with the genius of republicanism. There will be no checks, no real balances, in this government. What can avail your specious, imaginary balances, your rope-dancing, chain-rattling, ridiculous ideal checks and contrivances? But, sir, "we are not feared by foreigners; we do not make nations tremble." Would this constitute happiness or secure liberty? I trust, sir, our political hemisphere will ever direct their operations to the security of those objects.

Consider our situation, sir; go to the poor man and ask him what he does. He will inform you that he enjoys the fruits of his labor, under his own fig tree, with his wife and children around him, in peace and security. Go to every other member of society; you will find the same tranquil ease and content; you will find no alarms or disturbances. Why, then, tell us of danger, to terrify us into an adoption of this new form of government? And yet who knows the dangers that this new system may produce? They are out of sight of the common people; they can not foresee latent consequences. I dread the operation of it on the middling and lower classes of people; it is for them I fear the adoption of this system. I fear I tire the patience of the committee, but I beg to be indulged with a few more observations.

When I thus profess myself an advocate for the liberty of the people, I shall be told I am a designing man, that I am to be a great man, that I am to be a demagog; and many similar illiberal insinuations will be thrown out; but, sir, conscious rectitude outweighs those things with me. I see great jeopardy in this new government. I see none from our present one. I hope some gentleman or other will bring forth, in full array, those dangers, if there be any, that we may see and touch them. I have said that I thought this a consolidated government; I will now prove it. Will the great rights of the people be secured by this government? Suppose it should prove oppressive, how can it be altered? Our Bill of Rights declares that "a majority of the community hath an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform, alter, or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal."

The voice of tradition, I trust, will inform posterity of our struggles for freedom. If our descendants be worthy the name of Americans they will preserve and hand down to their latest posterity the transactions of the present times; and tho I confess my exclamations are not worthy the hearing, they will see that I have done my utmost to preserve their liberty, for I never will give up the power of direct taxation but for a scourge. I am willing to give it conditionally--that is, after non-compliance with requisitions. I will do more, sir, and what I

hope will convince the most skeptical man that I am a lover of the American Union; that, in case Virginia shall not make punctual payment, the control of our customhouses and the whole regulation of trade shall be given to Congress, and that Virginia shall depend on Congress even for passports, till Virginia shall have paid the last farthing and furnished the last soldier.

Nay, sir, there is another alternative to which I would consent; even that they should strike us out of the Union and take away from us all federal privileges till we comply with federal requisitions; but let it depend upon our own pleasure to pay our money in the most easy manner for our people. Were all the States, more terrible than the mother country, to join against us, I hope Virginia could defend herself; but, sir, the dissolution of the Union is most abhorrent to my mind. The first thing I have at heart is American liberty; the second thing is American union; and I hope the people of Virginia will endeavor to preserve that union. The increasing population of the Southern States is far greater than that of New England; consequently, in a short time, they will be far more numerous than the people of that country. Consider this and you will find this State more particularly interested to support American liberty and not bind our posterity by an improvident relinquishment of our rights. I would give the best security for a punctual compliance with requisitions; but I beseech gentlemen, at all hazards, not to give up this unlimited power of taxation. The honorable gentleman has told us that these powers given to Congress are accompanied by a judiciary which will correct all. On examination you will find this very judiciary oppressively constructed, your jury trial destroyed, and the judges dependent on Congress.

This Constitution is said to have beautiful features; but when I come to examine these features, sir, they appear to me horribly frightful. Among other deformities, it has an awful squinting; it squints toward monarchy, and does not this raise indignation in the breast of every true American? Your president may easily become king. Your Senate is so imperfectly constructed that your dearest rights may be sacrificed to what may be a small minority; and a very small minority may continue for ever unchangeably this government, altho' horribly defective. Where are your checks in this government? Your strongholds will be in the hands of your enemies. It is on a supposition that your American governors shall be honest that all the good qualities of this government are founded; but its defective and imperfect construction puts it in their power to perpetrate the worst of mischiefs should they be bad men; and, sir, would not all the world, blame our distracted folly in resting our rights upon the contingency of our rulers being good or bad? Show me that age and country where the rights and liberties of the people were placed on the sole chance of their rulers being good men without a consequent loss of liberty! I say that the loss of that dearest privilege has ever followed, with absolute certainty, every such mad attempt.

If your American chief be a man of ambition and abilities, how easy is it for him to render himself absolute! The army is in his hands, and if he be a man of address, it will be attached to him, and it will be the subject of long meditation with him to seize the first auspicious moment to accomplish his design, and, sir, will the American spirit solely relieve you when this happens? I would rather infinitely--and I am sure most of this Convention are of the same opinion--have a king, lords, and commons, than a government so replete with such insupportable evils. If we make a king we may prescribe the rules by which he shall rule his people, and interpose such checks as shall prevent him from infringing them; but the president, in the field, at the head of his army, can prescribe the terms on which he shall reign master, so far that it will puzzle any American ever to get his neck from under the galling yoke. I can not with patience think of this idea. If ever he violate the laws, one of two things will happen: he will come at the head of the army to carry everything before him, or he will give bail, or do what Mr. Chief Justice will order him. If he be guilty, will not the recollection of his crimes teach him to make one bold push for the American throne? Will not the immense difference between being master of everything and being ignominiously tried and punished powerfully excite him to make this bold push? But, sir, where is the existing force to punish him? Can he not, at the head of his army, beat down every opposition? Away with your president! we shall have a king: the army will salute him

monarch; your militia will leave you, and assist in making him king, and fight against you: and what have you to oppose this force? What will then become of you and your rights? Will not absolute despotism ensue?

Primary Sources: Samuel Adams

A leader of the Revolution and signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, Samuel Adams declined the invitation to attend the Constitutional Convention. He later became an opponent of the Constitution. The following are excerpts from speeches Adams delivered at the Massachusetts Ratifying Convention in 1788.

February 1, 1788...

Your Excellency's first proposition is, "that it be explicitly declared, that all powers not expressly delegated to Congress, are reserved to the several States, to be by them exercised." This appears to my mind to be a summary of a bill of rights, which gentlemen are anxious to obtain; it removes a doubt which many have entertained respecting the matter, and gives assurance that, if any law made by the Federal government shall be extended beyond the power granted by the proposed Constitution, and inconsistent with the Constitution of this State, it will be an error, and adjudged by the courts of law to be void. It is consonant with the second article in the present Confederation, that 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. I have long considered the watchfulness of the people over the conduct of their rulers, the strongest guard against the encroachments of power; and I hope the people of this country will always be thus watchful.

