

# ATA - Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist Perspectives on the Constitution

## ★ ARGUMENTS AGAINST RATIFYING THE CONSTITUTION

### ANTI-FEDERALIST WRITINGS, 1787-1788

The Constitution was submitted for ratification to thirteen states, nine of which had to approve for it to take effect. Anti-federalists were those who opposed ratification because of their belief in limited power of the federal government. They feared that the Constitution would establish a strong federal government limiting states' rights and individuals' freedoms. Below are excerpts from selected speeches and writings that reflect some of their views.

#### **GEORGE MASON**, *Speech to the Virginia ratifying convention, 1788*



"Mr. Chairman, whether the Constitution be good or bad, the present clause clearly discovers that it is a national government and no longer a confederation. I mean that clause which gives the first hint of the general government laying direct taxes. The assumption of this power of laying direct taxes does, of itself, entirely change the confederation of the states into one consolidated government. This power, being at discretion, unconfined and without any kind of control, must carry everything before it. The very idea of converting what was formerly a confederation to a consolidated government is totally subversive of every principle, which has hitherto governed us.

"This power is calculated to annihilate totally the state governments. Will the people of this great community submit to be individually taxed by two different and distinct powers? Will they suffer themselves to be doubly harassed? These two concurrent powers cannot exist long together; the one will destroy the other: the general government being paramount to and in every respect more powerful than the state governments, the latter must give way to the former. Is it to be supposed that one national government will suit so extensive a country, embracing so many climates and containing inhabitants so very different in manners, habits, and customs?..."

#### **WILLIAM FINDLEY, ROBERT WHITEHILL, and JOHN SMILIE**, *"The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the State of Pennsylvania to the Constituents," 1787*

"...The powers of Congress under the new Constitution are complete and unlimited over the *purse* and *sword*, and are perfectly independent of and supreme over the state governments, whose intervention in these great points is entirely destroyed. By virtue of their power of taxation, Congress may command the whole or any part of the property of the people. They may impose what imposts upon commerce, they may impose what land taxes, poll taxes, excises, duties on all written instruments and duties on every other article that they may judge proper; in short, every species of taxation, whether of an external or internal nature, is comprised in Article I, Section 8...."

#### **PATRICK HENRY**, *Speech to the Virginia ratifying convention, 1788*



"...And here I would make this inquiry of those worthy characters who composed a part of the late federal Convention. I am sure they were fully impressed with the necessity of forming a great consolidated government instead of a confederation. That this is a consolidated government is demonstrably clear; and the danger of such a government is, to my mind, very striking. I have the highest veneration for those gentlemen; but, sir, give me leave to demand—What right had they to say, "We, the people"? My political curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare, leads me to ask—Who authorized them to speak the language of "We, the people," instead of "We, the states"? States are the characteristics and the soul of a confederation...."

#### **RICHARD HENRY LEE**, *Letters from the Federal Farmer to the Republican, October 12, 1787*



"...It is to be observed that when the people shall adopt the proposed Constitution it will be their last and supreme act; it will be adopted not by the people of the New Hampshire, Massachusetts, etc., but by the people of the United States; and wherever this Constitution, or any part of it, shall be incompatible with the ancient customs, rights, the laws, or the constitutions heretofore established in the United States, it will entirely abolish them and do them away...."

#### **JOHN MERCER**, *To the members of the conventions of New York and Virginia, 1788*

"...We are persuaded that the people of so large a continent, so different in interests, so distinct in habits, cannot in all cases legislate in one body by themselves or their representatives. By themselves, it is obviously impracticable. By their representatives, it will be found, on investigation, equally so; for if these representatives are to pursue the general interest without constitutional checks and restraints, it must be done by a mutual sacrifice of the interests, wishes, and prejudices of the parts they represent...."

## FEDERALIST WRITINGS, 1787-1788

In 1787 and 1788 three Federalists (as supporters of the Constitution were called)—James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay—advocated ratification of the Constitution with 85 newspaper essays published under the pseudonym Publius. Later these essays were published as *The Federalist Papers*. Below are excerpts from three of the essays.

### JAMES MADISON, *Federalist Number 10*



“(It) may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concept result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such 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. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.

“A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking. Let us examine the points in which it varies from pure democracy, and we shall comprehend both the nature of the cure and the efficacy, which it must derive from the Union....

“Hence, it 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 to 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 great 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. The influence of factious leaders may

kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States. A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source. A rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it; in the same proportion as such a malady is more likely to taint a particular county or district, than an entire State....”

### ALEXANDER HAMILTON, *Federalist Number 78*

“...A constitution is, in fact, and must be regarded by the judges, as a fundamental law. It therefore belongs to them to ascertain its meaning, as well as the meaning of any particular act proceeding from the legislative body. If there should happen to be an irreconcilable variance between the two, that which has the superior obligation and validity ought, of course, to be preferred; or, in other words, the Constitution ought to be preferred to the statute, the intention of the people to the intention of their agents....”



### JOHN JAY, *Federalist Number 2*





“...Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts, fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war, have nobly established general liberty and independence.

“This country and this people seem to have been made for each other, and it appears as if it was the design of Providence, that an inheritance so proper and convenient for a band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties....”

