'PRESSING THEIR VOICES': THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS, AND THE GROWTH OF PARTICIPATORY POLITICS IN THE STATE RATIFYING CONVENTIONS FOR THE U.S. CONSTITUTION, 1787–1788

by

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Master of Arts
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, Steve and Debbie Hurter. Thank you.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to many, many, people for the support in working toward the completion of this dissertation. Of much more importance than the actual dissertation support has been the life-lessons and personal encouragement each has offered in their own ways.

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ABSTRACT

'PRESSING THEIR VOICES'
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This dissertation utilizes the state ratification conventions of Delaware, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, New Jersey, Virginia, and New York as case studies for analyzing how the public debate over ratification developed and what this meant for the emergence of participatory politics in the Early Republic. Rather than analyzing the specific political arguments that were at the center of this debate, this study focuses upon printed media Federalists and Antifederalists utilized in the ratification debates. It aims at discovering not just what was said, but *how* it was said. This project expands current historiography by examining the missing element of the public's participation, in and shaping of, early American politics by their ownership of the conventions and their use of media to create spectacles that forced negotiations of power among competing groups. The battle over the ratification of the Constitution

provided the American public with an extended period to articulate and refine their national goals.

Introduction: Setting the Stage

Delivered to the states in the fall of 1787, the Federal Constitution sparked heated reaction up and down the eastern seaboard. It pulled elite politicians and the public into lively conversations that fueled impassioned ratification conventions. A Federalist author writing in the *Boston Gazette* on November 26, 1788, reminded his readers that, "The PEOPLE are the grand inquest who have a RIGHT to judge of its [the Constitution's] merits."[1] Historians have noted the increased involvement of the public in politics on the American shores. However, the ratification debates expanded participatory politics in ways even the American Revolution had not achieved.[2]

Spirited commentary in print (through newspapers and correspondence); in semi-private conversations (in taverns and coffee shops); and in public celebrations (through parades, military convocations, and public toasts) began to redefine the nature of political participation across the states. The wide interest in the Constitution brought competing constituencies of the public into direct negotiations where each learned the growing necessity of relying upon public pressure to advance their own cause. The ratification debates highlighted emerging political practices that moved beyond formal acts of voting

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[1] John P. Kaminski, *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* (Volume 4): State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1997), 320. (Hereafter referred to as *DHRC*, followed by the appropriate volume number, and for states that have multiple volumes, numbers referring to that specific state.)

[2] In referring to the public, I am aware that most of those engaged in public events at this time were white, property owning, males. And while this is the public that most vocally engaged with the politics of this time, I do not restrict my understanding of this term to this group. The lives of women, African Americans, and other unheard voices all influenced, in some form or another, the politics of this period.

and office holding, to encompass much wider cultural activities. These cultural activities—aimed at influencing politics—formed the beginnings of American nationalism as it looked to define itself both within the existing thirteen states and to an observant Atlantic world.

The Federal Constitutional Convention

States originally called the Philadelphia Convention to mend the faltering Articles of Confederation. However, the Philadelphia Convention created a completely new form of governance, and along with this they also required a new form of ratification. The original Articles of Confederation required ratification by the state legislatures and had to be accepted by each of the thirteen states in order to become the governing law of the land. The process for achieving approval by all thirteen had proved so difficult that the delegates in Philadelphia designed a new process. Constitutional ratification required approval by only nine of the thirteen states. Further, the Philadelphia convention required that each state call a specific assembly (separate from their sitting state assembly) dedicated to debating ratification alone. Article seven of the Federal Constitution stated that "The Ratification of the Conventions of nine States, shall be sufficient for the Establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the Same." In this case, Massachusetts had provided the gathered with an exemplary process of constitutional ratification. The process of calling a specific drafting assembly and then a specific ratification assembly employed by Massachusetts (and headed by John Adams) in 1780 became the pattern for keeping the public informed, the political divisions at bay, and

allowing for the passage of a key political document. So keen were the delegates to keep intra-state battles from meddling with their proposal that they included the means of passage as a part of the Constitution itself.

Delegates to the Philadelphia Convention had been elected by their state legislatures. While all had not lasted the entire summer, when the compromises had been determined thirty-nine votes approved the Constitution on September 17th, 1787. Ferrying the document north to the meeting of the old Congress, James Madison, Nathaniel Gorham, and Rufus King, convinced their skeptical fellow congressmen to submit the document to each state. The strategy of Madison (primarily) for submission to specially called state ratification conventions bypassed the potential resistance of state legislatures, who would all clearly lose power under the new Constitution. Madison felt that directly appealing to the people would dilute the inner-state political factions enough to achieve ratification. His actions also quelled the fears of those clamoring about the illegitimacy of the new Constitution. While the Confederation Congress had not issued the document, nonetheless, the true political authority of the land—the people—would judge the Constitution. Acknowledging that the people, not the states, were the basis of government under the new Constitution set the parameters for the debates that soon swirled up around the Constitution. By basing the debates upon the authority of the people, Madison and his companions unleashed a voice that even they could not foresee; voices that eventually formed the United States of America.

This dissertation utilizes the state ratification conventions of Delaware, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, New Jersey, Virginia, and New

York as case studies to analyze the development of the public debate over ratification and the impact this development had upon the emergence of participatory politics in the Early Republic. The first four states reviewed are significant for jump-starting the procedure into motion. They ratified quickly, propelling the Constitution into the public spotlight. Pennsylvania (a much larger state in population and territory) was the location of the national capital. Its location in the middle of the union made ratification essential for other states to accept the Constitution. Massachusetts was crucial because rather than backbiting and semi-illegitimately working around each other (as in Pennsylvania), the Federalists and Antifederalists in the state worked out a critical compromise that ensured ratification would be unconditional. The Massachusetts convention submitted possible amendments, but did not make state ratification of the Constitution contingent upon wider acceptance of the amendments. New York and Virginia were key states in terms of land-size and political acumen. New York was wealthy, housed some of the most influential Federalists, and boasted important economic ties between states. Virginia housed many of the leading figures of the Revolution and supporters wanted it to be state number nine needed to make the Constitution the law of the land. Each state played a critical role in moving the states toward unification. Each state adds to our knowledge of how Americans came to be governed by the Constitution.

Rather than analyzing the specific political arguments that were at the center of this debate, this study focuses upon the types of media, newspapers, broadsides, sermons, public speeches, and personal letters, that Federalists and Antifederalists utilized in the ratification debates. It aims at discovering not just what was said, but *how* it was said. For

instance, in the state of Massachusetts the guiding interpretation in recent historiography suggests that the support of Boston's tradesmen convinced Samuel Adams to throw his support behind John Hancock and the Constitution.[3] Interestingly, the tradesmen unified at a large meeting at the Green Dragon Tavern. Historians have merely noted the event and then focused upon the decision by Adams and Hancock. My research moves beyond what Adams and Hancock did at the convention to what actually emerged in these tavern gatherings (and other similar public forms of interaction) to convince important constituents and the public at large to support or contest the Constitution. Each ratification event provides key insight into viewing public interaction and political negotiations within the newly forming United States.

The Heart of the Issue

A vibrant historiography of the Constitutional Convention and Constitutional history began almost as soon as the states ratified the Federal Constitution.[4] Many have analyzed the content of the Constitutional Convention and the subsequent application of

[3] See Patrick T. Conley, *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1988) and Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

[4] The first histories to appear from this period were the records and notes of those in attendance at the Federal Constitutional Convention and then at the state ratification conventions. At the turn of the twentieth century Max Farrand published three volumes on the *Records of Federal Convention of 1787,* followed by other works analyzing the founding fathers. Some of the most well-known historical interpretations have been Charles Beard's *The Economic Interpretations of the Constitution of the United States* (1913), and Merrill Jensen's *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781* (1940). They argued against the "consensus" view of the founding and instead focused on the economic motives and group conflicts that they believed defined the Constitutional period. They provided many of the arguments that historians have spent the later period of the twentieth century arguing for or against. The works of Bernard Bailyn and his student, Gordon Wood, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, moved the dominant narrative away from economics and more toward the intellectual and social roots of the Revolution.

the Constitution in American politics.[5] When historians have wandered beyond that event, they have often downplayed the significance of the state conventions in comparison with the Philadelphia meeting. More importantly, while political narratives of the state ratification conventions and debates exist, few historians have analyzed public presentation and participation in these debates. In analyzing these conventions, most have focused on political elites and on the political ideologies divided into pro- and anti-ratification. Historians have categorized reactions and events by social class, regional affiliation, gender, and/or race. My dissertation seeks to move beyond traditional categorizations and instead, through the medium of the written word, to look at how elite and non-elite, regional and cross-regional interactions intersected to form the national consciousness that came to be distinctly American.

This project expands current historiography by examining the missing element of the public's participation in the shaping of early American politics through their ownership of the conventions and their use of media to create spectacles that forced negotiations of power among competing groups. I follow the development of participation from city to city, state-to-state, and region-to-region, revealing how the public shaped and changed the debates, and in the process, the nature of participatory politics in the United States. Of particular importance, I synthesize local, state, and national interaction to gain a broader perspective that is not overly influenced or artificially divided by geographic space. Recognizing the impact that each geographic

[5] For some important overviews of the Constitutional Period see Jack Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Vintage, 1997); Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763–89* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and John Phillip Reid, *The Constitutional History of the American Revolution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

region had upon public thought and reactions, I show how various groups intermingled to claim these events as their own. As the public did claim these events, they turned the conventions into elaborate public spectacles that called for negotiations of hierarchy, authority, and definitions of American nationalism and nationhood.

The question of what authentic American nationalism is has dominated much historiographical discussion and framed many monographs. I argue that part of America's search for authentic nationalism occurred through the press. The lively print culture that emerged at this period played the role of the key centerpiece connecting disparate publics to each other. Seeking to define themselves as a unique and authoritative political identity, the American public developed an affinity for public expression. Public dialogue through print carried an authority and authenticity that eventually became part of the American definition of self. Print and the press became the glue binding and spreading American ideals.

