

More Americans Today Really Need to Read the Anti-Federalist Papers

Last week, we took a look at several important quotes from the [Federalist Papers](#), a collection of writings composed to support the adoption of the U.S. Constitution of 1787.

However, the adoption of the Constitution wasn't necessarily a smooth path. A number of arguments and cautions against the Constitution were offered in the months preceding its adoption. These arguments were chronicled in the *Anti-Federalist Papers*.

According to the [Constitution Society](#), the *Anti-Federalist Papers* "contain warnings of dangers from tyranny that weaknesses in the proposed Constitution did not adequately provide against, and while some of those weaknesses were corrected by adoption of the Bill of Rights, others remained, and some of these dangers are now coming to pass."

Below are five quotes from the *Anti-Federalist Papers*. In what ways have we seen some of these predictions come true? Which side would you have argued on – Federalist or Anti-Federalist – had you played a role in the adoption of the U.S. Constitution?

The Need for Simple Government...

"I believe it will be found that the form of government, which holds those entrusted with power, in the greatest responsibility to their constituents, the best calculated for freemen. A republican, or free government, can only exist where the body of the people are virtuous, and where property is pretty equally divided; in such a government the people are the sovereign and their sense or opinion is the criterion

of every public measure; for when this ceases to be the case, the nature of the government is changed, and an aristocracy, monarchy or despotism will rise on its ruin. The highest responsibility is to be attained, in a simple structure of government, for the great body of the people never steadily attend to the operations of government, and for want of due information are liable to be imposed on....” – [“Centinel” Number 1](#)

The Power of the Presidency...

“In my last number I endeavored to prove that the language of the article relative to the establishment of the executive of this new government was vague and inexplicit, that the great powers of the President, connected with his duration in office would lead to oppression and ruin. That he would be governed by favorites and flatterers, or that a dangerous council would be collected from the great officers of state, – that the ten miles square, if the remarks of one of the wisest men, drawn from the experience of mankind, may be credited, would be the asylum of the base, idle, avaricious and ambitious, and that the court would possess a language and manners different from yours; that a vice president is as unnecessary, as he is dangerous in his influence – that the president cannot represent you because he is not of your own immediate choice, that if you adopt this government, you will incline to an arbitrary and odious aristocracy or monarchy that the president possessed of the power, given him by this frame of government differs but very immaterially from the establishment of monarchy in Great Britain, and I warned you to beware of the fallacious resemblance that is held out to you by the advocates of this new system between it and your own state governments.” – [“Cato” Letter V](#)

On the Authority of the Courts...

“I said in my last number, that the supreme court under this

constitution would be exalted above all other power in the government, and subject to no controul. The business of this paper will be to illustrate this, and to shew the danger that will result from it. ...

I do not object to the judges holding their commissions during good behaviour. ... But I say, this system has followed the English government in this, while it has departed from almost every other principle of their jurisprudence, under the idea, of rendering the judges independent; which, in the British constitution, means no more than that they hold their places during good behaviour, and have fixed salaries, they have made the judges independent, in the fullest sense of the word. There is no power above them, to controul any of their decisions. There is no authority that can remove them, and they cannot be controuled by the laws of the legislature. In short, they are independent of the people, of the legislature, and of every power under heaven. Men placed in this situation will generally soon feel themselves independent of heaven itself.” – [“Brutus” Number 15](#)

Giving Up the Power of the People...

“But remember, when the people once part with power, they can seldom or never resume it again but by force. Many instances can be produced in which the people have voluntarily increased the powers of their rulers; but few, if any, in which rulers have willingly abridged their authority. This is a sufficient reason to induce you to be careful, in the first instance, how you deposit the powers of government.” – [“Brutus” Number 1](#)

The Need for a Bill of Rights...

“A people, entering into society, surrender such a part of their natural rights, as shall be necessary for the existence of that society. They are so precious in themselves, that

they would never be parted with, did not the preservation of the remainder require it. They are entrusted in the hands of those, who are very willing to receive them, who are naturally fond of exercising of them, and whose passions are always striving to make a bad use of them. – They are conveyed by a written compact, expressing those which are given up, and the mode in which those reserved shall be secured. Language is so easy of explanation, and so difficult is it by words to convey exact ideas, that the party to be governed cannot be too explicit. The line cannot be drawn with too much precision and accuracy. The necessity of this accuracy and this precision encreases in proportion to the greatness of the sacrifice and the numbers who make it. – That a Constitution for the United States does not require a Bill of Rights, when it is considered, that a Constitution for an individual State would, I cannot conceive. – [“John DeWitt” II](#)

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