February 6, 1788...[Adams makes a motion]... "that it be explicitly declared, that all powers not expressly delegated to Congress are reserved to the several states, to be by them exercised" [be expanded to say] "And that the said Constitution never be construed to authorize Congress to infringe the just liberty of the press, or the rights of conscience; or to prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceful citizens, from keeping their own arms; to raise standing armies, unless when necessary for the defence of the United States, or of some one or more of them; or to prevent the people from petitioning, in a peaceful and orderly manner, the federal legislature, for a redress of grievances; or to subject the people to unreasonable searches and seizures of their persons, papers or possessions."

Fearing the ratification of the Constitution and creation of an inadequate government, Antifederalist sought to strengthen their cause by communicating with Antifederalists in other states. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee of Virginia in 1787.

MY DEAR SIR:

...The Session of our General Court which lasted six Weeks, and my Station there requiring my punctual & constant Attendance, prevented my considering the new Constitution as it is already called, so closely as was necessary for me before I

should venture an Opinion. I confess, as I enter the Building I stumble at the Threshold. I meet with a National Government, instead of a Federal Union of Sovereign States. I am not able to conceive why the Wisdom of the Convention led them to give the Preference to the former before the latter. If the several States in the Union are to become one entire Nation, under one Legislature, the Powers of which shall extend to every Subject of Legislation, and its Laws be supreme & controul the whole, the Idea of Sovereignty in these States must be lost. Indeed I think, upon such a Supposition, those Sovereignties ought to be eradicated from the Mind; for they would be Imperia in Imperio justly deemd a Solecism in Politicks, & they would be highly dangerous, and destructive of the Peace Union and Safety of the Nation. And can this National Legislature be competent to make Laws for the free internal Government of one People, living in Climates so remote and whose "Habits & particular Interests" are and probably always will be so different. Is it to be expected that General Laws can be adapted to the Feelings of the more Eastern and the more Southern Parts of so extensive a Nation? It appears to me difficult if practicable. Hence then may we not look for Discontent, Mistrust, Disaffection to Government and frequent Insurrections, which will require standing Armies to suppress them in one Place & another where they may happen to arise. Or if Laws could be made, adapted to the local Habits, Feelings, Views & Interests of those distant Parts, would they not cause Jealousies of Partiality in Government which would excite Envy and other malignant Passions productive of Wars and fighting. But should we continue distinct sovereign States, confederated for the Purposes of mutual Safety and Happiness, each contributing to the federal Head such a Part of its Sovereignty as would render the Government fully adequate to those Purposes and no more, the People would govern themselves more easily, the Laws of each State being well adapted to its own Genius & Circumstances, and the Liberties of the United States would be more secure than they can be, as I humbly conceive, under the proposed new Constitution. You are sensible, Sir, that the Seeds of Aristocracy began to spring even before the Conclusion of our Struggle for the natural Rights of Men, Seeds which like a Canker Worm lie at the Root of free Governments. So great is the Wickedness of some Men, & the stupid Servility of others, that one would be almost inclined to conclude that Communities cannot be free. The few haughty Families, think They must govern. The Body of the People tamely consent & submit to be their Slaves. This unravels the Mystery of Millions being enslaved by the few!

Primary Sources: George Clinton

Like the Federalists, Antifederalists published essays in newspapers and journals between 1787 and 1789. Under pen-names such as Cato, Centinel, and Brutus, Antifederalists attacked the Constitution and opposed ratification. "Cato" is likely the politician and military leader George Clinton. Below are excerpts from Cato's *Letter V*, printed in the *New-York Journal* on November 22, 1787.

To the Citizens of the State of New York.

In my last number I endeavored to prove that the language of the article relative to the establishment of the executive of this new government was vague and inexplicit, that the great powers of the President, connected with his duration in office would lead to oppression and ruin. That he would be governed by favorites and flatterers, or that a dangerous council would be collected from the great officers of state, -- that the ten miles square, if the remarks of one of the wisest men, drawn from the experience of mankind, may be credited, would be the asylum of the base, idle, avaricious and ambitious, and that the court would possess a language and manners different from yours; that a vice president is as unnecessary, as he is dangerous in his influence -- that the president cannot represent you because he is not of your own immediate choice, that if you adopt this government, you will incline to an arbitrary and odious aristocracy or monarchy the that the president possessed of the power, given him by this frame of government differs but very immaterially from the establishment of monarchy in Great Britain, and I warned you to beware of the fallacious resemblance that is held out to you by the advocates of this new system between it and your own state governments.

....But the next thing to be considered in conformity to my plan, is the first article of this new government, which comprises the erection of the house of representatives and senate, and prescribes their various powers and objects of legislation. The most general objections to the first article, are that biennial elections for representatives are a departure from the safe democratical principles- of annual ones -- that the number of representatives are too few; that the apportionment and principles of increase are unjust; that no attention has been paid to either the numbers or property in each state in forming the senate; that the mode in which they are appointed and their duration, will lead to the establishment of an aristocracy; that the senate and president are improperly connected, both as to appointments, and the making of treaties, which are to become the supreme law of the land; that the judicial in some measure, to-wit, as to the trial of impeachments, is placed in the senate, a branch of the legislative, and some times a branch of the executive: that Congress have the improper power of making or altering the regulations prescribed by the different legislatures, respecting the time, place, and manner of holding elections for representatives, and the time and manner of choosing senators; that standing armies may be established, and appropriation of money made for their support for two years; that the militia of the most remote state may be marched into those states situated at the opposite extreme of this continent; that the slave trade is, to all intents and purposes permanently established; and a slavish capitation, or poll-tax, may at any time be levied -- these are some of the many evils that will attend the adoption of this government.

George Clinton, president of the New York Ratifying Convention, delivered the following speech for the convention's delegates on July 11, 1788.

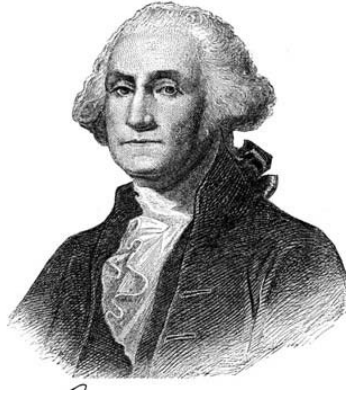
The objects of this government as expressed in the preface to it, are "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty"--These include every object for which government was established amongst man, and in every dispute about the powers granted, it is fair to infer that the means are commensurate with the end--and I believe we may venture to assert, that a good judge would not hesitate to draw this inference, especially when supported by the undefined powers granted by the 8th. section of the 1st. article and the construction that naturally arises from the prohibition against the creation of a nobility, a power which would otherwise appear to be neither expressly or impliedly granted.