Newspapers and broadsides, and their subsequent public readings in taverns and cafes, mediated between various groups of political persuasions and class status. The press not only fulfilled a mediatory role, it also legitimized the growing public voice. Carolyn Eastman argued the following: "Print and oral media helped lay Americans think of themselves as members of a unified body before nationalism had cohered and could be buttressed by institutions." She believed—as do I—that print and oral culture were "mutually constitutive" in this era. [6] In order to determine how print mediated and legitimized, this study moves beyond a traditional focus on the content of the arguments

[6] Carolyn Eastman, *A National of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4, 5.

offered and instead looks at the various genres used by specific contingencies and how these genre types influenced the methods and success of their arguments. The ratification conventions produced a huge influx of printed materials that reflected both public trends and private thoughts.

Historians agree that literacy rates during this time reached high levels, with the highest rates occurring in New England.[7] However, some suggest that in spite of the ability to read, very little similar materials were read across the thirteen states. The Constitution resolves the typical difficulty of determining who read what and to what extent certain texts were widely distributed. Each of the thirteen states printed the Constitution (as required by the Constitutional Convention) and publicly distributed it. The document represents a unique American artifact as it circulated widely. Along with its prolific dissemination, the press blurred categories of local and national politics. By focusing on one particular issue—ratification—it allowed the public(s) of the developing United States to practice national and local politics simultaneously.

In analyzing the mutually constructive bond between printed word and public action I build upon the arguments of David Waldstreicher and other cultural/political historians who see the development of nationalism in the convergence of word and deed. By looking across traditional categories of interaction, I break down false methodological barriers and in the process seek to explain how new power relationships were negotiated and reciprocated; power relations that as the country developed became defined in

[7] For information on early American literacy see, Jill Lepore, *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Vintage, 2003); and Hugh Amory, *A History of the Book in America: Volume I: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

nationalistic terms. In early America, the press existed as a material entity conveying abstract ideas. It contained long soliloquies arguing in favor of Edmund Burke's political theory, alongside reports of recent assembly activity, sermons from the local pastor, and advertisements connecting sellers and buyers and generally furthering economic advance. The press juxtaposed competing elements of society and cut across created categories that affect our efforts to analyze the period. Utilizing the press as an analytical lens allows for divergence and disagreement among America's public. At the same time, it also unveils themes of similarity and unity of values and especially of a shared material culture.

Using the press as my methodological lens also provides something that Jeffrey Pasley, Andrew Robertson and David Waldstreicher find missing in the burgeoning field of political culture; "longitudinal impact." Criticizing most modern works of the Early Republic as lacking an "interpretive reach," they decry the lack of a flexible framework that connects it convincingly to Jacksonian-era politics and public participation.[8] Newspapers provide both a lens and an interpretive angle from which to understand the growth of politics from the Revolutionary period through the Jacksonian upheaval. This work provides a birds-eye view of that growth, mapping the development of nationalism and participatory politics through the press. Viewing the media of the period in all its messy surroundings provides insight into the complicated birth of participatory politics as an American ideal and national identity.

[8] Jeffrey Pasley, Andrew Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, ed., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8.

Framing the Question

This work touches on many themes swirling about in discussions of Early American political development; the social and cultural influence on politics, growth of urbanization, print culture, the spectacle as part of political social action, and class tensions. Seeking to avoid the common entanglements in many of these conversations, I focus on print as a medium that circumvents the "idealism" and over-intellectualization of traditional studies of nationalism. The topics covered in this work include the development of national identity and political participation. By necessity, ideals of what Americans wanted their nation to become find their way into my work. Less than ten years after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which granted Americans their political independence, the debate over the legacy of the Revolution had begun. All of these issues appear in the pages to follow, however, the point of including them is not necessarily to provide a new interpretation of what American nationalism looked like.[9] Instead, what I argue is how it came to be. At the very time that Americans took a hard look at their political practices and began to develop American nationalism, the press took center

[9] There is a large number of excellent works describing the roots and emergence of American nationalism. For an influential book that expands the notion of political activity beyond traditional political practices, such as voting, see David Waldstreicher's *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). For the development and legitimization of dissent, see Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For a more recent work examining the expansion (and contraction) of women's participation in politics, see Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Two excellent collections on the development of early American nationalism are, Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Andrew Robertson, Jeffrey Pasley, David Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

stage as the pre-eminent means of communication. The media became a central part of American identity formation.

In focusing on participatory political development, my research situates me not only within a long and developed political historiography, but also within the newer field of urbanization studies. By looking at how urban environments produced revolutionary action, Gary Nash has argued that the social interplay of groups of laborers and neighborhoods formed an increasingly collective consciousness that in turn fueled growing participatory political fervor in the eighteenth century. The press emerged at this time as a substantial player in connecting and joining urban (and non-urban) people together. Nash argued, "It is not easy to determine precisely who read or was affected by … literature. But the literacy rate was high in colonial America and especially widespread in the cities. Population density made it easy to pass broadsides and pamphlets from hand to hand or to read them aloud in the taverns."[10] The city became the breeding ground for the rapid spread of political ideas that created a shared political culture, which in turn inspired people to more vigorous interaction with their governing authorities. My focus on the conventions, each placed in strategic cities for the states under analysis, expands upon this historiography by exploring how urbanization created a unique environment that facilitated public spectacles in print and public political rituals.

Political culture represents another subfield that this study draws upon and to which it seeks to contribute. Early American historians, such as Bernard Bailyn, John Brooke, and Saul Cornell, have used this concept as a "methodological eclecticism that

[10] Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 200.

moved easily between discussion of the psychological and behavioral." Through looking at language and activities, these historians have sought to determine the underlying culture that infused political expectations, ideas, and actions.[11] Believing that "neither the invention of American politics nor the significance of the early republic can be grasped solely, or even mainly, from the top down," other authors such as Rhys Isaac and Alfred F. Young evaluated street theater, parades, even architecture, and sought to connect these artifacts of material and popular culture to the larger political world. I draw upon the expanded conceptualization of early America such historians have produced, and in the process seek to enlarge our understanding of political evolvement.[12]

As social and cultural history has infused early American monographs, the decline of aristocracy and the rise of democracy have emerged as the dominant narrative. While scholars such as Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood began writing their narratives by analyzing the rhetoric of the elites, Wood realized the need for an overarching synthesis that brought elite and commoners into some kind of a relationship. His answer was *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, which stressed the transformative influence of text upon the common man.[13] More recent works by scholars such as David Waldstreicher, have pushed the political culture beyond merely deconstructing words to reading activities as "texts." Thus, he analyzes parades and political parties of the Early

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[11] Ronald B. Formisano, "The Concept of Political Culture," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31.3 (2001) 393–426.
[12] Jeffrey Pasley, David Waldstreicher, and Andrew Robertson, eds., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3.
[13] Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage), 1993 (reprint).

Republic as nation-building forces that common people used to influence politics.[14] Scholars of gender, such as Mary Beth Norton, expanded notions of politicization beyond traditional acts such as voting and serving in office. Instead, she argued that women engaged in a multitude of extra-political events aimed at influencing the "traditional" ones.[15] Others have evaluated the traditions brought from Europe that the lower orders used to gain political changes—such as through street demonstrations—European charivari.[16] The focus on rhetoric and "texts" reveals the impact that the linguistic turn has had upon political history. My dissertation seeks to draw upon the best insights derived from the above-mentioned scholars and their methodologies while also contextualizing my argument within the world of hard historical facts.

In looking at the current uses of political culture, Ronald Formisano finds fault with historians for using political culture as a way to empower the underprivileged, at the expense of understanding the role of the privileged. My dissertation looks at both. I join

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[14] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[15] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Norton was part of a larger movement of historians interested in women's involvement in the American Revolution and politics. For further research see, Linda Kerber's "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75/1 (1988): 9–39. Other historians working in this field are Nancy Cott, Rosemarie Zagarri, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, and Kathleen Brown. One of the most recent books to analyze the effects of gender on politics (and vice-versa) is Rosemarie Zagarri's *Revolutionary Backlash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[16]The historiography on taverns is another fascinating exploration of this same concept. The interpretations break down into two main camps. Peter Thompson's *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) and David Conroy's *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) argue that taverns were places where democracy was forged through shared opinion. Sharon Salinger in *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) conversely argued that colonial taverns encouraged the status quo and reinforced the division between the classes. Salinger highlights the traditional nature of the tavern; how it reinforced tradition rather than created the revolutionary. She also described the tavern as exclusionary rather than inclusive.

the wider historiographical debate over political culture in arguing that dynamics of power in early America were negotiated as much through traditional political means as through political culture, including through newspapers, public debates, broadsides, and meetings in taverns, etc. Rather than seeing this as a linear relationship, the public activity in the conventions suggests a much more dynamic and synergistic relationship. I argue that political culture was as much of a publicly orchestrated intersection of negotiated rituals, as it was an elite manipulated event. Public space—either concretely in physical spaces or in the form of print—blurred distinctions between public and private, elite and communal. These spaces provided a stage for the execution of public spectacles that enabled the public to express their growing political ideas and beliefs. Further, I attempt to avoid a teleology that sees American democracy as a foregone conclusion. Much like Wim Klooster in his book, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World,* I that "none of the revolutions [he compares four across the Atlantic] was foreordained." No one at the time knew what the outcome of his or her actions would be. This uncertainty provides another reason the Early Republic came to rely so intensely upon public communication as a means for individuals to build cohesion. Klooster noted that "What is missing from the standard accounts of revolutionary upheaval is the element of contingency."[17] The press represents a key place for understanding the nature of this contingency. By highlighting the medium of the press, I hope to show the uncertain nature of the development of American democracy in true context.

[17] Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2, 158.

