

JAMES MADISON – FATHER OF THE CONSTITUTION

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In 1786, the United States of America was in trouble. The thirteen British American colonies had declared their independence from Great Britain in 1776. The Revolutionary War had ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and the United States of America now consisted of, not only the thirteen original colonies, but all of the land from the Atlantic Ocean in the east, to the Mississippi River in the west. Struggling to govern this new growing nation, the first Continental Congress established the Articles of Confederation.¹

It soon became clear to James Madison that the government of the Articles was not working. He was worried that under the Articles of Confederation, the government would collapse. No money was being paid into the public treasury, no respect was given to the federal authority, and not a single state had complied with the requisitions. Madison realized it was not possible for a government to last long under these circumstances.² But he knew that he had to be prepared. Over the next few months Madison studied books

sent to him by Thomas Jefferson about the history of ancient and modern systems of government.³ He began to contemplate the problems of ancient Greek confederacies.⁴

In 1787, delegates from several states met at Independence Hall in Philadelphia to draft a new plan for the American government. At the time of the Constitutional convention, Madison was only 36 years old. He was not an impressive speaker, and he was only five feet tall and not physically imposing. But he was knowledgeable. He had gone to the College of New Jersey, later called Princeton University, where he studied Latin and Greek. Through his studies and his preparation, Madison arrived in Philadelphia as the “best-informed man in America on the principles of government.”⁵

At the Constitutional Convention, Madison played a key role in drafting a new plan for the government of the United States. He proposed a two-house national



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legislature with the lower house elected by the people. The new government would also have a national executive and a national judiciary.⁶ For his critical role in drafting and promoting the Constitution, James Madison has been called the “Father of the Constitution.” He wrote the document which served as the model for the Constitution.

He also drafted the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

The Constitution was finally adopted by the Convention in 1787 when “we the people” ordained and established the Constitution to secure the blessings of liberty to “ourselves and our posterity.”⁷ But it was not over. The Constitution still had to be ratified by at least nine of the thirteen States. So, in the first seven months of 1788, Madison, along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, authored the Federalist Papers, a series of

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eighty-five essays, published under the pseudonym Publius, in support of ratifying the Constitution.⁸ Ever so slowly, all thirteen states finally ratified the Constitution by 1790.⁹

The process of creating and ratifying the Constitution was James Madison’s greatest achievement. In securing the blessing of liberty under the Constitution, Madison had done more for the establishment of the

United States of America than any of the founding fathers since the Declaration of Independence,¹⁰ making him the “Father of the Constitution.” ■

¹*The Summer of 1787*, David O. Stewart, pp.127-129, Simon & Schuster (2007).

²*First Principles*, Thomas E. Ricks, p.191, Harper Collins, Publishers (2020).

³ *Id.* p.153.

⁴ *Id.* p.183.

⁵ *Id.* p.196.

⁶ *Id.* p.195.

⁷ *The Constitution of the United States, Preamble*, p.1.

⁸ *First Principles*, Thomas E. Ricks, p.206, Harper Collins, Publishers. (2020).

⁹ *Id.* p.215.

¹⁰ *Id.*

Author: Thomas Newcomb Hyde – Attorney at Law



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