I am sensible, it may be said, that the state governments are component parts of the general government and therefore that of necessity their existence must be preserved and that the Constitution has guaranteed to them a republican form[;] but this, on the least reflection, will appear to be too feeble a security to be relied on, when they are divested of every resource for their own support and the terms too indefinite to afford any security to the liberties of the people, as it includes in it the idea of an arbitrary aristocracy as well as of a free government--The form may exist without the substance. It will be remembered that this was the case in Rome when under a despotism--The Senate existed as formerly--Consuls, Tribunes etc. were chosen by the people--but their powers were merely nominal, as they were ruled by the will of the reigning Tyrant--and the most arbitrary ministers and judges generally preserve the forms of law, while they disregard its precepts and pervert them to the purposes of oppression.

From these observations, it is evident, that the general government is not constructed upon federal principles, and that its operations will terminate in a dissolution of the States--That even if this should not be the case, they will be so enfeebled as not to afford that effectual security to the rights and liberties of the people, against the undue and extensive powers vested in the general government, as its advocates have led them to expect. This being the case, the objections which have been stated against the system, must appear to well founded--and it therefore becomes our indispensable duty to obviate them by suitable amendments calculated to abridge and limit the powers to general objects. The evils pointed out in the system are now within our power to remedy--but if we suffer ourselves to be influenced by specious reasoning unsupported by example to an unconditional adoption of an imperfect government, the opportunity will be forever lost, for history does not furnish a single instance of a government once established, voluntarily yielding up its powers to secure the rights and liberties of the people.

Fact Sheet: George Washington

“Government is not reason, it is not eloquence—it is a force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master; never a moment should it be left to irresponsible action.”



Home state: Virginia

Personal Information:

- (1732-1799) Age 55 at time of Convention
- Born into a moderately wealthy planter family; learned the morals and manners for proper Virginia gentlemen
- Married Martha, the richest widow in Virginia, and helped to raise her children and grandchildren.
- Very large in stature at 6'3" tall; a distinctive, powerful, and respectable presence
- A man of few words with great strength of character
- Lieutenant colonel for Britain during French and Indian War, became war hero
- Commanded the armed forces against Great Britain during the Revolution

Occupation: Wealthy planter, Military General

Education: Little formal schooling, no college education (Note: He was the only Founding Father who did not attend college and was self-conscious about his lack of education)

Political Experience:

- Served in the Virginia House of Burgesses
- Served as a Virginia delegate to Second Continental Congress, where he was appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army
- Was one of the first to recognize the flaws in the government under the Articles of Confederation and supported the Annapolis and Constitutional Conventions
- Attended the Constitutional Convention as a delegate of Virginia and was unanimously elected president of the convention (little participation in debates)

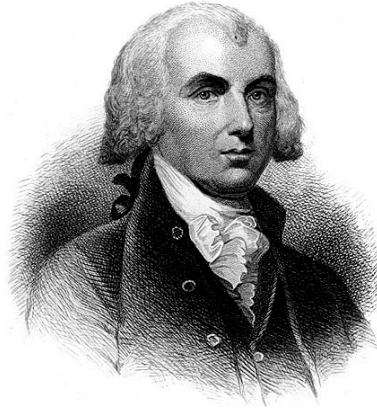
Views on the Constitution:

- Supported a strong central government severely limiting the power of the states, and was wary that the Constitution did not go far enough (Had affinity for aristocrats, like his closest political ally, Hamilton)
- Believed that the new Constitution was the best that could be agreed upon, and that it was so superior to the current one that it should be embraced by all who support a more effective national government
- Argued that the only two options were ratification of the Constitution or certain ruin

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: James Madison

“Democracy is the most vile form of government... democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.”



Home state: Virginia

Personal Information:

- (1751-1836) Age 36 at time of Convention
- Born into a wealthy planter family and lived a life of privilege
- Tiny in stature, standing at only 5'4" tall and weighing less than 100lbs. as an adult; weak and sickly in his youth
- After college, embraced the patriotic cause; turned to politics because he was too frail for military service
- Soft-spoken with poor speaking skills, but persistent (Note: He took the floor more than 150 times at the Constitutional Convention)
- A hard-worker who was very thoughtful with his words and actions (Note: He arrived three months early at the Convention with blueprints for the Constitution already prepared)
- Married wealthy widow Dolley Todd at age 43 and had no children

Occupation: Politician

Education: Privately tutored in youth; graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), where he studied government, law, and theology

Political Experience:

- Served in the Virginia State Legislature
- Helped to draft Virginia's state constitution, which became the model for the U.S. Constitution
- Represented Virginia in Continental Congress

- Served as delegate from Virginia at Constitutional Convention, where he had great influence (Proposed a plan for Congress, known as the Virginia Plan)
- Along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, authored *The Federalist Papers*, which were a series of essays published in newspapers from 1787-88 outlining the structure and purpose of the new government

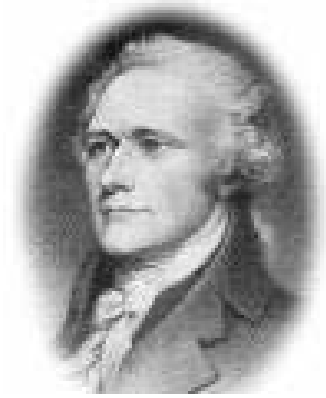
Views on the Constitution:

- Strongly advocated the ratification of the Constitution, arguing that a strong central government was essential to the stability and success of the nation
- Wrote 29 of the 85 essays compiled into *The Federalist*, in which he wrote detailed explanations of the government's working and calculated responses to Antifederalist arguments
- Believed that the Constitution created a government with "more wisdom as well as more safety" because it was the result of common deliberation of a group of citizens
- Was unable to persuade the convention's delegates to pass most of his proposals, and therefore found the Constitution to be imperfect, but like George Washington, believed it to be the best constitution that could be created under the given circumstances

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: Alexander Hamilton

“In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.”



Home state: New York (born in British West Indies)

Personal Information:

- (1755-1804) Age 32 at time of Convention
- Born out of wedlock in the West Indies.
- Became an apprentice clerk in a counting house, where he was recognized for his ambition and superior intellect
- Immigrated to colonies in 1772 at age 17 to attend college after community leaders raised funds to send him
- Enlisted in the military and after proving himself, became Washington's secretary and aide-de-camp from 1779-1781.
- Was attractive, charismatic, a skilled organizer, and obsessed with honor
- Married Elizabeth, who came from a rich and politically powerful New York family, and fathered eight children

Occupation: Lawyer, Real Estate Speculator, Soldier

Education: Basic education in Caribbean; Kings College (Later Columbia)

Political Experience:

- Served in the Continental Congress
- Served in NY State Legislature
- Feared the collapse of the U.S. under the Articles of Confederation and led the effort to convene the Constitutional Convention
- Represented NY at the Constitutional Convention; played small part in debates

- Along with James Madison and John Jay, authored *The Federalist Papers*, which were a series of essays published in newspapers from 1787-88 outlining the structure and purpose of the new government

Views on the Constitution:

- Pushed passionately for a nation built around a strong and financially stable central government
- Advocated a national government that would have virtually abolished the states, and even pressed for a lifetime leader of the country, and was frustrated by his conservative fellow delegates
- Believed that the intellectual aristocracy should rule the nation (elitist)
- Did not believe the Constitution to be a strong enough change, but argued that it was far better than the Articles of Confederation
- Particularly supported the Constitution's separation of powers into three branches of government and national taxing power

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: Benjamin Franklin

At the close of the Constitutional Convention, Franklin observed the symbol of a sun on Washington's chair and said, "I have the happiness to know it is a rising sun and not a setting sun".