Tracing the power of rhetoric across history reveals not only the influence of words, but equally as important, the influence of how, where, and by whom words were and are expressed. The eighteenth century substantially altered how the public viewed and utilized the written word in the form of the press, and with it arose the emergence of mass communication. While much has been written on the press in the transatlantic world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the historiography still remains divided over questions of the causative role of print and the press, the relationship between printers as mechanized businessmen and printers as ideologues, and the shift in power relationships with the emergence of the daily press.

Determining who was behind many of the printed articles, who received the printed newspapers, and who discussed and responded to them, proves another difficult task. In my dissertation, I refer to print as mobilizing a growing middling class. By using the term "middling sort" or "middling classes" I refer to a wider swath of people whose lives, as Margaret Hunt suggested in her book, *The Middling Sort*, were tied to commerce. During the late eighteenth century, this group became increasingly influential in American society.[18] Through the entrepreneurship available in the newly forming country they became more politically and socially involved and in the process disrupted elite domination.[19]

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[18] Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996).

[19] For further information on the middling sort in Early America see, Jennifer L. Goloboy, "The Early American Middle Class," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25: 4 (Winter 2005), 537–545. For a collection of essays that traces this idea through American history, see Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Rutledge, 2001).

Many cultural historians, when evaluating the press, describe it as a synergistic element that "liberalized" and challenged the dominant hierarchical status of life. This approach analyzes how authority and power interrelate and challenge rhetoric and power. As print material multiplied and circulated beyond the literati or political elite and into the hands of the provincial, shifts in power relationships emerged.[20] An important part of this transmission, scholars such as Cathy Davidson, Roger Chartier, and David Shields argue, was a spreading culture of communal sharing that began to create separate communities outside traditional religious and political structures.[21] As communities merged around shared text, criticism and empowerment to criticize also grew. Historians, such as Kenneth Cmeil, Miles Orvell, and David Henkin note the importance of a written text as a means of creating or shaking up "reality" for individuals. These historians thus argue that text produced a living synergy that slowly began to awaken something called public consciousness, which existed outside of the traditional institutions of church and state.[22]

In my dissertation I situate print as both a mediator for public spectacles and also an object of the spectacle itself. Much has been said of print as a mediator. David

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[20] Some basic histories of the development of newspapers are, Charles E. Clarke, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665–1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society 1695–1855* (Longman Publishing Group, 1999).

[21] See Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Roger Chartier, *Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), and David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[22] See Kenneth Cmeil, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight for Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1990); Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); and David Henkin, *City Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Waldstreicher argues, "What is lacking in the historiography of the Revolution is not an appreciation of festivity as a site of local political action, of conflict and consensus. It is rather an understanding of the relationship between local street theater and the nation: a relationship that came into being through the mediation of print."[23] Part of this role of mediation derived from the proposed liberating potential that print held. The move from an economy of scarcity, where few held knowledge and communicated it under very strict terms, to an economy of abundance, where many shared knowledge openly, occurred because of a burgeoning print culture. The power of the written word to influence the way people understood their world not only challenged structural hierarchy but also contributed to the politicization of the public sphere.[24]

The privileging of "text, speech, or writing … at a specific time and region," is an important part of the analysis of print as a public spectacle. Historians such as Jeffrey Pasley, Isabelle Lehuu, and David D. Hall explored to varying degrees the impact that the press had on reinforcing or challenging the hierarchical structures in society through politicizing the public. Others, such as Jane Kamensky and Christopher Grasso explored the interconnections between speech and print in early America and provided the groundwork for establishing why text became such a venerated source in the late eighteenth century. These works set the foundation for studying print, by first studying speech and then its relationship to print and to hierarchy. These scholars have provided a foundation for acknowledging the significance of communication. Specifically, they have

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[23] David Waldstreicher, "Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History* 82.1 (June 1995): 37.

[24] Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early American, 1700–1865*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 280.

established a connection between the spoken and written word in early America, and further print's effectiveness in influencing forms of hierarchy and authority.[25]

Pasley's work, *'The Tyranny of the Printers:' Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* argued that printers engaged in the first stages of party formation through their newspaper publishing. He describes an army of middling printers who were willing to put their financial and personal future on the line in order to convey ideas through the medium of print. They became an integral part in helping to motivate and politicize American citizens as they engaged with politics in the public sphere. As the press burgeoned at the close of the eighteenth century, these men printed their way to a huge transfer in power from Federalist to Democratic-Republican. Adopting the contemporary trend for finding agency in all aspects of history, Pasley finds empowered middling printers to be key players in both formal political party organization and informal national politicization. What Pasley, in particular, concludes is that such activity, far from sedating the masses, challenged them to become more involved in the political process. However, his focus was on the printers, not the intersection between the printers, their print, and the public. My dissertation moves beyond Pasley's army of printers to investigate the interactions and reactions between printer, print, and public. The citizenry's use of public spectacles to negotiate with traditional power structures

[25] For specific works see Jeffrey Pasley, *'The Tyranny of the Printers:' Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jane Kaminsky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

enlarges the scope of this discussion and hopefully deepens understanding within the field.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Trish Loughran in her book, *The Republic in Print* questions whether historians have turned print into America's "techno-mythology." She argued that rather than existing as the "great unifier," print actually encouraged a more fragmented, sectionalized United States. Taking Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and related works to task for being "ahistorical, a postindustrial fantasy of preindustrial print's efficacy as a cross-regional agent and of federalism itself as an inevitable outcome," she seeks to dismantle print as a "national" actor.[26] However, her work over-theorizes the impact of print upon the development of a national political culture across the thirteen unified states.[27] She understands print through a narrow-lens that neglects to see its intersection with co-existing cultures around it; oral, religious, and communal. Print as an institution by itself hardly stands up to critical evaluation for its efficacy as a revolutionizer. However, in the midst of synergistic political and social relations, print media indeed acted as the mediator, the tool that helped American political culture find its voice and its identity. This does not feed into fantasies or glorifications of modern American political myths. Print existed as both a material entity and an extension of an abstract shared oral tradition. This dual position enshrined print as a key political tool making and being

[26] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[27] Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), xx, xix.

made by the people of the United States. Rather than finding Anderson's work, "ahistorical," my dissertation agrees with many other historians who see his theory as historically valid. Further, I base much of my theoretical foundation upon Jurgen Habermas' framing of the "public sphere" as a significant place for the development of national consciousness.[28] I agree with William Shade's statement that "local newspapers, broadsides, and legislative and constitutional convention debates are about as close as we will get to the rational debate of the people. This is the public sphere."[29]

The public sphere arose as a result of the growth of print communication. Thus my work also borrows from cultural historians who have formulated important theoretical theses for understanding how people in the eighteenth century read texts. "Reader-response" theories have helped historians broaden their understanding of traditional "reading" of texts. When analyzing the press of the Early National period, I look beyond the obvious message for what may not be so clearly stated. Scholars such as Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton have grappled not merely with the expansion of print in the Age of the Enlightenment, but the empowering effect that reading (or listening to text being read) had upon the public.[30] Their research provides not only helpful insights into understanding the affect of newspapers upon the politicization of the common man or

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[28] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). See also, Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) and John L. Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historian," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX:I (Summer, 1998), 43–67.

[29] William G. Shade, "Déjà Vu All Over Again: Is There a New New Political History?" in Pasley, et al, *Beyond the Founders*, 401.

[30] See Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), *Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jack Censer, *The French Press in the Age of the Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985), and *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

woman, but also contributes to my methodological framework for grasping non-traditional aspects of public political culture.

Much of the modern materials on rhetoric and print in the Early Republic rely heavily on cultural theory that closely connects words with their cultural moment. Lacking total agreement regarding the role of the text, each theorist's interpretation pushes historians to grapple with the multi-causal nature of print and rhetoric. Clifford Geertz's ideas of culture as symbiotic, symbolic and representational have urged historians to see all aspects of history as "texts" in which each is equally imbedded with meanings significant to the time of its creation.[31] Anderson furthered this argument noting that writing superseded the authority of speech. A shared written text supported by the developing state and market helped people feel a part of a larger nation—an imagined community—that existed outside of their realm of experience. While avoiding the humanization of print "as though the technology were itself an actor," I argue that it did often take on a life of its own. Understanding if and why text, speech, or writing is privileged by a specific public at a specific time within a specific region is an important aspect of my research and enables print to be placed in proper context.[32] In many ways, one could argue that the dominant modern interpretation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century print historiography is the dual nature of print as potentially

[31] See Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play," and "Thick Description," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[32] David D. Hall and David Amory, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

liberating and confining.[33] My dissertation acknowledges this tension and builds around it.

While not bound by these theoretical and methodological insights, my dissertation builds upon Habermas' idea of the "public sphere," Anderson's description of print as creating nationalistic community, and Geertz's description of text as representational, subversive, and reifying. In situating my focus around print and public activities as forms of public spectacles that created negotiated spaces for political participation, I unravel another layer revealing the development of participatory politics and how the public understood the development of nationalism in the United States.

While this study looks at presentation of arguments and reception of these arguments as public spectacles negotiating political relationships, the significance of such a study is much wider. Understanding forms of media and their impact upon drawing elites and public into political activity provides insights into the developing politicization of the people of the newly forming United States. Such a study contributes to the growing materials analyzing the nature of the public sphere and its impact upon politics. Understanding the nature of the media used to influence political involvement and its impact also speaks to modern day debates over the impact of the news media on the political process and its role in the development or hindrance of democracy.

[33] Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Bringing Together the Materials

The primary sources for these case studies are organized in an edited collection, the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* (hereafter, *DHRC*). Volume II of this series includes all pertinent documents related to the Pennsylvania ratification convention and debate. Volume III contains documents covering the ratification conventions of Delaware, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Georgia. Volumes IV–VII includes all pertinent documents—public and private—related to the Massachusetts ratification debate. Volumes VIII through X cover Virginia. Volumes XIX through XXIII follow the ratification debates in New York.

