

The Constitution

KIDS
DISCOVER

I'm known as
the Father of the
Constitution.

The
SUPREME LAW
of the Land



FARMERS
& FRAMERS

It All Happened at
INDEPENDENCE
HALL



POWER to
the PEOPLE

We the People of the United States
insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common Defence, promote the general
and our Posterity, We ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States

The Supreme Law of the Land

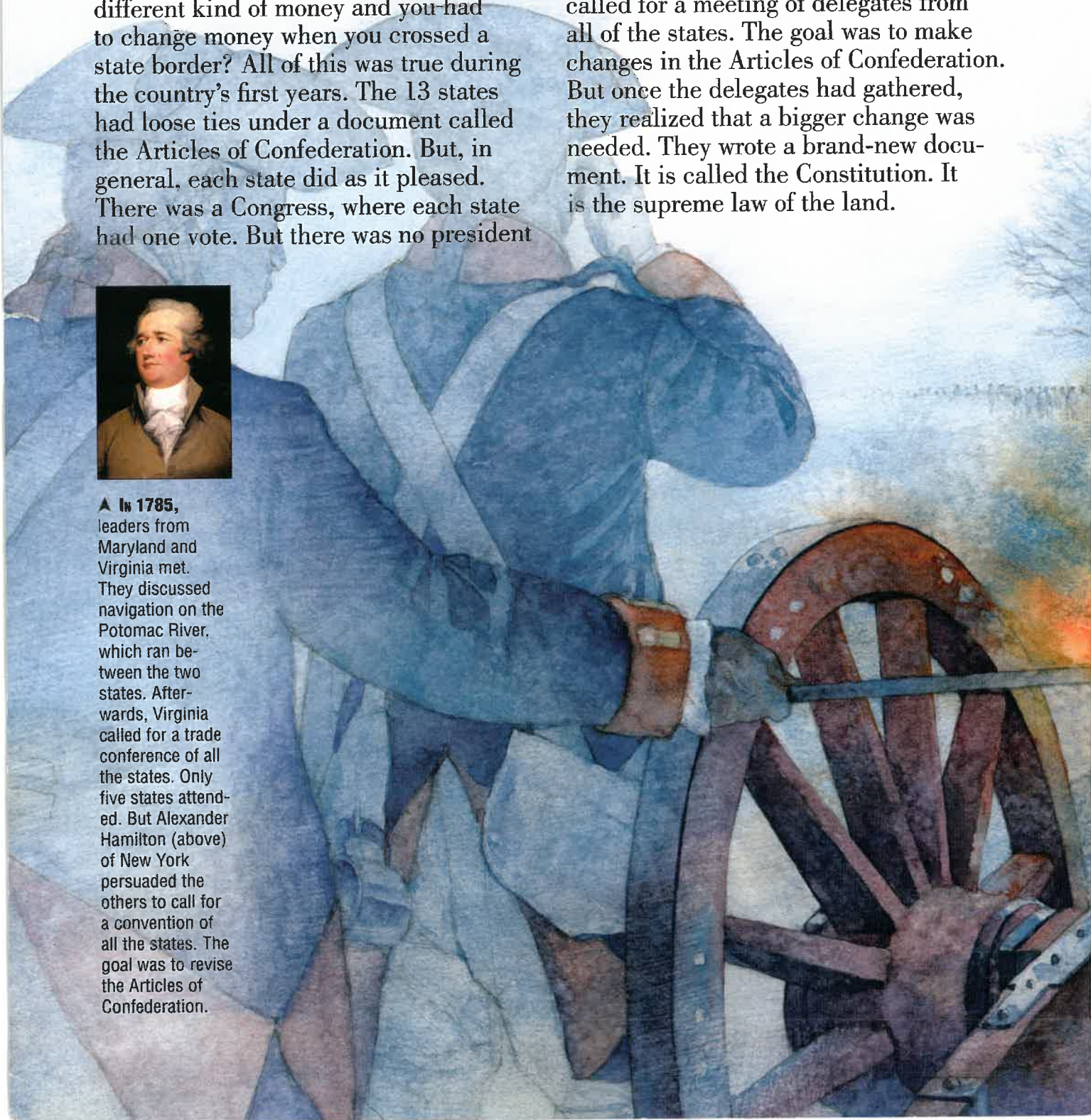
What if there was no such thing as a president of the country? What if the government had no money to pay soldiers? What if every state had a different kind of money and you had to change money when you crossed a state border? All of this was true during the country's first years. The 13 states had loose ties under a document called the Articles of Confederation. But, in general, each state did as it pleased. There was a Congress, where each state had one vote. But there was no president

to enforce decisions made by Congress. And there were no national courts. Congress could ask the states for money to pay national debts, but it could not force the states to pay. And many states did not pay.