Home state: Pennsylvania (Born in Boston)

Personal Information:

- (1706-1790) Age 81 at time of Convention
- Born the son of a candle-maker;
- Became apprentice to his brother James, a printer, who started Boston's first local newspaper
- Ran away to Philadelphia, where he found work as an apprentice printer
- Eventually purchased the Pennsylvania Gazette, which became the most successful newspaper in the colonies
- After making money in the printing business, devoted life to writing, science, and politics
- Married Deborah, with whom he had two children
- Became estranged from his illegitimate son, William, the governor of NJ, when he supported the British during the Revolution
- An unusual, witty, sarcastic character

Occupation: Printer, Scientist, Inventor, Diplomat, Businessman, among others

Education: Attended school for two years, then was self-taught; received honorary degrees from multiple institutions

Political Experience:

- Served as Colonial Representative for several colonies in England

- Proposed unification of the colonies in 1754 and began working actively for independence
- Elected to the Second Continental Congress
- Served on the committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence
- Served as Minister to France during the Revolution
- One of three Americans to sign the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War
- Became president of the Executive Council of Pennsylvania
- Served as a delegate of Pennsylvania at the Constitutional Convention; the oldest delegate in attendance

Views on the Constitution:

- Suspicious of a powerful central government with strong leader, whether they were kings or presidents, and initially advocated a three-person presidential committee rather than a single president
- Encouraged compromise at the convention and used humor and wit to calm the heated debates
- Signed the Constitution, despite some disapproval, and his support for it greatly improved its chances of ratification

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: George Mason

“No free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people, but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue, and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.”



Home state: Virginia

Personal Information:

- (1725-1792) Age 62 at time of Convention
- Born to a wealthy planter family; was raised from the age of 10 by his uncle, whose 1500-volume library greatly influenced his education
- Inherited 20,000 acres in VA and MD
- Fathered nine children with first wife Anne
- Was a rational man who was reluctant to join the political scene
- In doing business, his demeanor was cool and impersonal

Occupation: Wealthy planter and slave holder, Real Estate Speculator (one of the richest men in Virginia)

Education: Private tutors; private academy in MD

Political Experience:

- Served in in Virginia’s House of Burgesses
- Wrote Virginia’s Declaration of Rights in 1776, which served as a model for the first part of the Declaration of Independence and for the Bill of Rights (Note: This document was the first in America to call for freedom of the press, tolerance of religion, and right to a fair and speedy trial, among other things)

- Active in establishing the new government for the U.S. after declaring independence
- Represented Virginia at the Constitutional Convention; was one of the most vocal delegates
- After greatly influencing the construction of the Constitution, he refused to sign it

Views on the Constitution:

- Strongly promoted constitutionalism but believed the Constitution was flawed, mainly because it lacked a declaration of rights, did not abolish the slave trade, took too much power away from the states, and created a congress that was not truly representative of the nation
- Believed the new government was destined to either become a monarchy or fall into the hands of a corrupt, oppressive aristocracy

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: Patrick Henry

"The Constitution is not an instrument for the government to restrain the people, it is an instrument for the people to restrain the government- lest it come to dominate our lives and interests."



Home state: Virginia

Personal Information:

- (1736-1799) Age 51 at time of Convention
- Born to a successful Scottish-born planter
- Attempted business and farming before turning to law
- Fathered 6 children with first wife, Sarah
- A gifted speaker who was dedicated to helping the common people, he used his skills to fight for independence from Great Britain
- Distrusted men like Hamilton and Madison, fearing that they were too ambitious and nationalistic

Occupation: Lawyer

Education: Some formal education at a local school; later schooled by father; taught himself law

Political Experience:

- Served in the Virginia House of Burgesses
- Served as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress
- Served as Governor of Virginia, five terms

- Protested British tyranny before the Revolution; delivered famous “Give me liberty or give me death” speech
- Refused to attend the Constitutional Convention, saying that he “smelt a rat”

Views on the Constitution:

- Ardently supported states’ rights and argued that the Constitution gave too much power to the federal government
- Specifically opposed the Necessary and Proper Clause, arguing that it gave the federal government unlimited powers
- Pushed for limits on presidential powers and a bill of rights

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: Samuel Adams

“I meet with a National Government, instead of a Federal Union of Sovereign States. I am not able to conceive why the wisdom of the convention led them to give the preference to the former before the latter.”



Home state: Massachusetts

Personal Information:

- (1722-1803) Age 65 at time of Convention
- Born into a respectable family that was both politically and religiously active; the son of a merchant and brewer; cousin of Federalist John Adams
- A diligent, thoughtful student who studied law before turning to business
- One of Massachusetts' most prominent Revolutionary activists, he lead Bostonians in their fight against their mother country
- Passionate, but rational (ex: he believed in rebellion against oppressive, unrepresentative governments, but did not agree with Shays Rebellion because the problem could have been solved through elections)

Occupation: Merchant, Politician

Education: Harvard College

Political Experience:

- Served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives
- Served in the First Continental Congress
- Signed the Declaration of Independence
- Signed the Articles of Confederation

Views on the Constitution:

- Disliked the Constitution because it was a “national government, instead of a federal union of states”
- Thought that too much power was given to the federal government, weakening the states
- Would agree to ratify as long as amendments were added that protected individual liberties and states’ rights

NOTES:

Fact Sheet: George Clinton

“The evils pointed out in the system are now within our power to remedy--but if we suffer ourselves to be influenced by specious reasoning unsupported by example to an unconditional adoption of an imperfect government, the opportunity will be forever lost.”