For a broader view of the Constitution, the Federal Convention held in Philadelphia prior to the state ratifications, and the general discourse about these political matters, I rely upon Bernard Bailyn's edited volume, *The Debate on the Constitution: Federalist and Antifederalist Speeches, Articles, and Letters During the Struggle over Ratification: Part One, September 1787–February 1788*. The editors of the *DHRC* also have compiled a volume titled, *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution, Volume I, Constitutional Documents and Records, 1776–1787*. These volumes served as my primary source base, with extra sources, such as private letters, newspapers, etc., providing additional materials. The *DHRC* provides an extensively researched and compiled collection of all materials relevant to the ratification conventions. Their recent entrance into the digital world through the University of Virginia's Rotunda publications provides even more access to these key records.

Some may question the viability of creating a dissertation around pre-selected documentary collections. The *DHRC* has served as a carefully tuned lens allowing me to more carefully evaluate the data of the ratification period and analyze it in unique ways. As a result of the collecting work conducted by historian John Kaminski and his staff, I have been given the gift of time to analyze sources, rather spend a good deal of my research time tracking down the existence or non-existence of certain records. The work they have done in order to provide myself and other scholars with a comprehensive directory to the ratification conventions is a terrific gift to the scholarly community and my great thanks is extended to them.

Organization

The rationale for choosing to focus on eight of the original thirteen states arises from the fact that each state contributed key people and moments in the ratification process that gave the movement the impetus it needed to move toward successful adoption . These factions provide key insights into public political culture and the alliances formed as conversations developed through print and public display. Spanning the full extent of the eastern seaboard, and representing a variety of religious heritages, economic reliance, and attitudes toward slavery, these states provide a fuller picture of the unique histories and cultures from which the American political experience emerged.

The first chapter, *To Follow the 'Political Saviours of the Country': The Ratification Conventions of Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut,* analyzes the first, third, fourth, and fifth states to ratify the Constitution. With the exception of

Pennsylvania—the second to ratify, but it has its own chapter—these first four provide a remarkable foil from which my thesis develops. The first four followed their elite leaders, remained relatively unconcerned with other state views on ratification, and held relatively little press coverage of the event. They reveal the lack of a national "consciousness" or even a unified political culture heading into the ratification debates. Their very lack of public pro-activity provides a perfect contrast to what begins to emerge as more individuals became involved, and more citizens read the actual Constitution and the debates surrounding its ratification. At the same time, these states' fast response to the document set up the ratification debates with good momentum to be received by the other states.

In chapter two, *Blueprint: The Public Prints Arising from Pennsylvania's Ratification Convention,* I analyze Pennsylvania's ratification convention, paying close attention to Pennsylvania's previous history as a forward leaning progressive state that embraced a more democratic style of government. Pennsylvania proves a good case study in popular political culture. Pennsylvania's founding by Quakers established it as one of the most progressive colonies; a colony that encouraged more democratic interactions, which produced the first bicameral state government. Voting rights in the colony were also more inclusive when compared with other states. However, the ratification convention stands in stark contrast. The shady voting practices that occurred during the ratification conventions angered many across the state and pushed the press into a key role for delivering news and editorials to the public. As a result of the pen wars that ensued, Pennsylvania provided the blueprint for the state ratification conventions that

followed. This also revealed growing divisions within the public as the various political "factions" vigorously argued either for or against ratification—many times placing their rhetoric in life or death terms.

Massachusetts provides an interesting contrast. Historically a conservative state (at this time it had the most conservative state constitution of all thirteen states), Massachusetts' convention occurred with an amazing amount of democratic public interaction and pressure. Though the current state government was conservative, for many weeks the outcome of the convention remained uncertain and dependent on public support. Thus the third chapter, *The Public is Political: Middling Class Political Activity in the Massachusetts Ratification Convention,* analyzes the ups and downs of the very public convention. In many ways, among all thirteen conventions, Massachusetts most closely replicated traditional notions of public "spectacles." Attracting hundreds of spectators to the actual convention, the public evidenced signs of political interest not seen since the Revolution. Tracing the development of the public interaction with the convention, I argue that Massachusetts set a pattern for future conventions that created new national political rituals. One of the primary ways they set these rituals was through the new political class attracted to the convention and to political engagement—the middling class. The growth of this class, and particularly the growth of their confidence in expressing themselves politically, meant that the political world was about to be re-aligned. As they engaged in new rituals and remade old ones they came to rely heavily upon the press. The ratification convention thus became the breeding ground where elites and middling learned to negotiate political power.

Chapter four, *Great Expectations: New York's Political Leaders, Its Press, and the Public during the State Ratification Convention*, takes us to the heart of the political battles that erupted as more people became engaged in the ratification debates. New York leaders not only held much sway in determining whether the Constitution would become the law of the land, but also held the attention of many other states looking to it for leadership. Led by a strong anti-federalist governor, and yet populated with the masterful Federalist rhetoricians Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, New York's debates reveal the inability of the elites to rely solely upon political charm or position to sway public opinion. New York's convention built upon the themes begun in Pennsylvania's press and put into action in Massachusetts through its energized middling class. The ratification convention of this state highlights the growing reliance of the states upon the press as a key communication tool for political entities.

In chapter five *"Debt & Dignity": Virginia's Ratification Convention*, the role of elites in politics is most closely analyzed. Virginia had a long-established hierarchical society and deferential polity. The elites of the state fought hard against the growing democratization—specifically expressed in the press—to retain their position. Virginia represents one of the last elite havens among the original thirteen states. While ratification may have been the desired outcome of the elite, its passage in such a public way also signed their death warrant. Further, with the ratification of the Constitution in Virginia, the press revealed its staying power in the emerging political culture of the newly minted United States of America.

Conclusion

"The grand inquest" of the Constitution shaped American identity. The battle over the ratification of the Constitution provided the American public with an extended period to articulate and refine their national goals. In the process, these same debates empowered young Americans to create a new national identity. A functioning society for over one hundred years already—unlike many other emerging revolutionary nations at the time—the people of the United States had the time and resources to devote to publicly debating the legacy of the Revolution and what this legacy promised for the future. The press gave the American people a place, and most importantly, an instrument through which to debate their nationhood. Further, the printed Constitutional debates helped forge American identity not only because of what was said or who participated, but how they participated. The Constitutional debates forged American identity because they occurred through the simultaneous growth of printed media. The influence that the confluence of the press and the Constitutional debates had upon American national identity should not be underestimated.

This is the story of a young tempestuous nation growing up into adulthood. It is the story of how a young nation found its voice and the confidence to express it. It is a story of a people pressing their voices and changing history as a result.

CHAPTER 1: To Follow the 'Political Saviours of the Country': The Ratification Conventions of Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut

When the Federal Constitution emerged from the halls of the Pennsylvania Assembly in Philadelphia the thirteen states of America faced a new dawn. Debt from the Revolutionary War, hostile trading practices, and distrust among each other had led to a general sense of weariness and bewilderment. What had happened to the great ideals of self-governance and individual liberty so eloquently expressed by Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry? Disillusioned, burdened, even somewhat panicked, delegates from across North America met to ameliorate the growing alarm spreading across the states. Meeting once in Annapolis and then again in Philadelphia, the announcement of the creation of the Federal Constitution singularly claimed American attention. Unlike any political events that had taken place to this point, the ability to review and to ratify their governing federal document represented the birth of a new era in the political organization and self-governance of the North American states.

As each state held its own ratification convention, rhetoric celebrating the wisdom of America's political leaders or warning of the imminent death of the confederation filled taverns, private conversation, and public newspapers. Such potential for real political change transformed periodic political involvement into a sudden surge among the citizenry. While efforts toward enshrining democratization in legal terms had begun with the Revolution, the ratification debates brought the public into an extensive

conversation over how to guard political liberty. Moving away from a deferential mode of representation that bowed to the wisdom of elite leaders of the community, middling farmers, merchants, and artisans inserted themselves into this conversation and forged new expectations for broadened political involvement. While still important, reputation and status became one factor among many in determining who would speak and who would listen. The society previously governed by a "speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent democracy" faced new challenges, in no small measure, due to the deliberate and very public ratification conventions of the 1780s and 90s.

American political identity developed as state after state focused on key questions about what self-government, political representation, equal taxation, and bloodshed in the name of freedom meant. While the details of each convention may not have been publicized, rumors and convention hearsay crossed state lines in personal letters and conversations. Newspaper articles written and published in one state appeared up and down the Eastern seaboard. Federalists and Antifederalists traversed state lines strategizing campaign methods and organizing propaganda battles. Through such efforts, the defining of a uniquely American political identity began. State-by-state each convention transformed formal rights-rhetoric into cultural and political experience.[34]

The transformation of American nationalism and political culture arose not in revolutionary bloodbaths or dramatic coups. This formation arose through the power of the written word. Newspapers, broadsides, personal letters, and town meeting notes

[34] In writing this I understand the limited nature of the rights gained at this time and the fact that democratization in American history has been an ongoing battle over the nature of political/human rights and who is entitled to claim them.

provided the venue by which individuals debated and defined what it meant to be a "free people." Public rhetoric formed the stage on which the American people dramatized their expectations for widened political involvement. For the Federalists, print acted merely as a natural extension of their vocal power to command attention. For the Antifederalists, print represented much more. Antifederalists lacked a natural audience and even more importantly, lacked cohesion and a strong uniting ideology. Historian Saul Cornell correctly noted that print was the "only thread tying them [the Antifederalists] together."[35] While more dramatically witnessed in the state conventions of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the beginnings of this push—in print and in voice—for broader political involvement can be traced through Pennsylvania and Connecticut as elites struggled to retain their political and social status. This chapter explores the early ratifiers—Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut—and establishes a baseline for evaluating the emergence of broadening political participation as an integral and defining characteristic of American nationalism.[36]

In the ratification conventions of Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut, elites fashioned and situated convention rhetoric in deferential political terms and in that process, sidelined the more democratic politicians.[37] Comparing these ratification proceedings against later conventions highlights the widening scope of participatory politics in the newly formed United States of America.