By 1787, many leaders feared that the new country would fall apart without a stronger central government. They called for a meeting of delegates from all of the states. The goal was to make changes in the Articles of Confederation. But once the delegates had gathered, they realized that a bigger change was needed. They wrote a brand-new document. It is called the Constitution. It is the supreme law of the land.



A In 1785, leaders from Maryland and Virginia met. They discussed navigation on the Potomac River, which ran between the two states. Afterwards, Virginia called for a trade conference of all the states. Only five states attended. But Alexander Hamilton (above) of New York persuaded the others to call for a convention of all the states. The goal was to revise the Articles of Confederation.



► **AFTER THE** Revolutionary War, the country fell into an economic depression. Few people would accept the national government's printed money. Each state printed its own money. This made trade among the states hard. Farmers and



merchants did not know what to charge for their goods. Also, some states collected a tax on goods imported from other states.

That made the goods more expensive. Some believed that a stronger central government would help the economy.

▼ **THE ECONOMIC** problems were especially hard on farmers. If they couldn't pay their debts, their land was taken from them. They were put in prison. In Massachusetts, in 1786, some 1,200 farmers

rose up in armed rebellion. They refused to pay their state taxes. They shut down the local courts. The men were led by Daniel Shays. The national government was helpless to put

down Shays's Rebellion. Eventually, state troops ended the revolt. But the event made many think that a stronger central government was needed.



The Constitutional Convention

On May 25, 1787, delegates from seven states met in Philadelphia. Their goal was to revise the Articles of Confederation. Soon, delegates from five more states arrived. Of the original states, only Rhode Island wasn't represented. Some of the most famous names in America were there. Benjamin Franklin, at 80, was the oldest. George Washington served as chair. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were absent. Both were in Europe as ambassadors for the new country. Others did not go because they did not want a stronger central government. Patrick Henry, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams fell into this category. Through the long, hot summer, the delegates debated many issues. In the end, they changed history.



▲ **NO ONE WORKED** harder for the convention than James Madison of Virginia. From France, Thomas Jefferson had sent him hundreds of books about government. Madison read them all. Before

the convention, he drew up a list of the most important points to be covered. At the convention, he took detailed notes. Thanks to Madison; there was a written record of the meetings.

VIRGINIA CAME TO the convention with a plan. It called for two houses of Congress. Each member of Congress would have one vote. Under the Articles of Confederation, each state had only one vote. The plan also proposed an executive and a judicial branch of the government. Congress would appoint the members of these. Soon, the dele-

gates realized that they were going way beyond revising the Articles. They were creating a binding law for a new nation. The meeting had turned into the Constitutional Convention.



▼ **SOME DELEGATES** did not like the Virginia Plan. They worried that the states would lose all their power