Home state: New York

Personal Information:

- (1739-1812) Age 48 at time of Convention
- Son of a British immigrant who served in the colonial assembly in NY
- Enlisted in the army, fought in French and Indian War, and was appointed brigadier general during the Revolution
- Studied law and became a member of the colonial assembly in NY
- Hated supporters of the British before and during the Revolution and used his political powers to punish them
- Shared a strong friendship with George Washington and supported him as a leader the country, but the friendship did not influence his political views
- Fathered six children with wife Sarah

Occupation: Lawyer, Politician, Soldier

Education: Studied law in New York City

Political Experience:

- Worked as clerk of the court of common pleas and district attorney
- Served in NY colonial assembly
- Served in the Second Continental Congress
- Elected Governor of NY six times

- Likely wrote some of the Antifederalists essays, published in response to the Federalist essays, under the pen-name Cato
- President of the ratifying convention in NY

Views on the Constitution:

- Believed the Constitution to be too powerful and demanded more protection for individual liberties
- Believed the structure of the new government would lead to oppression and ruin at the hands of a power-hungry president, especially considering the unfair apportionment of congressional representatives
- Withdrew his opposition to the Constitution after the Bill of Rights was added

NOTES:

Primary Sources: George Washington

During the Constitutional Convention, delegates communicated openly with each other about the proceedings. In the following letter, dated July 10, 1787, George Washington shares his feelings toward the Constitution and its opposition in a response letter to Alexander Hamilton, who was visiting in New York at the time.

The Men who oppose a strong & energetic government are, in my opinion, narrow minded politicians, or are under the influence of local views. The apprehension expressed by them that the *people* will not accede to the form proposed is the *ostensible*, not the *real* cause of the opposition—but admitting that the present sentiment is as they prognosticate, the question ought nevertheless to be, is it or is it not, the best form? If the former, recommend it, and it will assuredly obtain mauger opposition.

I am sorry you went away. I wish you were back. The crisis is equally important and alarming, and no opposition under such circumstances should discourage exertions till the signature is fixed. I will not, at this time trouble you with more than my best wishes and sincere regards.

Immediately following the adjournment of the Constitutional Convention, Washington sent a copy of the Constitution to his fellow Virginian, Patrick Henry, who had skeptically declined to attend the convention. The following is an excerpt from the accompanying letter, dated September 24, 1787.

In the first moment after my return I take the liberty of sending you a copy of the Constitution which the Foederal Convention has submitted to the People of these States. I accompany it with no observations; your own Judgment will at once discover the good, and the exceptionable parts of it. and your experience of the difficulties, which have arisen when attempts have been made to recoil such variety of interests and local prejudices as pervade the several States will render explanation unnecessary. I wish the Constitution which is offered had been made more perfect, but I sincerely believe it is the best that could be obtained at this time; and, as a constitutional door is opened for amendment hereafter, the adoption of it under the present circumstances of the Union, is in my opinion desirable.

From a variety of concurring accounts it appears to me that the political concerns of this Country are, in a manner, suspended by a thread. That the Convention has been looked up to by the reflecting part of the community with a solicitude which is hardly to be conveyed, and that if nothing had been agreed on by that body, anarchy would soon have ensued, the seeds being richly sown in every soil.

In the following letter to his nephew, a politician who supported ratification, Washington poses, and attempts to answer, the big questions facing the nation in the months following the Constitutional Convention. November 10, 1787.

A Candid solution of a single question to which the plainest understanding is competent does, in my opinion, decide the dispute: namely is it best for the States to unite, or not to unite? If there are men who prefer the latter, then unquestionably the Constitution which is offered must, in their estimation, be wrong from the words, we the People to the signature inclusively; but those who think differently and yet object to parts of it, would do well to consider that it does not lye with any *one* State, or the *minority* of the States to superstruct a Constitution for the whole. The separate interests, as far as it is practicable, must be consolidated; and local views must be attended to, as far as the nature of the case will admit. Hence it is that every State has some objection to the present form and these objections are directed to different points. that which is most pleasing to one is obnoxious to another, and so vice versa. If then the Union of the whole is a desirable object, the componant parts must yield a little in order to accomplish it. Without the latter, the former is unattainable, for again I repeat it, that not a single State nor the minority of the States can force a Constitution on the Majority; but admitting the power it will surely be granted that it cannot be done without involving scenes of civil commotion of a very serious nature let the opponents of the proposed Constitution in this State be asked, and it is a question they certainly ought to have asked themselves, what line of conduct they would advise it to adopt, if nine other States, of which I think there is little doubt, should accede to the Constitution? would they recommend that it should stand single? Will they connect it with Rhode Island? or even with two others checkerwise and remain with them as outcasts from the Society, to shift for themselves? or will they return to their dependence on Great Britain? or lastly, have the mortification to come in when they will be allowed no credit for doing so?

The warmest friends and the best supporters the Constitution has, do not contend that it is free from imperfections; but they found them unavoidable and are sensible if evil is likely to arise there from, the remedy must come hereafter; for in the present moment, it is not to be obtained; and, as there is a Constitutional door open for it, I think the People (for it is with them to Judge) can as they will have the advantage of experience on their Side, decide with as much propriety on the alterations and amendments which are necessary [as] ourselves. I do not think we are more inspired, have more wisdom, or possess more virtue, than those who will come after us.

Primary Sources: James Madison

After the Constitution was signed, Madison wrote to his political ally, Thomas Jefferson who was serving as Minister to France at the time. He reported on the results of the convention and explained the benefits of the document it produced. The following is an excerpt from a letter from Madison to Jefferson dated October 24, 1787.

. . . You will herewith receive the result of the Convention, which continued its Session till the 17th. of September. I take the liberty of making some observations on the subject which will help to make up a letter, if they should answer no other purpose.

It appeared to be the sincere and unanimous wish of the Convention to cherish and preserve the Union of the States. No proposition was made, no suggestion was thrown out, in favor of a partition of the Empire into two or more Confederacies.

It was generally agreed that the objects of the Union could not be secured by any system founded on the principle of a confederation of sovereign States. A *voluntary* observance of the federal law by all the members, could never be hoped for. A *compulsive* one could evidently never be reduced to practice, and if it could, involved equal calamities to the innocent & the guilty, the necessity of a military force both obnoxious & dangerous, and in general, a scene resembling much more a civil war, than the administration of a regular Government.

Following the adjournment of the Constitutional Convention, James Madison and John Jay were recruited by Alexander Hamilton to compose a series of persuasive essays explaining the purpose and benefits of the Constitution. These essays were printed in NY newspapers and were collectively known as *The Federalist*. The following is an excerpt from *Federalist 57*, written by Madison in February 1788.

To the People of the State of New York:

THE *third* charge against the House of Representatives is, that it will be taken from that class of citizens which will have least sympathy with the mass of the people, and be most likely to aim at an ambitious sacrifice of the many to the aggrandizement of the few.

Of all the objections which have been framed against the federal Constitution, this is perhaps the most extraordinary. Whilst the objection itself is levelled against a pretended oligarchy, the principle of it strikes at the very root of republican government.

The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust. The elective mode of obtaining rulers is the characteristic policy of republican government. The means relied on in this form of government for preventing their degeneracy are numerous and various. The most effectual one, is such a limitation of the term of appointments as will maintain a proper responsibility to the people.