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[35] Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 22.
[36] The order of ratification by state is as follows: (1) Delaware, (2) Pennsylvania, (3) New Jersey, (4) Georgia, (5) Connecticut, (6) Massachusetts, (7) Maryland, (8) South Carolina, (9) New Hampshire, (10) Virginia, (11) New York, (12) North Carolina, and (13) Rhode Island.
[37] One might suggest this as a battle between Old World elites and New World (homegrown) local leaders.

Bragging Rights—Delaware's Strange Flash of Political Unity

Although a small state, Delaware had a history of dramatic revolutionary experiences and contentious political scenes. This tradition notwithstanding, when it came to ratification, political leaders laid down their arms and unified their rhetoric. The first state to ratify, the state legislature followed the recommendations of the representatives from Philadelphia. On September 28, 1787, the Confederation Congress transmitted written copies of the Constitution to each of the thirteen states. On the 10th of November, Delaware officials called for a state convention to meet on December 3rd. Delaware's voting public elected convention delegates on the 26th of November and the convention occurred as originally planned from the 3rd to the 7th of December. The delegates then unanimously ratified the proposed Constitution within three days of commencing its convention on December 7th, 1787.[38] The Delaware public appeared pleased to follow the lead of its elite politicians. In the days leading up to the ratification, Federalists clearly felt no imminent challenge to their position, for no pro-Constitution campaign emerged. The only documented Antifederalist demonstration in the state came when Virginia's Richard Henry Lee passed through Wilmington and sought to stir up sentiment against the document. One letter writer described his attempt as "he harangued the populace and cautioned them against hastily adopting it [the Constitution], assuring them that a powerful opposition was forming against it in Philadelphia and in confirmation of his assertions, distributed many of his inflammatory papers." Lee failed

[38] The final vote was 30–0.

to attract public support and left the state.[39] Yet, Delaware's passage of the Constitution appears too simple; surely there had to be more involved in the process than a simple affirmative vote. Modern analysis of the event is restricted by a limited number of sources. What has survived is Federalist rhetoric that focused on arguing for the necessity of joining with the newly forming union. If it were to isolate itself, the small state would surely crumble under financial ruin. Delaware's citizens appeared to follow their recommendations and support ratification.

While the ratification process suggested a harmonious political culture operating within a deferential political system, in reality, this event stands in stark contrast to Delaware's political history. Though the first state to ratify and join the union, Delaware had been one of the most pro-British colonies before the Revolution. In the 1770s, the state remained divided over the issue of independence from Britain. Figures suggest that roughly three-fourths of New Castle County favored independence, whereas half of Kent and four-fifths of Sussex Counties opposed it.[40] In the first Continental Congress, Delaware's two representatives divided over the vote for independence. Their deadlock was broken a day later when another pro-independence representative from Delaware arrived.[41] The fact that such strong convictions for or against Britain had been voiced during the Revolution meant the state inherited a tense political climate after independence. Divided by Revolutionary-based loyalties, the state's political leaders either identified themselves as Whig (pro-independence leaders) or Tory (moderates or

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[39] Samuel Powel to George Washington, Philadelphia, 13 November; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 94.
[40] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 37.
[41] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 37.

British supporters). In 1780, moderates (Tories) in Sussex County revealed their distrust of the Whigs and discontent with state politics by staging the "Black Camp Rebellion." Similar to Shays' Rebellion of 1786 in Massachusetts, the Black Camp Rebellion gave voice to disgruntled farmers whose grievances included complaints against oppressive taxation, an unfair draft law, and harassment by Whig militia. These angry farmers met in a swamp (the "Black Camp") to plan an attack on the local Whig militia. However, shortly before their mobilization, local militia intercepted and disarmed them.[42]

During the following decades the state seesawed between Whig and moderate/Tory rule. The Tories framed the state constitution in 1776, but then lost control of the Assembly in 1777. In 1778, after the British withdrew from Philadelphia, Tories once again regained control. The back and forth of power between the two parties provided ample fodder for the press, which in turn stimulated the continuation of conflict.[43] Statewide struggle between Whigs and Tories existed within a political culture that distrusted factions. Thus, fighting for control meant fighting for what each side perceived to be the survival of the state and its hard-earned liberties.

Election violence proved a frequent venue through which each faction expressed its distrust of the other. The election season of 1787 proved particularly tense.[44] As election season approached in 1787, the Whigs in Sussex vowed to riot if former

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[42] Harold Hancock, "Delaware: Delaware Becomes the First State," in Patrick Conley and John P. Kaminski, eds., *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House, 1988), 26.
[43] Hancock, "Delaware," *The Constitution and the States*, 24.
[44] This Assembly would receive notice from the Federal Constitutional Convention calling for state ratification conventions. Those political elites keeping up with the news from the Philadelphia convention knew this to be the case and so the outcome of the state elections to the legislature became even more important.

Loyalists were allowed to vote.[45] After the election occurred, the state legislature received petitions from a group of Tories decrying the recent elections in Sussex. After hearing from witnesses, the legislature decided to void the 15th of October elections. In a perceived effort to remedy the situation, the legislators passed an act that moved the polling place from Lewes (a Whig stronghold) to the house of a Sussex Tory and then called for another election to take place. While the state legislature accepted the final returns of this election, the results remained highly prejudicial. Assembly president, Thomas Collins, and local leaders had (previous to the election) decided that only fifty votes from each "side" would be counted. This second election included the same threats of violence as the first, only this time the Tories threatened the Whigs. In another petition sent to the legislature, Sussex citizens complained that "on the said fifteenth day of October, the freeholders in general met at Lewes aforesaid in order to vote for their representatives but were denied their right of suffrage, it having been agreed among the leading gentlemen of said county that only one hundred votes should be taken whereby near one thousand freemen were abridged of one of their greatest privileges, namely that of choosing their representatives."[46] In spite of documented violence and a rigged election, the Assembly denied the Whigs' petition for another election.[47] Moving polling places from publicly established locations to homes of known partisan leaders revealed the level of control elites held over Delaware politics. Far from raising an outcry at the

[45] John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., "The General Assembly and the Sussex Elections, 25 October—10 November 1787;" *DRHC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 62.
[46] "Sussex County Petitions Protesting the 15 October Election," Petition, 27 October; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 66–7.
[47] "The General Assembly and the Sussex Elections 25 October—10 November 1787;" *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 63.

illegality of the use of arms, intimidation, and clearly rigged election results, these two factions remained focused on winning coveted seats in the state legislature. To further add to the tumultuous nature of politics in the state, state leaders made another shady electoral decision. In October, after the Sussex voting debacle had been decided, the legislature feared they would not achieve a quorum because of continuing unrest in Sussex. The members rushed an act reducing the legal quorum to a simple majority (there were twenty-one members in the legislature at this time) through both houses in a single day.[48] Such an act exemplified typical politics in Delaware.[49]

Voting discrepancies continued in the state and the elite stoutly refused to address them. During elections for the ratification convention, the county of Sussex (again) experienced intimidation and voting fraud. Aggrieved citizens sent a petition to the state ratification convention delegates requesting a revote. "Your petitioners," they implored, "impressed with a proper sense of the critical and important situation of public affairs at this time … and knowing that it cannot be considered as binding on them without their assent expressed either by themselves or their representatives freely chosen, do hereby solemnly remonstrate against the legality of the election of those persons returned by the sheriff of this county to represent the same in said state Convention."[50] While the convention delegates acknowledged this petition they took no action and the election results stood. Little actual "representation" outside of the interest of the elites occurred in

[48] Ibid., 63.
[49] Interestingly, more printed material covering the Sussex riot survives than materials covering the state ratification convention.
[50] Sussex County Petition to the Delaware Convention, Document Signed Folder 181, Convention to Ratify the Constitution of the United States—1787, General Reference Collection, De-Ar; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 107–108.

the convention. While it appears that a majority of the state's population supported ratification, the voting fraud that plagued the state revealed not only the lack of true representation that existed, but also the elite-controlled nature of the political process.

As with many other states, influential elite men headed Delaware's factions. George Read, an outspoken Tory, represented the most dominant figure in Delaware politics. Active in the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, he remained in Philadelphia the entire course of the convention and spoke twenty-seven times—an impressive number for a politician from such a small state.[51] Richard Bassett, who early in the Revolutionary War had led a Tory insurrection, was one of the principle Tory leaders. Caesar Rodney (until his death in 1784) and Dr. James Tilton, a Scottish-Irish Presbyterian, filled out the Whig leadership.[52] These men held various positions in Delaware's political world and represented to the public the voice of "the state." Historian Gaspare Saladino argued that notwithstanding each side's position in the Revolution "the two factions also split over such issues as debtor legislation, taxation, paper money, representation in Congress by nonresidents, and the manner and extent to which the legislature should encourage the state's economy."[53] It was not until 1790 that state assemblymen amended the state constitution to alleviate the acrimonious feelings between the two factions.[54]

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[51] Gaspare J. Saladino, "Delaware: Independence and the Concept of a Commercial Republic," Gillespie and Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 38.
[52] Dr. James Tilton frequently wrote under the pseudonym, "Timolean."
[53] Gaspare J. Saladino, "Delaware", Gillespie and Lienesch eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 31–32.
[54] David P. Peltier, "Party Development and Voter Participation in Delaware, 1772–1811," *Delaware History* XIV, no. 2 (October 1970), 77.

Before the 1790 compromise, the state faced the ratification decision on the proposed Federal Constitution. The call for election of delegates followed the same procedures as the general elections and Sussex once again reported unrest among its voters. Accusations of intimidation and threats of violence circulated amongst the public.[55] In this case, the two sides did not vie for votes due to a desire to achieve different outcomes. Rather, the election represented yet another arena in their ongoing struggle to achieve political control of the Assembly. In general, voter turnout across the state was lower than normal, in good part due to ongoing intimidation and violence at polling sites.[56] A normal statewide election generally involved about 1000–1100 votes. However, the election ballots cast for this convention barely reached 700. One would expect such an important event to attract more, rather than fewer voters. Such a low turnout validated the many accusations of intimidation and suggests the strong control each party held over their voters.

