



U. S. History: From the Colonial Period to 1877

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7.3 RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

<p>OPPOSITION TO CONSTITUTION Massachusetts Virginia New York</p>	<p>If the people had voted on the Constitution in the fall of 1787, it probably would not have passed, since substantial majorities opposed the document in Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York. In only a few of the remaining states could those who supported a strong federal government count on support. To obtain ratification by nine states, they faced a difficult task.</p>
<p>THE FEDERALISTS</p>	<p>The Constitution's supporters, known as FEDERALISTS (not to be confused with the Federalist party which emerged in the 1790s), had a number of advantages over those who opposed the document. They had a SUPERIOR ORGANIZATION, were members of the established POLITICAL ELITE, and used a name that once had described opponents to centralization. They CALLED THEIR CRITICS ANTIFEDERALISTS, a label that made it seem that they stood for nothing constructive. By May 1788, eight states had ratified the Constitution, but one more was needed.</p>
<p>THE ANTI-FEDERALISTS</p>	<p>The ANTIFEDERALISTS were a diverse group that drew support from rural and backcountry areas with a long tradition of antipathy toward eastern elites. The new government, they claimed, could not effectively represent the interests of the individual states and their populations. It would increase taxes, exercise dictatorial powers, favor the elites over the common people, and put an end to individual liberties. Above all, they protested the document's lack of a bill of rights.</p>
<p>Virginia New York</p>	<p>Although the decisive ninth vote for ratification had been cast by New Hampshire, a new government could not hope to succeed without the participation of Virginia and New York, whose conventions were closely divided.</p> <p>George Mason and Patrick Henry led the Antifederalist opposition in Virginia's ratifying convention. After Federalists promised a carefully worded bill of rights, the Virginia convention ratified the Constitution by a ten-vote margin. The New York Antifederalists argued that such a large and powerful state as New York did not need to yield so much authority to a new federal government.</p>
<p>THE FEDERALIST PAPERS</p>	<p>The FEDERALIST PAPERS were a series of eighty-five essays written by ALEXANDER HAMILTON, JOHN JAY, and JAMES MADISON between October 1787 and May 1788. The essays were published anonymously under the pen name PUBLIUS in various New York state newspapers to urge New Yorkers to ratify the proposed Constitution.</p> <p>In lobbying for adoption of the Constitution, the essays explained particular provisions of the Constitution in detail. For this reason, and because Hamilton and Madison were each members of the Constitutional Convention, the Federalist Papers are often used today to help interpret the intentions of those drafting the Constitution. (See http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fedi.htm)</p> <p>FEDERALIST NO. 10, one of the most compelling essays, challenged Antifederalists' conviction that republican government had to be small-scale:</p> <p><i>The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended....</i></p>

<p>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>	<p><i>[I]t clearly appears, that the same advantage which a republic has over a democracy, in controlling the effects of faction, is enjoyed by a large over a small republic,--is enjoyed by the Union over the States composing it. Does the advantage consist in the substitution of representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and schemes of injustice? It will not be denied that the representation of the Union will be most likely to possess these requisite endowments. Does it consist in the greater security afforded by a greater variety of parties, against the event of any one party being able to outnumber and oppress the rest? In an equal degree does the increased variety of parties comprised within the Union, increase this security. Does it, in fine, consist in the greater obstacles opposed to the concert and accomplishment of the secret wishes of an unjust and interested majority? Here, again, the extent of the Union gives it the most palpable advantage.</i></p> <p>(For details, see http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fed10.htm)</p> <p>Newspaper support and heavy lobbying, combined with news of Virginia’s decision, finally convinced New York. In less than twelve months, the United States Constitution had been written and ratified.</p> <p>In the 1789s, the American people confronted the challenges of self-government. They wrestled with the problem of how much democracy to permit while still maintaining a workable system. When they discovered that demanding unanimity made it impossible to function, they created a stronger, national government regulated by a system of checks and balances. The ratification of the Constitution ended a decade of protest, revolution, and political experimentation. However, there was still opposition to the Constitution, and conflict between its supporters and opponents continued.</p> <p>In <i>An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States</i> (1911), historian Charles A. Beard argued that the Constitution was an economic document written by self-interested elite. After reading this excerpt from his book, present evidence to support or refute this argument, based on your knowledge of how the constitution was created and ratified: http://www.choate.edu/Sports/dept/ng/courses/documents/BeardExcerpt.html</p> <p>Why were Virginia and New York so important to the ratifying process and the “more perfect union?”</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson cautioned: “The real friends of the Constitution in its federal form, if they wish it to be immortal, should be attentive, by amendments, to make it keep pace with the advance of age in science and experience.” Describe the amendment proposal and ratification process and try to account for the fact that to date only twenty-seven amendments have been added.</p> <p><i>Adventure Tales of the Constitution of the United States</i> refers to the Constitution as the “Miracle at Philadelphia: A Federal Republic” and says that two pillars – capitalism and democracy – uphold the edifice of the republic and if either pillar crumbles, the republic falls: http://www.adventuretales.com/cbpage24.htm. Examine the web site to determine if the author is correct. Where in the Constitution does it say that the republic is based on capitalism? Since there is a close relationship between Protestantism, capitalism, and democracy, why do you think the author failed to list Protestantism as a third pillar of the republic?</p>
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