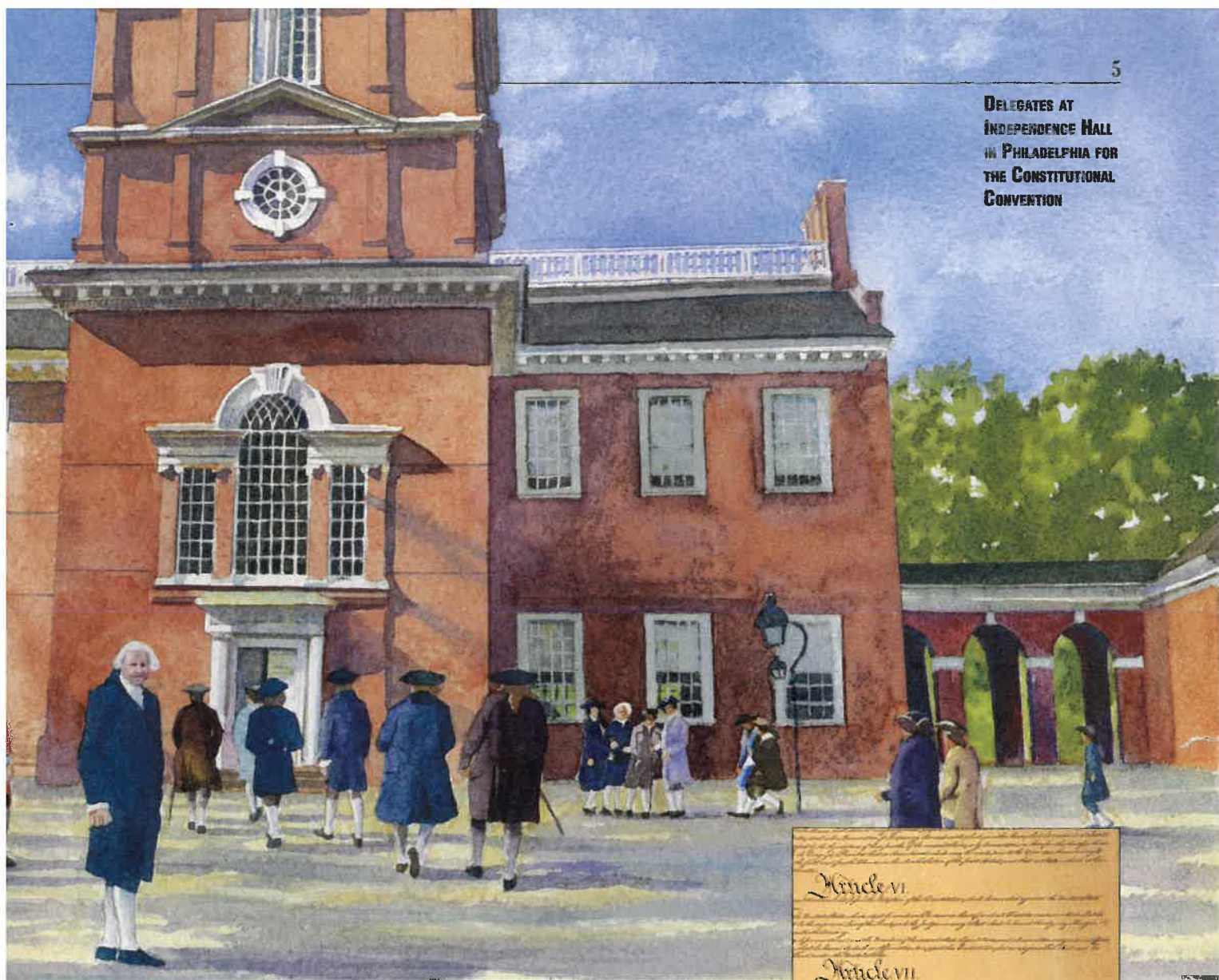
to the national government. But others believed that arguments among the states were the source

of the country's problems. A strong national government would fix that.



THE VIRGINIA PLAN said the number of members of Congress from each state should be based on the state's population. Smaller states didn't like this. The Great Compromise provided a solution. It said every state would send two senators to the Senate. The number of members a state could send to the House of Representatives would be based on the state's population.

DELEGATES AT INDEPENDENCE HALL IN PHILADELPHIA FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION



▼ **THE NORTH AND** South disagreed about whether slaves should be counted as part of a state's population. The South said yes. This would give southern states more members in Congress. The North said no. It argued

that slaves were treated as property. Why should they be counted as people? Again, a compromise was reached. The Three-Fifths Compromise said that each enslaved person would be counted as three-fifths of a person.



▲ **BY SEPTEMBER,** the delegates had agreed on what the new document should say. A committee put it in final written form. Several delegates had already left the convention. Three of those remain-

ing refused to sign it. On September 17, 1787, 39 men signed the final draft. Now it was in the hands of the states. Nine had to ratify, or agree to it, before it could become the law of the land.

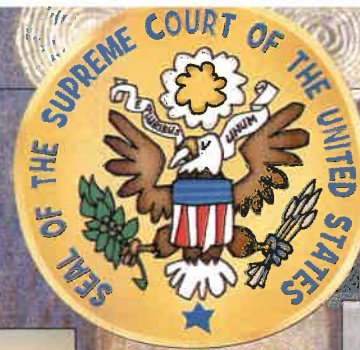
Articles, Sections, and Clauses

The Constitution starts with a short Preamble that explains the purpose of the document. The Preamble begins: "We the People of the United States." These words stress that the power of the document comes from the people. After the Preamble are seven Articles. Some are divided into Sections. Some of the Articles and Sections are further divided into Clauses.

CHECK IT OUT!

Article I contains an elastic clause. What's that?

(answer on back cover)



ARTICLE I

Article I calls for a Congress made up of a Senate and a House of Representatives. It says how Congress shall be elected and organized. It also says what Congress's duties shall be, what it cannot do, and the relationship between Congress and the states. Congress was forbidden to end the slave trade until at least 1808. This was done as a compromise to win the support of pro-slavery delegates, who were needed to get the Constitution passed.

