

The Federalist

The Federalist (they did not become known as 'The Federalist Papers' until the 20th century) is a series of 85 essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay between October 1787 and May 1788.



The essays were published anonymously, under the pen name "Publius," in various New York state newspapers of the time.

The Federalist Papers were written and published to urge New Yorkers to ratify the proposed United States Constitution, which was drafted in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787.

In lobbying for adoption of the Constitution over the existing Articles of Confederation, the essays explain 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.

The Federalist Papers were published primarily in two New York state newspapers: The New York Packet and The Independent Journal. They were reprinted in other newspapers in New York state and in several cities in other states.

Beginning on October 27, 1787, these papers are generally considered to be one of the most important contributions to political thought made in America.

The essays appeared in book form in 1788, with an introduction by Hamilton. Subsequently they were printed in many editions and translated to several languages.

The authors of the Federalist papers argued against the decentralization of political authority under the Articles of Confederation.

They worried, for example, that national commercial interests suffered from intransigent economic conflicts between states and that federal weakness undermined American diplomatic efforts abroad. Broadly, they argued that the government's impotence under the Articles of Confederation obstructed America's emergence as a powerful commercial empire.

The authors were also critical of the power assumed by state legislatures under the Articles of Confederation - and of the characters of the people serving in those assemblies. In the authors' view, the farmers and artisans who rose to power in postrevolutionary America were too beholden to narrow economic and regional interests to serve the broader public good.

Of particular concern to the authors was the passage by state legislatures of pro-debtor legislation and paper money laws that threatened creditors' property rights.

Unlike most Americans of the period, who typically worried about the conspiracies of the elite few against the liberties of the people, the authors were concerned about tyrannical legislative majorities threatening the rights of propertied minorities.

The Articles of Confederation, in their view, had provided no safeguards against the vices of the people themselves, and the American Revolution's enthusiasm for liberty had diminished popular appreciation of the need for good governance. The Federalist papers presented the 1786-87 insurrection of debtor farmers in western Massachusetts - Shays's Rebellion - as a symptom of this broader crisis.

The authors of the Federalist papers argued for an increase in the 'energy' of the federal government to respond to this crisis.

However, the national government's increased power would have to be based in republican principles and retain a federal distribution of power; there would be no return to monarchical rule or consolidation of central authority.

In one of the most notable essays, "Federalist 10," Madison rejected the then common belief that republican government was possible only for small states.

He argued that stability, liberty, and justice were more likely to be achieved in a large area with a numerous and heterogeneous population.

Although frequently interpreted as an attack on majority rule, the essay is in reality a defense of both social, economic, and cultural pluralism and of a composite majority formed by compromise and conciliation.

Decision by such a majority, rather than by a monistic one, would be more likely to accord with the proper ends of government. This distinction between a proper and an improper majority typifies the fundamental philosophy of the Federalist papers; republican institutions, including the principle of majority rule, were not considered good in themselves but were good because they constituted the best means for the pursuit of justice and the preservation of liberty.

*To Mr. Church from her sister
Elizabeth THE Hamilton*

FEDERALIST;

A COLLECTION

OF

ESSAYS,

WRITTEN IN FAVOUR OF THE

NEW CONSTITUTION,

AS AGREED UPON BY THE FEDERAL CONVENTION,
SEPTEMBER 17, 1787.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



NEW-YORK:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. AND A. M'LEAN,

No. 41, HANOVER-SQUARE.

MDCCLXXXVIII.

Mr. Jefferson's copy

The Federalist 1

General Introduction
Hamilton for the Independent Journal.

To the People of the State of New York:

AFTER an unequivocal experience of the inefficiency of the subsisting federal government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new Constitution for the United States of America.

The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences nothing less than the existence of the union, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire in many respects the most interesting in the world.

It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.

If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.

This idea will add the inducements of philanthropy to those of patriotism, to heighten the solicitude which all considerate and good men must feel for the event.

Happy will it be if our choice should be directed by a judicious estimate of our true interests, unperplexed and unbiased by considerations not connected with the public good. But this is a thing more ardently to be wished than seriously to be expected.

The plan offered to our deliberations affects too many particular interests, innovates upon too many local institutions, not to involve in its discussion a variety of objects foreign to its merits, and of views, passions and prejudices little favorable to the discovery of truth.

Among the most formidable of the obstacles which the new Constitution will have to encounter may readily be distinguished the obvious interest of a certain class of men in every State to resist all changes which may hazard a diminution of the power, emolument, and consequence of the offices they hold under the State establishments; and the perverted ambition of another class of men, who will either hope to aggrandize themselves by the confusions of their country, or will flatter themselves with fairer prospects of elevation from the subdivision of the empire into several partial confederacies than from its union under one government.

It is not, however, my design to dwell upon observations of this nature. I am well aware that it would be disingenuous to resolve indiscriminately the opposition of any set of men (merely because their situations might subject them to suspicion) into interested or ambitious views.

Candor will oblige us to admit that even such men may be actuated by upright intentions; and it cannot be doubted that much of the opposition which has made its appearance, or may hereafter

make its appearance, will spring from sources, blameless at least, if not respectable--the honest errors of minds led astray by preconceived jealousies and fears.

So numerous indeed and so powerful are the causes which serve to give a false bias to the judgment, that we, upon many occasions, see wise and good men on the wrong as well as on the right side of questions of the first magnitude to society.