Let me now ask what circumstance there is in the constitution of the House of Representatives that violates the principles of republican government, or favors the elevation of the few on the ruins of the many? Let me ask whether every circumstance is not, on the contrary, strictly conformable to these principles, and scrupulously impartial to the rights and pretensions of every class and description of citizens?

Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscurity and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States. They are to be the same who exercise the right in every State of electing the corresponding branch of the legislature of the State.

Who are to be the objects of popular choice? Every citizen whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country. No qualification of wealth, of birth, of religious faith, or of civil profession is permitted to fetter the judgement or disappoint the inclination of the people.

Primary Sources: Alexander Hamilton

Though the Constitutional Convention's proceedings were kept a secret from the public, the delegates at the convention communicated openly with each other about it. The following is an excerpt from a letter that Alexander Hamilton wrote to George Washington while he was visiting NY during the convention. July 3, 1787.

In my passage through the Jerseys and since my arrival here I have taken particular pains to discover the public sentiment and I am more and more convinced that this is the critical opportunity for establishing the prosperity of this country on a solid foundation. I have conversed with men of information not only of this City but from different parts of the state; and they agree that there has been an astonishing revolution for the better in the minds of the people. The prevailing apprehension among thinking men is that the Convention, from a fear of shocking the popular opinion, will not go far enough. They seem to be convinced that a strong well mounted government will better suit the popular palate than one of a different complexion. Men in office are indeed taking all possible pains to give an unfavourable impression of the Convention; but the current seems to be running strongly the other way.

A plain but sensible man, in a conversation I had with him yesterday, expressed himself nearly in this manner. The people begin to be convinced that their "excellent form of government" as they have been used to call it, will not answer their purpose; and that they must substitute something not very remote from that which they have lately quitted.

The following letter was written by Alexander Hamilton to James Madison during NY's debates over ratification. Hamilton worried that the growing strength of the Antifederalists would lead to NY voting down the Constitution. May 19, 1788.

As Clinton is truly the leader of his party, and is inflexibly obstinate I count little on overcoming opposition by reason. Our only chances will be the previous ratification by nine states, which may shake the firmness of his followers; and a change in the sentiments of the people which have been for some time travelling towards the constitution, though the first impressions made by every species of influence and artifice were too strong to be eradicated in time to give a decisive turn to the elections. We shall leave nothing undone to cultivate a favourable disposition in the citizens at large.

The language of the Antifederalists is that if all the other states adopt, New York ought still to hold out. I have the most direct intelligence, but in a manner, which forbids a public use being made of it, that Clinton has in several conversations declared his opinion of the *inutility* of the UNION. Tis an unhappy reflection, that the friends to it should by quarrelling for straws among themselves promote the designs of its adversaries.

Immediately after the Constitution was completed in September of 1787, attacks on the Constitution began appearing in New York newspapers. Hamilton recruited James Madison and John Jay to compose a series of persuasive essays explaining the purpose and benefits of the document. These essays were printed in NY newspapers and were collectively known as *The Federalist*. The following is an excerpt from an *Federalist* 85, the final essay, written by Hamilton in August 1788.

The additional securities to republican government, to liberty and to property, to be derived from the adoption of the plan under consideration, consist chiefly in the restraints which the preservation of the Union will impose on local factions and insurrections, and on the ambition of powerful individuals in single States, who may acquire credit and influence enough, from leaders and favorites, to become the despots of the people; in the diminution of the opportunities to foreign intrigue, which the dissolution of the Confederacy would invite and facilitate; in the prevention of extensive military establishments, which could not fail to grow out of wars between the States in a disunited situation; in the express guaranty of a republican form of government to each; in the absolute and universal exclusion of titles of nobility; and in the precautions against the repetition of those practices on the part of the State governments which have undermined the foundations of property and credit, have planted mutual distrust in the breasts of all classes of citizens, and have occasioned an almost universal prostration of morals....

....Concessions on the part of the friends of the plan, that it has not a claim to absolute perfection, have afforded matter of no small triumph to its enemies. "Why," say they, "should we adopt an imperfect thing? Why not amend it and make it perfect before it is irrevocably established?" This may be plausible enough, but it is only plausible. In the first place I remark, that the extent of these concessions has been greatly exaggerated. They have been stated as amounting to an admission that the plan is radically defective, and that without material alterations the rights and the interests of the community cannot be safely confided to it. This, as far as I have understood the meaning of those who make the concessions, is an entire perversion of their sense. No advocate of the measure can be found, who will not declare as his sentiment, that the system, though it may not be perfect in every part, is, upon the whole, a good one; is the best that the present views and circumstances of the country will permit; and is such an one as promises every species of security which a reasonable people can desire.

I answer in the next place, that I should esteem it the extreme of imprudence to prolong the precarious state of our national affairs, and to expose the Union to the jeopardy of successive experiments, in the chimerical pursuit of a perfect plan. I never expect to see a perfect work from imperfect man. The result of the deliberations of all collective bodies must necessarily be a compound, as well of the errors and prejudices, as of the good sense and wisdom, of the individuals of whom they are composed. The compacts which are to embrace thirteen distinct States in a common bond of amity and union, must as necessarily be a compromise of as many dissimilar interests and inclinations. How can perfection spring from such materials?

Primary Sources: Benjamin Franklin

On the final day of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin wanted to address the delegates before signing. He was too weak to deliver the speech himself, so James Wilson, also from Pennsylvania, read the speech for him. The following is as reported in Madison's notes on the Convention for Monday, September 17, 1787.

Mr. President

I confess that there are several parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others. Most men indeed as well as most sects in Religion, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far error. Steele a Protestant in a Dedication tells the Pope, that the only difference between our Churches in their opinions of the certainty of their doctrines is, the Church of Rome is infallible and the Church of England is never in the wrong. But though many private persons think almost as highly of their own infallibility as of that of their sect, few express it so naturally as a certain french lady, who in a dispute with her sister, said "I don't know how it happens, Sister but I meet with no body but myself, that's always in the right — *Il n'y a que moi qui a toujours raison.*"

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such; because I think a general Government necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men, all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded like those of the Builders of Babel; and that our States are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another's throats. Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure, that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die. If every one of us in returning to our Constituents were to report the objections he has had to it, and endeavor to gain partizans in support of them, we might prevent its being generally received, and thereby lose all the salutary effects & great advantages resulting naturally in our favor among foreign Nations as well as among ourselves, from our real or apparent unanimity. Much of the strength & efficiency of any Government in procuring and securing happiness to the people, depends, on opinion, on the general opinion of the goodness of the Government, as well as of the wisdom and integrity of its Governors. I hope therefore that for our own sakes as a part of the people, and for the sake of posterity, we shall act heartily and unanimously in recommending this Constitution (if approved by Congress & confirmed by the Conventions) wherever our influence may extend, and turn our future thoughts & endeavors to the means of having it well administred.