ARTICLE II

Article II says that the president shall be elected by electors chosen by each state. The number of electors equals the number of senators plus representatives from each state. The Electoral College is all of the electors.

CHECK IT OUT!

What else does Article II call for?

(answer on back cover)

ARTICLE III

Article III says that one Supreme Court will head the judicial branch. Justices serve for life as long as they commit no crime. Congress has the power to set up lower courts as needed. The Supreme Court has the power to decide arguments about how the Constitution should be interpreted. Article III also defines treason, the act of betraying the country. It gives Congress the power to punish treason.

\$50 REWARD

Stanway from the subscriber.

TUESDAY MORNING, 26th ULTY

My negro boy calling himself Severy. The said negro is about 5 feet six in height, chestnut color, has a scar on per lip, down bent countenance when to, blink-eyed, showing a great white, long bushy hair, is about years old, had on when he left a blue jacket, pantaloons of a greyish cal striped shirt, A BLACK SLEUCU and shoes neatly worn out.

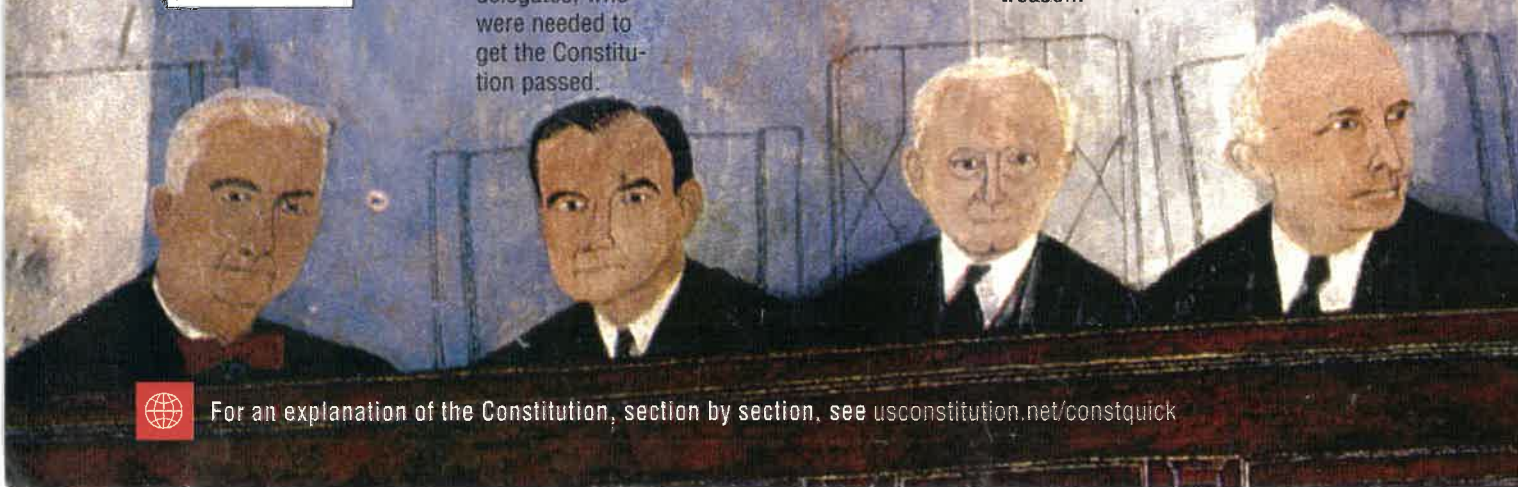
The above reward will be paid to any for the apprehension of the said negro in the County Jail at Providence, Rhode Island, on or before the 1st day of November, 1851. N. B. SEVERY, 1851.

12

NOVEMBER 11, 1851. PROVIDENCE, R. I.

ARTICLE IV

Article IV establishes the relationship between the states. It also establishes the relationship between each state and the national government. It gives Congress the right to form new states. And it says that a slave who escapes to a state that outlaws slavery must be returned to his or her owner if requested.





ARTICLE V

Article V explains two ways that the Constitution can be amended, or changed. Using either method, three-fourths of the states must vote in favor of the amendment for it to pass.

ARTICLE VI

Article VI has three clauses. The debts of the previous government must still be paid. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. All federal and state officials must take an oath of allegiance to the Constitution. But public officials cannot be required to follow a particular religion.