This circumstance, if duly attended to, would furnish a lesson of moderation to those who are ever so much persuaded of their being in the right in any controversy. And a further reason for caution, in this respect, might be drawn from the reflection that we are not always sure that those who advocate the truth are influenced by purer principles than their antagonists.

Ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives not more laudable than these, are apt to operate as well upon those who support as those who oppose the right side of a question. Were there not even these inducements to moderation, nothing could be more ill-judged than that intolerant spirit which has, at all times, characterized political parties. For in politics, as in religion, it is equally absurd to aim at making proselytes by fire and sword. Heresies in either can rarely be cured by persecution.

And yet, however just these sentiments will be allowed to be, we have already sufficient indications that it will happen in this as in all former cases of great national discussion. A torrent of angry and malignant passions will be let loose.

To judge from the conduct of the opposite parties, we shall be led to conclude that they will mutually hope to evince the justness of their opinions, and to increase the number of their converts by the loudness of their declamations and the bitterness of their invectives.

An enlightened zeal for the energy and efficiency of government will be stigmatized as the offspring of a temper fond of despotic power and hostile to the principles of liberty. An over-scrupulous jealousy of danger to the rights of the people, which is more commonly the fault of the head than of the heart, will be represented as mere pretense and artifice, the stale bait for popularity at the expense of the public good.

It will be forgotten, on the one hand, that jealousy is the usual concomitant of love, and that the noble enthusiasm of liberty is apt to be infected with a spirit of narrow and illiberal distrust.

On the other hand, it will be equally forgotten that the vigor of government is essential to the security of liberty; that, in the contemplation of a sound and well-informed judgment, their interest can never be separated; and that a dangerous ambition more often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people than under the forbidden appearance of zeal for the firmness and efficiency of government.

History will teach us that the former has been found a much more certain road to the introduction of despotism than the latter, and that of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people; commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants.

In the course of the preceding observations, I have had an eye, my fellow-citizens, to putting you upon your guard against all attempts, from whatever quarter, to influence your decision in a matter of the utmost moment to your welfare, by any impressions other than those which may result from the evidence of truth. You will, no doubt, at the same time, have collected from the general scope of them, that they proceed from a source not unfriendly to the new Constitution.

Yes, my countrymen, I own to you that, after having given it an attentive consideration, I am clearly of opinion it is your interest to adopt it.

I am convinced that this is the safest course for your liberty, your dignity, and your happiness. I affect not reserves which I do not feel. I will not amuse you with an appearance of deliberation when I have decided. I frankly acknowledge to you my convictions, and I will freely lay before you the reasons on which they are founded.

The consciousness of good intentions disdains ambiguity. I shall not, however, multiply professions on this head. My motives must remain in the depository of my own breast. My arguments will be open to all, and may be judged of by all. They shall at least be offered in a spirit which will not disgrace the cause of truth.

I propose, in a series of papers, to discuss the following interesting particulars:

The utility of the union to your political prosperity

the insufficiency of the present confederation to preserve that union

the necessity of a government at least equally energetic with the one proposed, to the attainment of this object

the conformity of the proposed constitution to the true principles of republican government

its analogy to your own state constitution

and lastly, the additional security which its adoption will afford to the preservation of that species of government, to liberty, and to property.

In the progress of this discussion I shall endeavor to give a satisfactory answer to all the objections which shall have made their appearance, that may seem to have any claim to your attention.

It may perhaps be thought superfluous to offer arguments to prove the utility of the UNION, a point, no doubt, deeply engraved on the hearts of the great body of the people in every State, and one, which it may be imagined, has no adversaries.

But the fact is, that we already hear it whispered in the private circles of those who oppose the new Constitution, that the thirteen States are of too great extent for any general system, and that we must of necessity resort to separate confederacies of distinct portions of the whole.

This doctrine will, in all probability, be gradually propagated, till it has votaries enough to countenance an open avowal of it. For nothing can be more evident, to those who are able to take an enlarged view of the subject, than the alternative of an adoption of the new Constitution or a dismemberment of the Union.

It will therefore be of use to begin by examining the advantages of that Union, the certain evils, and the probable dangers, to which every State will be exposed from its dissolution. This shall accordingly constitute the subject of my next address.

Publius.

On September 17, 1787, the Constitution of the United States was accepted by the delegates. Nine states needed to vote for the Constitution for it to be accepted.

On July 26, 1788 New York, by a vote of 30-27, became the 11th state to ratify the Constitution. The New York Ratifying Convention, having approved the Constitution, also voted unanimously to prepare a circular letter to the other states, asking them to support a second general convention to consider amendments to the Constitution.

Largely through the efforts of James Madison, the first Congress in September 1789 proposed a Bill of Rights, which was adopted with little public debate in December 1791.

The states and the dates of ratification are listed here, in order of ratification:

- Delaware: December 7, 1787
- Pennsylvania: December 12, 1787
- New Jersey: December 18, 1787
- Georgia: January 2, 1788
- Connecticut: January 9, 1788
- Massachusetts: February 6, 1788
- Maryland: April 28, 1788
- South Carolina: May 23, 1788
- New Hampshire: June 21, 1788 (With this state's ratification, the Constitution became legal.)
- Virginia: June 25, 1788
- New York: July 26, 1788
- North Carolina: November 21, 1789
- Rhode Island: May 29, 1790 (Rhode Island did not hold a Constitutional Convention.)

Information here is primarily from Library of Congress; Government Printing Office; Khan Academy; Britannica

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young