On the whole, Sir, I can not help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to it, would with me, on this occasion doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.

Federalists v. Anti-Federalists

A Role Play Debate over the Ratification of the
Constitution

Laura Greeley
Masconomet Regional High School
"A More Perfect Union" Final Project
September 22, 2010

Introduction

In May of 1787, delegates from the states met in Philadelphia with the goal of revising the Articles of Confederation. With a quorum of seven states, debates were opened, and eventually all states were represented except Rhode Island. Through the grueling heat of summer, the delegates debated the philosophical origins of government, the weaknesses of the nation under the Articles of Confederation, and the best possible structure of government for the United States. With such a wide array of views represented, compromise was essential. In the end the delegates abandoned the Articles of Confederation altogether and decided upon a plan that was unprecedented in history: a federal government of elected representatives in three separate branches, each with the power to check and balance the others. The structure of the new government was spelled out in the Constitution. On September 17, 1787, all twelve state delegations approved the Constitution, with 39 of the 42 present delegates signing. The convention was adjourned, and the delegates rushed home to their respective states to share the news.

Before the Constitution could become law, though, it had to be ratified by three-fourths, or 9 of the 13 states. Such a dramatic shift in government naturally attracted both dedicated supporters and strong opponents. Those who supported ratification of the Constitution as it was in 1787 were called Federalists because they supported a strong central government. Opponents of the Constitution were named Anti-Federalists, falsely insinuating that they were against a federal government. Actually, they opposed the Constitution for a variety of reasons, including fear of states losing their rights and the desire for a bill of rights protecting individual liberties.

Federalists and Anti-Federalists raced to promote their views on ratification to the public. They delivered speeches, held rallies, published in newspapers, and distributed pamphlets. *The Federalist*, a compilation of essays written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison under the collective pen-name Publius, contains some of the most important sources of analysis of the Constitution. Anti-Federalists, though far less organized than the Federalists, published some powerfully persuasive writings of their own, such as *Lee's Letters from the Federal Farmer to the Republican* by Richard Henry Lee. Both sides presented articulate and convincing arguments, which led to some intense debates on the floors of the state ratifying conventions.

In this unit, students will learn about the debates over ratification of the Constitution through an interactive role play debate. During debate and preparation, students will either take on the roles of some of the most important Federalists and Anti-Federalists involved in the ratification process or become moderators for the debate. In preparation students will explore the arguments, experiences, and personalities of the key characters and their parties through primary sources and short biographies provided in class, and through independent research. The activities and debate are based on a class size of 20 students at the College Prep level with class period length of 60 minutes. Ideally, this unit will be taught immediately following lessons on the Constitutional Convention so that students have the necessary background information, but before lessons on the ratification of the Constitution.

Learning Objectives

Upon completing all of the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify the main arguments posed by the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the debate over ratification of the Constitution.
- Analyze primary sources and gather appropriate information from secondary sources and use information to formulate arguments for or against the Constitution.
- Articulate the views of several prominent Federalists and Anti-Federalists during a class debate.
- Explain the significance of the debates over ratification to the creation and development of the United States.

Curriculum Standards

- USI.8 Describe the debate over the ratification of the Constitution between Federalists and Anti-Federalists and explain the key ideas contained in the Federalist Papers on federalism, factions, checks and balances, and the importance of an independent judiciary.
- USI.9 Explain the reasons for the passage of the Bill of Rights.

Materials

- Unit guide for daily activities
- Student handout with criteria for success
- Grading rubric for Moderators and Debaters
- Character Fact Sheets, 8 total
- Primary Source Excerpt packets, 8 total

Sources:

Gibson, Alan. *Interpreting the Founding: Guide to the Enduring Debates over the Origins and Foundations of the American Republic*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006. Print.

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Jordan, Terry, ed. *The U.S. Constitution and Fascinating Facts About it*. Naperville, IL: Oak Hill Publishing Company, 2005. Print.

Kammen, Michael, ed. *The Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

The National Archives. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2003. Web. 10 Sept. 2010. <www.archives.gov>.

Rossiter, Clinton, ed. Charles R. Kesler, Introduction and Notes. *The Federalist Papers*. By Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. New York: Signet Classic, 2003. Print.

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Daily Activities

Day 1:

- Introduction: Distribute student handout and read aloud with students.
 - Assign roles: Students will be assigned one of the following roles:
 - **Key Character (8 total):** Students will assume the identity of one of eight key characters involved in the debates over ratification (see list below). During the debate, the key characters will introduce themselves and participate in the debate as if they were that character.
 - **Key Character Supporter (8 total):** Students will pair up with a key character and will be responsible for learning the same information as the student assigned that key character role. During debate the supporter will not assume that character's identity, but will present the same arguments.
 - **Moderator (4 total):** Students will act as moderators and judges during debate. Students are responsible for learning the views of all key characters, preparing questions to stimulate debate, evaluating the debaters during the debate, and judging which side won the debate.
- *Note: Roles and character sources vary in difficulty. Assign students accordingly.

Key Character List:

Federalists	Antifederalists
George Washington, VA	George Mason, VA
James Madison, VA	Patrick Henry, VA
Alexander Hamilton, NY	Samuel Adams, MA
Benjamin Franklin, PA	George Clinton, NY

- Distribute necessary handouts: Each Key Character and Character Supporter should get a copy of the Fact Sheet and the Primary Sources for their character. Moderators should have access to Fact Sheets and Primary Sources for all characters.
- Begin group work: Students should break into small groups according to role, begin exploring the information provided, and complete the assigned tasks.
- Tasks:
 - Key Characters & Character Supporters: pair up according to character, read Fact Sheet and Primary Sources together, and begin to learn the background, views, and personality of the assigned character. Students should highlight the most useful information and quotes. Students should begin preparing a list of the character's strongest arguments for or against the Constitution.
 - Moderators: work as a team to become familiar with the characters. Moderators should divide the workload and assign two characters to each moderator. Moderators will be required to write at least two questions per character that challenge and/or clarify a character's argument.
- Homework: Students should research their assigned characters and bring new information and sources to class with them that will help develop strong arguments during the debate.