ARTICLE VII

If nine states ratify this Constitution, it will become the law governing them.

CHECK IT OUT!
Where can you see the Constitution?
(answer on back cover)

Checks and Balances

After winning freedom from Great Britain, many Americans were wary of giving power to a strong central government. The Constitution addressed this problem. It set up three branches of government. The legislative branch, or Congress, makes laws. The executive branch, headed by the president, enforces laws. The judicial branch, or the courts, makes sure the laws are carried out fairly. The Constitution also made sure that no one branch had too much power. It did this with a system of checks and balances. For example, the president can veto, or say no to, a law passed by Congress. But Congress can overcome a veto with a two-thirds vote. There are many more instances of checks and balances among the three branches.

 For more on checks and balances, see usconstitution.net/constop_1.php



THE 1954 U.S. SUPREME COURT, WHICH ENDED SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To Ratify or Not to Ratify?

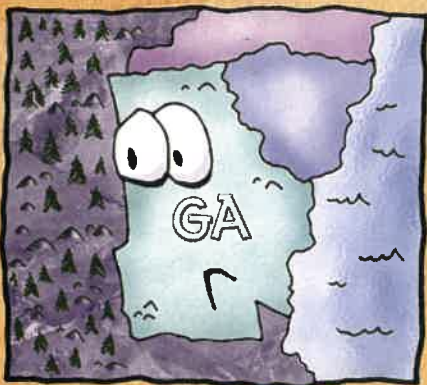
The new Constitution was sent to the states, and each state was to call a convention. There, delegates would vote to ratify or not ratify. Then the real debate began.

Those who supported the Constitution were called Federalists. (*Federal* refers to a central government.) They thought the country would do better with a stronger central government.

Those who were opposed to this idea were called Anti-Federalists. There were many reasons why people were against the Constitution. Some thought a central government wouldn't care about local issues. Some said it would overwhelm the states and take away the people's rights. Some feared the government would be taken over by "the few and the great." Some said the president would have too much power. Some said the slavery clauses were immoral. The strongest argument against the document was that it did not state the rights of the people.



TODAY, GROUPS express their opinions on TV and the Internet. Until radio in the early 20th century, people depended on ink and paper or public speeches. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote 85 essays in favor of the Constitution, called *The Federalist Papers*. Others wrote essays and letters in opposition.



◀ **THREE STATES**—Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey—quickly ratified. Georgia and Connecticut soon followed. The smaller states saw the advantage of strength in numbers. Connecticut and New Jersey had been

angered by New York's taxes on the goods they sold there. They hoped the new government would bring tax relief. Georgia wanted help from the new government to protect its frontier from Indian attack.





▲ **EVEN THOUGH NINE** states had ratified, two of the most powerful states had not. Many wondered if a country without New York and Virginia could survive. In Virginia, Patrick Henry and other heroes of the Revolution spoke against the Constitution. They thought it needed a bill of rights. The state finally ratified in June

1788. The New York convention had a majority of Anti-Federalists. Many New Yorkers believed the Union would not succeed without Virginia. Alexander Hamilton was a powerful voice for ratification. When Virginia ratified, New York gave in. On July 26, 1788, New York became the 11th state to ratify.

▼ **THE LAST TWO** holdouts were North Carolina and Rhode Island. Two conventions in North Carolina failed to ratify. Then, in November 1789, North Carolina ratified. Rhode Island voted seven times

against sending the Constitution to a state convention. In May 1790, more than a year after George Washington took office as the first president (below), Rhode Island, the smallest state, joined the Union.

◀ **ANTI-FEDERALISTS** in Massachusetts included Samuel Adams and John Hancock (left), heroes of the Revolution. The Federalists won them over by promising to push for a bill of rights as soon as the Constitution was ratified.



▲ **NEW HAMPSHIRE** had a hard time deciding. There were the usual arguments against. Also, some in the state

were opposed because the Constitution did not end slavery. But in June 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify. The Constitution went into effect for those nine states. The Union was established.



JAMES MADISON became known as the "Father of the Constitution." He made speeches, negotiated with delegates, forged compromises, and kept a record of the debates and decisions that occurred at the Constitutional

Convention. Madison told the delegates that the plan they came up with would "decide forever the fate of republican government." Other men who helped write the Constitution included Gouverneur Morris, John

Dickinson, Edmund Randolph, Roger Sherman, James Wilson, and George Wythe. Morris put the Convention's resolutions and decisions into polished form. He actually "wrote" the Constitution.