## 13-4 ★ FEDERALISTS VS. REPUBLICANS: THE FIRST POLITICAL PARTIES, 1792

“Jefferson said, ‘the many!’ Hamilton said, ‘the few!’ Like opposite sides of a penny were those exalted two. If Jefferson said, ‘It’s black, sir!’ Hamilton cried, ‘It’s white!’ But, ‘twixt the two, our Constitution started working right.”  
 —Stephan Vincent Benet

<b>FEDERALIST PARTY</b>	By the election year of 1792, Hamilton and Jefferson headed rival political parties to enact their views.  Both parties had the same goal, a free republic, but differed in means to attain it.  The political party system (continuing since 1792 to the present), at first feared divisive, has proved vital for democracy.  <p style="text-align: center;">Why?</p> Parties provide for dissent and choice, the lifeblood of freedom.	<b>REPUBLICAN PARTY*</b> (not the same as today's Republican party) <b>*also called Democratic-Republican</b>
B A S E D O N  		 B A S E D O N  ALEXANDER HAMILTON'S VIEWS <span style="float: right;">THOMAS JEFFERSON'S VIEWS</span>

### SOCIAL

#### PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Hamilton believed people are basically selfish—thus need the restraint of strong government.

#### OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Jefferson believed people are basically good—thus capable of self-government.

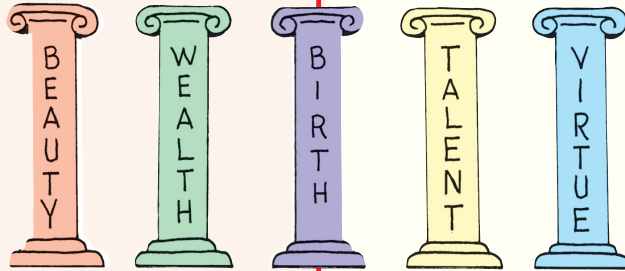
### POLITICAL: Who Should Govern?

Both Hamilton and Jefferson believed that an aristocracy should rule—but differed as to what kind:

Hamilton favored:  
a rich and well-born aristocracy, based on **birth, wealth, and status.**

He agreed with John Jay that, “Those who own the country ought to govern it.”

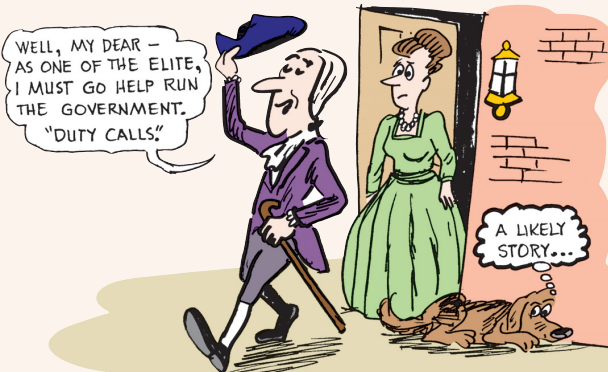
They had more at stake, so they would be more responsible.



THE FIVE PILLARS OF ARISTOCRACY  
(as described by John Adams)

Jefferson favored:  
a natural aristocracy, based on **talent and virtue.**

He advocated rule by educated men of property, but he promoted widespread access to both education and property.



★ FEDERALISTS VS. REPUBLICANS

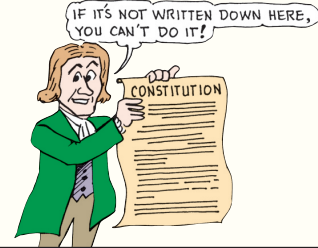
**FEDERALIST PARTY**  
Based on HAMILTON'S VIEWS

**REPUBLICAN PARTY**  
Based on JEFFERSON'S VIEWS

- 1. Nationalist: strong central government
- 2. Loose interpretation of the Constitution

**GOVERNMENT POWER**

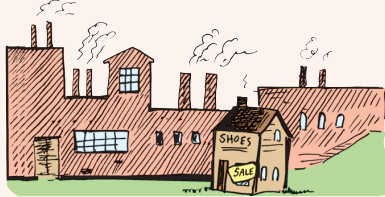
- 1. Localist, states' rights: limited central government
- 2. Strict interpretation of the Constitution



- 1. Industrial economy; manufacturing
- 2. Urban centered

**ECONOMY**

- 1. Agrarian economy; farming
- 2. Rural centered



- 1. Modified capitalism: government aid to business—but not regulation of business
- 2. Responsive to creditors

**CAPITALIST SYSTEM**

- 1. *Laissez-faire* (hands-off) capitalism: government neither aiding nor regulating business
- 2. Responsive to debtors



**PRO-BRITISH**

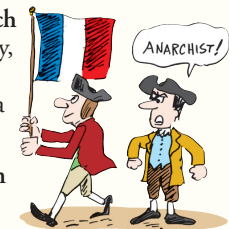
**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**PRO-FRENCH**



Americans cheered when the French Revolution of 1789 overthrew the French monarchy, and replaced it in 1792 with the French Republic—based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. But the cheering stopped in 1793 when the French republicans beheaded King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, started a reign of terror against the nobles, and declared war on Britain.

Warring France and Britain violated America's neutrality by interfering with her shipping. Federalists, fearing French "mobocracy," favored Britain.



Federalist Republican

Republicans, fearing monarchists, favored France.

Republican Federalist

**LEADERS**



President George Washington (tried to remain neutral but leaned toward the Federalists)



Vice President John Adams (committed Federalist leader; Federalist president, 1797-1801.)



Congressman James Madison (co-leader of Republicans; Republican president, 1809-17)



Senator James Monroe (friend to Madison, Jefferson; Republican president, 1817-25)

- 1. Northeast merchants, manufacturers, financiers
- 2. Creditors

**VOTERS**

- 1. Southern agrarians, northeastern workers, western pioneers
- 2. Debtors