Upon arrival in Dover, differences between Tory and Whig were laid aside and the task of ratifying the constitution consumed full attention. An editorial in the *Delaware Gazette* provided insight into the attitude of the state's factions toward ratification and also suggested public fatigue toward the constant partisan fighting. "In Kent, the Whigs, not caring by whom the government was ratified, made no opposition, and the Tories carried their election in great triumph. Some noted Tories declared they had been hindmost in a former revolution, but they were determined to be foremost in this. The

[55] "The Election of Convention Delegates 26 November 1787;" *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 92.
[56] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 92.

same spirit seemed to pervade the whole."[57] In the end, this surprising truce produced a unanimous ratification of the Constitution in four days.

While the interior workings of the convention are not known, a number of public petitions sent to the convention still exist. Highlighting the deferential political system that operated in the state, these petitions read as competitive boasts between Tory and Whig voters vying to outdo the other in their vocal backing for their leaders' support of the Constitution. Both sides were clearly convinced that Delaware's economic and political future resided in greater collaboration among the states. Rather than being a debate over the validity of the document, it became a race to see who could prove themselves more supportive of the state's political good. Whig leader, James Tilton, writing under the pseudonym "Timolean,"[58] complained in a newspaper editorial "Tories went immediately to canvassing for the election of Convention men." Moving beyond just stumping for the election to the upcoming state ratification convention, they also maligned their political opponents. Tilton continued his objection by noting "they spread rumors throughout the state that the Whigs would be aver[se] … [to] the new Federal Constitution; and they everywhere set themselves up as the patrons of it." Wishing to clarify the record, Tilton strongly noted "nobody in the state opposed its establishment." His eagerness in defense of the new Constitution revealed the unanimity of support for

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[57] "Timolean" (Dr. James Tilton), "On the Elections in New Castle and Kent Counties," *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 26 November 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 95. While this was originally published in the *Delaware Gazette*, the only surviving record is from Philadelphia's *Independent Gazetteer*.

[58] "Timolean" was the name assumed by Dr. James Tilton, a Whig leader and physician in Dover. He wrote a lengthy pamphlet, which was published by a Philadelphia press, decrying the activities of Tory leader George Read.

the Constitution, but more importantly, the level to which local politics controlled this vital national political issue.[59]

As nobody in the state appeared to oppose the Constitution the argument centered over which leaders most favored it. Orchestrated in a traditional spectator-attracting method, the elites assumed a position of leadership in convention matters. Their attitude toward this political issue, as with all others, was expressed in the tradition of "a speaking aristocracy [acting] in the face of a silent democracy."

A petition from the grand jurors of the Court of Oyer and Terminer in New Castle provides further insight into the deferential framework within which Delaware citizens operated. "We the jurors aforesaid… deem it our duty, as citizens of this state… beg leave to recommend to the honorable the General Assembly of Delaware their approbation and concurrence, to ratify and confirm the present system of government adopted by the late Honorable Convention."[60] Clearly operating within a deferential system inherited from their British relatives, the jurors of New Castle acted on the "authority" of their leader. They explained their petition as specifically "adhere[ing] to the charge delivered unto us by the Honorable William Killen." Their desire to "beg leave to recommend" further inscribed their submissive posture. Their suggested course of action also underscored the deferential carriage of the public. This docile approach contrasted greatly with the later vigorous rights rhetoric that developed among the public in other state conventions. These jurors offered their recommendations based upon the

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[59] "Timolean" (Dr. James Tilton), "On the Election Campaign," *Biographical History of Dionysius*, 72–73; *DHRC*, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: III: 93.
[60] Petition of the Grand Jurors, 6 October, Document Signed Legislative Papers, 1787, October–November, Petitions, De-Ar; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 53.

privilege given them by their political superiors. This privilege, acknowledged as their granted duty, was therefore performed with deference and acquiescence. Another petition from citizens in New Castle County also underscored this mindset. "To the honorable the representatives of the freemen of the Delaware State… the persons… would humbly declare."[61] Other petitions closed with "and your petitioners as in duty bound will pray."[62] Following the attitude of their leaders, the voting citizenry (one might argue an elite in and of themselves) joined the ranks of their leaders vying for vocal support to prove their loyalty to Delaware's political future.

The official ratification document produced by the convention offers further insight into the attitudes of the politicians and the public they professed to represent. A very straightforward document, it lacks much of the decorative and formalized rhetoric so common among the ratification documents subsequently produced by other states.[63] The document was a mere two paragraphs long, 148 words to be exact. The reason for the brevity of the document remains uncertain, as do the details of the debates.[64] In the absence of more documentation, the language of the official document remains one of the

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[61] Petition of New Castle County Citizens, Document Signed Folder 181, Convention to Ratify the Constitution of the United States—1787, General Reference Collection, De-Ar; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 54.

[62] Petition of New Castle County Inhabitants, Document Signed Folder 181, Convention to Ratify the Constitution of the United States—1787, General Reference Collection, De-Ar; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 55.

[63] The document appeared as follows: "We the Deputies of the People of the Delaware State, in Convention met, having taken into our serious consideration the Foederal Constitution proposed and agreed upon by the Deputies of the United States in a General Convention held at the City of Philadelphia on the seventeenth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven. Have approved, assented to, ratified, and confirmed, and by the Presents, Do, in virtue of the Power and Authority to us given for that purpose, for and in behalf of ourselves and our Constituents, fully, freely, and entirely approve of, assent to, ratify and confirm the said Constitution.
Done in Convention at Dover this seventh day of December in the year aforesaid, and in the year of the Independence of the United States of America the twelfth In Testimony whereof we have hereunto subscribed our Names—."

[64] The missing details are due in great part to the loss of the convention records.

only sources providing insight into the attitudes directing the political activity of the state officials. The ratification document described the delegates as "Deputies." Such a description was unique and suggested the delegates' notion of authority to be more comprehensive than other official documents may have suggested. Rather than utilizing the more common usage of the day to refer to their representative role (where their actions remain under public scrutiny) the term suggested the delegates assumed full authority. While the document did acknowledge their power and authority as "given," this wording reflected more of a paternalistic view of the public's representational authority. Only as the ratification debates gained steam across other states would the public begin to demand this wording be honored in reality and not just represent a rhetorical flourish.[65]

Elite boasting about ratification was not limited to Delaware. News about the unanimity and speed that marked the first state's ratification sounded all over the mid-Atlantic. A neighboring Philadelphia newspaper reported that, "On Thursday they [the state of Delaware] ratified the new Federal Constitution by an unanimous vote, and on Friday every member signed the ratification." A Massachusetts' newspapers celebrated the passage by titling its article announcing the ratification, "FEDERAL CONSTITUTION. The FIRST PILLAR of a great FEDERAL SUPERSTRUCTURE

[65] For further information on the development of the idea of public representation, see Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

raised."[66] A personal letter from a Wilmington resident proudly recorded, "Of course we are the first in the Union for the adoption."[67]

The dearth of official materials from the Delaware Ratification Convention is matched by a dearth of materials from its press. The role that Delaware's newspapers played in ratification remains the weakest among the states. Having a somewhat slow and uneventful press history, no precedent for an involved press as the eyes and ears of the public existed in the state. A pre-Revolutionary press had barely existed due to difficulties securing presses and type, and because of the lack of strong urban centers for distribution.[68] Two newspapers began publishing after the war—*The Delaware Gazette*, or the *Faithful Centinel* and *The Delaware Courant, and Wilmington Advertiser*. Few records of their publications survive and it appears that no Delaware printer published a pamphlet on the Constitution itself. Given the lack of record, we are left to assume that the public remained silent and relied on the elites to handle the political business of the day.[69] The lack of precedent for using the press to alert the public to political events during the Revolution carried over into this most important decision and rather than feeling entitled to information, it appears the public sat blithely by, willing their future to their leaders. While no publication exists indicating public scrutiny or attitudes, the General Assembly did call for *The Delaware Gazette* to publish "100 Copies [of their resolutions calling for the Ratification Convention] to be printed and transmitted to the

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[66] *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 10 December 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 112–113.
[67] Jacob Broom to Trench Coxe, Wilmington, 8 December 1787, Recipients Copy, Coxe Papers, Trench Coxe Section, Phi; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 112.
[68] John A. Munroe, *Federalist Delaware: 1775–1815* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 184.
[69] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 44–45.

sheriffs of the several Counties to be by them fixed up at the most publick Places in their Counties respectively."[70] Interestingly, while the Assembly called for the printing of the resolutions calling for the ratification convention, no records exist calling for the printing of the actual ratification resolution, nor, for that matter, the Constitution itself. The lack of a vibrant press allowed the elite to continue their infighting, trusting that the public would continue operating as a "silent democracy."

Delaware's ratification convention—the first of the states—clearly operated within a deferential political system. Far from exciting the citizenry to imagine greater political participation as their inheritance and right, this process affirmed the status quo. The adoption of the Constitution merely provided another venue for partisan squabbling. In their hurried manner to outdo each other, the state's political leaders pushed the Constitution through the ratification process quickly. Aside from the many institutional traditions that kept the public's political involvement passive, this swift passage of arguably one of the most important political documents in the state's history, kept the citizenry from an opportunity to debate the meaning of the Constitution and the freedoms it promised. As a result, Delaware's public lost the opportunity to re-envision their political identity as Americans—an opportunity, however, that was not lost on other observant states.

[70] The Delaware General Assembly, Thursday, 25 October 1787, House Proceedings, A.M., Manuscript (LT), Folder 181, Convention to Ratify the Constitution of the United States—1787, General Reference Collection, De-Ar; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 59.