Day 2:

- Small group work: Students should pair up again, recap information learned on Day 1, and share information gathered and ideas developed at home. Students should then continue their list of the character's best arguments.
- Large group work: Halfway into the class period, students should organize themselves into large groups according to their parties/roles (Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and Moderators) and complete the following tasks:
 - Key Characters and Character Supporters, arranged into Federalists and Anti-Federalists: Students should share the information and arguments that were developed in small groups, making sure to introduce their character to the rest of the group, and discuss the strongest arguments in support of their side. Provide students with one copy of each of the opposing character's Fact Sheet and Primary Sources. Students should begin reviewing the information provided on their opponents, and collaborate on a list of rebuttals in anticipation of questions from the opposing side.
 - Moderators: Students should share information learned about their designated characters, continue analyzing the sources provided, and make a list of the best arguments that each side should make during the debate. Students should also develop an introduction speech welcoming the debaters, setting the stage for the debate, and opening up the debate.
- HW: Students who are assigned the role of a Key Character should draft their introduction speeches, which will be delivered at the opening of the debate. Speeches should include background information on the character and views on the Constitution. Students who are assigned the role of Character Supporters and Moderators should continue their research and analysis of sources and complete their lists of arguments and rebuttals.

Day 3:

- Large group work: Students should form into the large groups from Day 2. In groups students should accomplish the following tasks:
 - Key Characters and Character Supporters, arranged into Federalists and Anti-Federalists: Practice delivering introduction speeches, collect constructive criticism from peers, and make edits. Finalize the arguments of the individual characters and the group. Practice debate.
 - Moderators: Solidify list of arguments that each side should make, create a scoring sheet to help evaluate the debaters, and brush up on Parliamentary Procedure. See <http://www.robertsrules.org/rulesintro.htm>. Students should practice asking questions and keeping order using Parliamentary Procedure.
- HW: Students should prepare for debate the following day. Students should be sure to bring with them their notes, handouts, argument lists, and speeches.

Day 4:

- Student preparation: Students should be allowed five minutes at the beginning of class to get organized. From this point on, teachers should try to stay removed from the activities. Teachers should use debate rubrics to grade students throughout the class period.
- Debate Preparation: Teacher should arrange the room to have two distinct sides facing one another with section at the front for Moderators. Key characters should sit close to their Character Supporters, divided into Federalists on one side of the room and Anti-Federalists on the other.
- Debate: Moderators should welcome the debaters, state the purpose of the debate, and explain the rules of the debate. Key characters should then introduce themselves to the crowd. Once introductions are finished, Moderators should open up the floor for debate. Key Characters and Supporters should take turns speaking, using their prepared arguments, and making sure that all debaters participate. Throughout the debate, Moderators should keep order and ask guiding questions to steer the debate. Meanwhile, Moderators should use their scoring sheets to evaluate the debaters. With 5-10 minutes left to class, Moderators should close debate.
- Debate Evaluation: Moderators should break into private caucus to discuss the debate proceedings, compare scoring sheets, and determine the winning side in the debate. At the end of the class, Moderators should deliver their decision and support it with evidence from the debate.
- Work Submittal: Before leaving, students should turn in their lists, speeches, and notes to the teacher to aid in the grading process.

Day 5:

- As a whole class, discuss the events of the debate over ratification of the Constitution. Consider the following questions:
 - What were the major arguments presented by both sides?
 - Which arguments were best supported? Which lacked substance?
 - Based on the arguments presented in class, would you support or oppose the Constitution? If you answered oppose, under what circumstances would you approve of ratification?
 - Knowing that debates similar to ours were happening all over the country, what do you think their impact was during the ratification process? What do you think is the lasting impact?

Federalists v. Anti-Federalists:

A Role Play Debate over the Ratification of the Constitution

Background:

It is fall 1787 and the Philadelphia Convention has just closed its doors after four long months of grueling debate. Before adjourning the delegates had voted in favor of a new plan for the government of the United States, spelled out in a constitution. If the Constitution is to become law, though, it needs to be ratified by three-fourths, or 9 of the 13 states. Some states have already ratified, accepting the document exactly as it was created by the convention's delegates. In other states, however, opposition is strong and adoption of this new form of government is far from inevitable. Those who support ratification of the Constitution as is are called Federalists, because they support a strong central government. Opponents of the Constitution, though they oppose it for a variety of reasons, are collectively known as Anti-Federalists.

All across the country Federalists and Anti-Federalists are racing to promote their views on ratification to the public. They deliver speeches, hold rallies, publish in newspapers, and distribute pamphlets. Both sides present articulate and convincing arguments, which leads to some intense debates on the floors of the state ratifying conventions. Whether the Constitution will be ratified or not is yet to be determined.

Assignment:

Over the next few days, you will be learning about the debates over ratification of the Constitution through an interactive role play debate. During debate and preparation, you will either take on the roles of some of the most important Federalists and Anti-Federalists involved in the ratification process or become moderators for the debate. In preparation you will explore the arguments, experiences, and personalities of the key characters and their parties through primary sources and short biographies provided in class, and through independent research.

Date of Debate: _____

Value (grading): _____

Criteria for Success for Debate Participants:

- **Historical Accuracy:** Accurately portray the views and personality of your character, with special attention paid to your representation of the time period.
- **Preparation:** Make efficient use of class and homework time to research your character and develop your arguments.
- **Participation:** Actively engage in the debate throughout the entire class period, both by posing and responding to questions and comments.
- **Persuasion:** Present the best arguments to support your side and successfully attack the opponents' arguments.
- **Teamwork:** Work collaboratively with your teammates, sharing the workload both during preparation and debate.

Criteria For Success for Moderators:

- **Historical Accuracy:** Create an accurate list of potential arguments for both sides and appropriate questions to pose during debate. Accurately judge debate participants' portrayals of the views and personalities of their character.
- **Preparation:** Make efficient use of class and homework time to research the characters and their positions.
- **Participation:** Actively engage in the debate throughout the entire class period by asking questions of the debate participants and judging their effectiveness.
- **Persuasion:** Present a well-supported argument declaring one side the victor at the end of the debate.
- **Teamwork:** Work collaboratively with your teammates, sharing the workload both during preparation and debate.

<u>Historical Accuracy:</u> Did you remain true to your character, group's opinions, & the time period?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Preparation:</u> Did you make proper use of class & homework time? Were you prepared to speak & participate in the debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Participation:</u> Were you actively engaged and participating throughout the entire debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Persuasiveness:</u> Did you make a good case for your group & successfully attack the other groups' opinions?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Teamwork:</u> Did your group members work well together, sharing the work-load during the prep & debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent

Name: _____ Total: _____ / _____ = _____

Federalist v. Anti-Federalist Debate Rubric: Moderators

<u>Historical Accuracy:</u> Did you complete an accurate list of arguments and questions? Did you accurately judge debaters?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Preparation:</u> Did you make proper use of class & homework time? Were you prepared to speak & participate in the debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Participation:</u> Were you actively engaged and participating throughout the entire debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Persuasiveness:</u> Did you make a good case for your group's decisions at the end of the debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<u>Teamwork:</u> Did your group members work well together, sharing the work-load during the prep & debate?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent

Name: _____ Total: _____ / _____ = _____