

Ratifying the Constitution

The Big Idea

Americans carried on a vigorous debate before ratifying the Constitution.

Main Ideas

- Federalists and Antifederalists engaged in debate over the new Constitution.
- The *Federalist Papers* played an important role in the fight for ratification of the Constitution.
- Ten amendments were added to the Constitution to provide a Bill of Rights to protect citizens.

Main Idea 1: Federalists and Anti-Federalists engaged in debate over the new Constitution.

Federalists

- Supported Constitution
- Desired strong central government
- Liked balance of powers in Constitution
- Made speeches and pamphlets advocating change in government

Anti-Federalists

- Opposed Constitution
- Feared central government would be too powerful
- Concerned about lack of guarantee of individual rights
- **George Mason** became Anti-Federalist over rights issue

Main Idea 2: The *Federalist Papers* played an important role in the fight for ratification of the Constitution.

- *Federalist Papers*: series of essays supporting the Constitution
- Written anonymously by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison
- *Federalist Papers* argued that new federal government would not overpower states
- Widely reprinted in newspapers around the country; influenced the Constitution debate

Battle for Ratification

- Each state needed to ratify the Constitution.
- All states except Rhode Island held ratification conventions for citizens to discuss and vote on the Constitution.
- Delaware was the first state to ratify, in 1787, and Rhode Island was the last, in 1790.
- New York and Virginia debated over ratification, but finally ratified.
 - Political leaders knew these states were important, since Virginia had the largest population in the nation, and New York was an important center for business and trade.

Main Idea 3: Ten amendments were added to the Constitution to provide a Bill of Rights to protect citizens.

- Several states ratified the Constitution only after the promise of a bill protecting individual rights.
- Congress responded by passing a Bill of Rights to be added to the Constitution as **amendments**.
- Upon ratification by the states in December 1791, the **Bill of Rights** became the first ten amendments to the Constitution.
 - Gave a clear example of how to amend the Constitution to fit the needs of a changing nation
 - Flexibility of the Constitution has allowed it to survive for over 200 years.