Tacit Approval—New Jersey's Quiet Acceptance

While ratification in Delaware never raised serious concerns among Federalists, it did in other states such as Rhode Island, with its independent and democratic history. New Jersey also should have been included in that category of concern. It boasted an egalitarian and democratic history, in good part, due to the work of radical revolutionary Abraham Clark. Clark's conception of "republican democracy" stood at odds with the proposed Constitution and his clout in the state as a man of the people would naturally have given him an influential voice in the debate. However, as another historian noted about the state, "The materials were there; the mobilization was not."[71] How did the Federalists manage to pull off such a massive victory in a state potentially hostile to their political beliefs? As in Delaware, New Jersey's elite played on the fears of the public and dominated ratification politics. Clark and his followers, in weighing the benefits against the drawbacks of the Constitution, appeared to decide that the economic benefits of the Constitution outweighed the potential loss of personal liberty. They quietly stepped aside and allowed ratification to move forward unopposed.

New Jersey represented one of the most diverse states within the original thirteen. The state housed Quakers, Anglicans, and Baptists, and was comprised of Dutch, English, German, Scottish, and African inhabitants. An active participant in the Revolution, it struggled with financial troubles after gaining independence. Without a port, westward lands, or lucrative exports, New Jersey's revenue came solely from internal taxation. These hardships, combined with fears of being overwhelmed by

[71] Sara M. Shumer, "New Jersey: Property and the Price of Republican Politics," Gillespie and Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 73.

Pennsylvania and New York, rested heavily on the backs of hardworking farmers. Abraham Clark's political activities marked him as a leader who understood the plight of the heavily taxed and indebted farmer and hence won their support. His service to the state spanned the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods. He worked to redress the state's financial deficit through legislation favorable to paper money and restrictive of greedy land speculators and loan sharks. Passionate for liberty, he wrote "Let us not stop here [referring to independence from Britain] or … we may awake in fetters, more grievous, than the yoke we have shaken off." For, he warned "although we have knocked off the shackles of British tyranny [beware lest] we should suffer ourselves to be duped into as bad a situation by artful interested designing men." In many ways, Clark embraced and articulated for New Jersey the vision that Thomas Jefferson articulated for Virginia; the necessity of the agrarian farmer in providing a stable republican government. The "industrious husbandmen" of New Jersey represented the future of the state. They embodied the "constituents" Clark worked hardest to support and protect.[72]

Clark's vision for the state clearly excited support from his constituents. One example particularly reveals his political ideology at work and the public support behind him. While a state legislator he proposed a bill in support of paper money. As the time for the Assembly to commence and vote on the bill approached, Clark encouraged his constituents to "stand no longer idle," but to mobilize against "moneyed men, merchants and lawyers," who were "very industrious" in resisting the bill. "Use humble petitioning only, and no doubt you may be heard; if not your only remedy is in the next election of

[72] Ruth Bogin, "New Jersey's True Policy: The Radical Republican Vision of Abraham Clark," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 104.

representatives." His encouragement produced a petition campaign from over ten thousand citizens. In spite of such large-scale support for Clark's bill, the council deadlocked. In the face of such actions, New Jersey residents turned to the press and initiated a writing campaign that caused the Assemblymen to fear for their seats.[73] Grudgingly recognizing the will of the people, the Assembly finally passed the legislation.

Clark's humble roots and political acumen won him the trust of the agrarian class. His longstanding service to the state made him a formidable foe when he set his mind for or against something. He understood the power of the press to unite the populous in pressuring elected representatives. Why then, with such a devoted passion to liberty and such a strong grass roots "organization" did he not oppose the Constitution? In writing about the document, he noted "I never liked the System in all its parts. I considered it from the first, more a Consolidated government than a federal, a government too expensive, and unnecessarily Oppressive in its Operation; Creating a Judiciary undefined and unbounded."[74] Yet, expressing his characteristic trust in the people, he chose not to launch an anti-ratification campaign. Clark wrote, "I nevertheless wished to go to the States from Congress just as it did, Without any Censure or Commendation, hoping that in case of a general Adoption, the Wisdom of the States would soon amend it in the exceptional parts."

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[73] Ibid., 107.
[74] Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey: From Colony to State, 1609–1789* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1981), 276.

Clark acquiesced to ratification because of his trust in the wisdom of the people. However, he also explained his compliance was because of the hope of the introduction of amendments aimed at appeasing Antifederalist fears. Clark was one of the first Antifederalists to mention this. "Strong fears however remained on my mind," he noted, "until I found the Custom of Recommending amendments with the Adoptions began to prevail. —This set my mind at ease … I anxiously wish every state may come into the adoption in order to effect a measure with me so desirable; in which case, from the general current of amendments proposed, we shall retain all the important parts in which New Jersey is interested."[75] His hopes of producing amendments were not realized until Massachusetts (the sixth state to ratify) when the compromise between Antifederalists and Federalists came down to ratification with non-binding recommended amendments.

As Clark recused himself from the debate, Federalists gained an amazing opportunity to make their case and push their agenda unhindered. Economic woes and concerns about being consumed by their larger neighbors had sent New Jersey's delegates to the Federal Convention resolved to defend their state by securing equal representation in the new government. After the New Jersey suggestion of equal votes in the Senate was adopted, the delegates felt their battle had been won and walked away from the convention confident in the document and in their state's support.[76] "Give N[ew]. Jersey an equal vote and she will dismiss her scruples, and concur in the

[75] Ibid., 276–277.
[76] George (Charles?) Pinckney, 16 June 1787, Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention*, Volume 1 (New Haven, Connecticut, 1911), 255. (Hereafter referred to as Farrand.)

Nati[ona]l. system," Charles Pinckney quipped.[77] Indeed, his confidence proved a reality as the New Jersey state convention ratified the Constitution unanimously 38–0.[78]

Eager to engage in ratification, the state quickly called for elections. One New Jersey observer reported, "Nothing but the immediate adoption of it can save the United States in general, and this state in particular, from absolute ruin." When it came to discussing the Constitution, newspapers held a small role, more in the tradition of public billboard than debating podium. Far from being utilized to produce political pressure, as had been done in the paper money controversy, relatively few articles appeared in print. Those that did appear were supportive of ratification in New Jersey and predicted it in other states as well. While selections from New York and Pennsylvania newspapers were reprinted in the state, only three articles from New Jersey authors were published.[79] The state printer, Isaac Collins, was commissioned by the legislature to produce 500 copies of the directive from the Federal Convention calling for state ratification conventions. "On motion, Resolved, That Isaac Collins be directed to print or strike off 500 copies of the resolutions of the legislature of October 29, 1787, recommending to the people of the state to meet by their delegates in convention for the purpose of taking into consideration the Constitution of the federal government proposed by the late General Convention."[80] Elections for delegates to the convention occurred without any of the debacles recorded

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[77] Richard P. McCormick, *Experiment in Independence: New Jersey in the Critical Period 1781–1789* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 259.
[78] The New Jersey Form of Ratification, 18 December, Engrossed MS (LT), RG 11, Certificates of Ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights … 1787–92; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 130.
[79] "Commentaries on the Constitution 28 September—26 December 1787;" *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 133.
[80] The New Jersey Legislature, Tuesday, 30 October 1787, Assembly Proceedings, A.M.; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 168.

in Delaware, nor did they even attract much attention. Historian Sara Shumer summarized the situation well when she wrote, "The newspapers entered short notices of the results and of the weather but made no note of debates, of speeches, or of losers or winners, let alone of what anyone had advocated. In this fashion, almost casually and certainly with little deliberation, the people of New Jersey elected representatives to decide what then was seen and now is still seen to be one of the most momentous choices to face the new nation."[81] During the convention, printers Frederick C. Quequelle and George M. Wilson requested that the Assembly allow them to print the daily proceedings. The Assembly denied Quequelle and Wilson's specific request, but did allow them to print summaries of the convention in their newspaper, the *Trenton Mercury*. Isaac Collins—the "state printer"— per the Assembly's request, published the "official version" of the convention proceedings as a separate pamphlet.[82] Far from using the press as Clark had done, as a means for the citizenry to demand political accountability and involvement, the elites utilized the press as a billboard acknowledging the "official" proceedings.[83] The Federalists acknowledged a certain responsibility to their public—

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[81] Sara M. Shumer, "New Jersey," Gillespie and Lienesch eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 72.
[82] Convention Proceedings, Saturday, 15 December, (*DHRC*, III, 182) and "The New Jersey Convention 11–20 December 1787"; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 177.
[83] By relying on the press to record "official" business, Delaware's elites assumed traditional attitudes toward the press. As press historian Stephen Botein has written, the early American press—even during the Revolution—did not have the precedent, nor the liberty, to be a cataclysmic agent. Rather, it existed merely within economic restraints of the business world. Not an agent of change, it merely reflected any changes occurring. Publishers were expected to be neutral at worst and pro-government at best. Stephen Botein, "'Mere Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political "Strategies of Colonial American Printers," Offprint from *Perspectives in American History* Volume IX, 1975. Botein's conclusions are also shared by John Alexander's study of the press' coverage of the Federal Constitutional Convention. Those printers, he argues, reported in a favorable light, the activities of the elite leaders of the nation. John K. Alexander, *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention: A History of News Coverage* (Madison: Madison House, 1990).

clearly realizing their importance in retaining local support, but fell far short of what later would become the demands of an awakened populous.

While the press remained relatively quiet, Federalists utilized town meetings and association petitions to encourage public support and to express satisfaction with the Constitution. By utilizing the "potent weapon" that Richard McCormick called the "inarticulate majority of the petition" many signaled their support for the Constitution.[84] The majority of these petitions arose from prominent elite organizations and communities. One such organization, *The Newark Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge*, recorded the following action:

> An occasional meeting was called in order to hear the Constitution for the United States read and to fall upon some method, which might be useful to recommend it to the people in and about this town. The Society having accordingly convened, the Constitution was read. After which on motion it was ordered that the president, in the evening of the following Monday [1 October], should read the Constitution publicly in the Presbyterian Church in this town and should make such explanatory and recommendatory remarks thereon as to him should seem proper, which on the day appointed was accordingly done.[85]

Understanding themselves as the leaders of their town, they had gathered for the express purpose of devising a strategy for recommending the Constitution "to the people in and about this town." Interestingly, they decided upon devising a strategy even before they had read the document as a group—their confidence in its structure clearly revealing their "biased" agenda. The outcome of the meeting called for the public reading of the document in a local church, followed by editorial comments presented for the "instruction" and "benefit" of those listening. Though the citizens of a strong democratic

[84] Richard P. McCormick, *Experiment in Independence*, 278.
[85] Proceedings of the Newark Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge, 28 September 1787, Manuscript, Commonplace Book, John Croes Papers, NjR; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 135.

state clearly understood the nature of public meetings and interactions, they seemed satisfied in the recommendation of their leaders during the Constitutional debate.

Records indicate that pro-Constitution petitions sent to the ratification convention came from Western Jersey; an area mainly populated by elite landowners, merchants, and lawyers. Eastern New Jersey held the majority of the small farmers who supported Abraham Clark and paper money initiatives. Of the five petitions, only two were sent from within this Eastern region (and technically these counties fell within the center region that had waffled between support for East and West). The majority of the petitioning counties, Gloucester, Salem and Burlington all fell firmly within West New Jersey, home to the wealthy landowners, merchants, and lawyers.[86]

The fact that elite counties wrote petitions in support of the constitution is not surprising. Nor is the fact that those elected to the convention and placed in positions of leadership in the convention were likewise wealthy and elite politicians. Richard McCormick described the group of delegates who first convened at a tavern in Trenton as "early Whigs" who had held important military positions in the Revolution. While farmers were elected, lawyers, doctors, merchants, ministers, and presidents of the State's colleges formed a substantial segment of the representation. The President of the Convention, John Stevens, was one of the wealthiest men in the state. Chief Justice of the State, David Brearly, joined him as an influential leader in the convention. A loquacious supporter of the Constitution, Brearly lay to rest any misgivings that any delegates may

[86] Gloucester County Petition, 1 October; Burlington County Petition, 1 October; Salem County Petition; Middlesex County Petition, Document Signed; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 136–7; 118—map showing counties.

have uttered during the conventions brief periods of discussion.[87] An article in the *New Jersey Journal* reported of Brearly that, "notwithstanding the dispatch of the Convention, many supposed exceptions were agitated; but that the Honorable Judge [David] Brearly, with perspicuity of argument and persuasive eloquence which carried conviction with it, bore down all opposition."[88] Another writer for the *Pennsylvania Mercury* congratulated the state of New Jersey for electing Brearly to the convention. As an original delegate to the Philadelphia convention, Brearly brought background information and well-rehearsed arguments to the New Jersey convention that "cleared up the doubts in many minds to the entire satisfaction of those who heard him."[89]

Abraham Clark's silence, and that of his agrarian supporters in East Jersey, remains a mystery. Many have argued that the Constitution held enough benefits to buy their silence. Regardless of the reason, their silence meant that in this political decision elites dominated in voice, text, and most importantly, the vote. The press reported local proceedings and occurrences, but as the public demanded relatively little, the press obliged. Town meetings and requisite petitions approved the document and encouraged others to do so. And so, in a rather un-dramatic fashion, the state that boasted the democratic visionary Abraham Clark followed Delaware's example in executing a speedy and unanimous ratification.

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[87] Richard P. McCormick, *Experiment in Independence*, 173.
[88] *New Jersey Journal*, 26 December; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 194.
[89] "Unitas," *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 5 January 1788; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 195.

Whither the People?–Georgia's Silent Ratification

While elites dominated the ratification debates of Delaware and New Jersey, the public at least appeared to support their decision. Georgia's public remained strangely silent. Few records survive documenting the actions of the state. Those that do, describe formal actions and the expected handful of elite newspaper articles for and against the Constitution. No petitions, records of county elections, and few personal letters exist indicating public attitudes toward the document.

What raises further questions about Georgia's ratification is the fact that its political history is anything but unanimous and calm. From its beginnings, the state struggled with division between personal and factional rivalries. Historian Edward Cashin noted that, "an investigation of almost any one of the ten years proceeding ratification would reveal an intense interest in political matters and an equally intense disposition to quarrel."[90] In the mid-1780s as people flooded into the state to acquire suddenly available cheap land, the center of population and thus political power moved from southern Georgia (the lowcountry counties) to northern Georgia (the upcountry counties). This shift moved Georgia from a state controlled mainly by wealthy planters and merchants who had served in the colonial assembly to one dominated by frontiersmen who, as John Kaminski describes them, "had won fame as guerrilla leaders during the [Revolutionary] war." Most frontiersmen were recent arrivals and favored a more democratic style of governing.[91] Flexing their power, these new citizens moved the

[90] Edward J. Cashin, "Georgia: Searching for Security," Gillespie and Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 95.
[91] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 207.

state capital from Savannah to Augusta. Divisions deepened and one contemporary described the differences between the upcountry and low country representatives as: "The U.C. [upcountry] people say that the L.C. [lowcountry] people want to have everything as they please in despite of reason or the common interest, and the L.C. people say that the U.C. people want to have everything as they please without paying taxes for the support of government."[92] While the new leaders of the state came from a more democratic bent, their rise in societal importance over time transformed them from backcountry Daniel Boones into plantation aristocrats.

Georgia's 1777 state constitution revealed the early democratic leanings of the state. Taxpaying male suffrage, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, trial by jury, and various other rights constituted the heart of the document. Provisions for schools to be established in each county at the public expense were also included. The Constitution disestablished the Anglican Church and banned religious leaders from holding office. Broad enfranchisement existed as, "All male white inhabitants of the age of twenty-one years, and possessed in his own right of ten pounds value, and liable to pay tax in this State, or being of any mechanic trade, and shall have been resident six months in this State, shall have a right to vote at all elections for representatives, or any other officers, herein agreed to be chosen by the people at large." So seriously did the public take their rights that the state constitution placed a fine of five pounds upon any person qualified to vote but who neglected to exercise this right.[93] Historian Kenneth Coleman credited the

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[92] Isaac Briggs to Joseph Thomas, [Savannah, 6 March 1786], in E. Merton Coulter, ed., "Three Isaac Briggs Letters," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XII [1928], 178–79.
[93] Albert Berry Saye, *A Constitutional History of Georgia, 1732–1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948), 106.

radical leaders with the "overthrow [of] the old order with its aristocratic checks." In its place, they "established a new one without any checks. The democratically-minded frontiersmen had achieved their revolutionary victory and were ready to enjoy it."[94]

Among the thirteen original colonies Georgia remained one of the most fiercely independent. In 1785, one of Georgia's congressmen wrote home, "the whole body of Congress are become so clamorous against our state that I shudder for the consequences ... it is very seriously talked of, either to make a trial of voting Georgia out of the Union or to fall upon some means of taking coercive measures against her."[95] The state's independence arose from its individualistically minded citizens. Coleman again writes, "The towns had a small artisan class, which matched the yeomanry in social and economic standing. This large middle class usually had little formal education but was independent-minded and knew the value of its vote at election time. These people were in a very real sense the backbone of Georgia and her development."[96] This fierce sense of independence had its limits. In 1787 as Indian wars and threats of Indian raids escalated, the Georgia Assembly began to assume their duties to the Confederation more seriously. While refusing to send delegates to the meeting called in Annapolis (to address problems with the Articles of Confederation), it did elect delegates to the Federal Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Concerned with retaining control over their state's slave trade, Georgia fought alongside other southern states to retain "state's rights." At the same time, due to the financial pressure they felt as a result of the growing Indian crises,

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[94] Edward J. Cashin, "Georgia," Gillespie and Lienesch, *Ratifying the Constitution*, 97.
[95] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 209.
[96] Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 117.

their main agenda remained strengthening the central government.

A copy of the Constitution arrived in Savannah with a returning delegate on the 3rd of October 1787. Fortuitously, the state Assembly was in the midst of a special session discussing the Indian crises. The Assembly accepted the Constitution and followed directions from Philadelphia to call a state convention. They made recommendations for the state ratification convention to meet in December, specifically on the 25th of December. Within a week of this meeting, official notices calling for delegate elections and the state ratification convention had been unanimously passed. In regards to the Constitution and the approaching ratification convention, very little transpired between October and December in the public sphere. No organized Federalist or Antifederalist campaign materialized. No record of county meetings or public petitions exists.

Georgians appeared to have had every reason to accept the document. Historians have suggested that concerns over Indian wars caused the state to be distracted and to see the Constitution as a promise of more congressional support of arms and men to fight the frequent Native American uprisings. The financial issues the state struggled with as a result of the Revolution and continued Indian wars promised to be ameliorated through stronger federal ties. Federal protection of Georgia's borders from its British and Spanish neighbors also sounded appealing to a war-weary state. However, while all of these realities represented valid reasons to support ratification, the extent to which these arguments actually informed the decision to ratify (or not) is difficult to confirm. Only

two letters from Georgia locals citing the Indian crises as reason for ratification exist.[97] A series of articles from both Federalists and Antifederalists appeared in the Savannah newspapers and other articles from other states were also published. However, no clear reason for ratification appeared in the press or in personal communications. The public appeared to have retired their voice in this decision.

Of special note among the few public documents appearing in the Georgia press is a series of articles written by five authors—both Federalist and Antifederalist. The debate, mainly between an Antifederalist "A Georgian" and a Federalist "Demosthenes Minor," with support or attacks from "A Farmer," "A Citizen," and "A Briton," lasted for about a month, from the 15th of November through the 13th of December. "A Georgian's" account stands as probably the most prescient commentary on the Constitution that the state produced.[98] While other Antifederalist articles appeared in state newspapers, this Georgian author highlighted all of the major concerns that Antifederalists across the states voiced against the Constitution. He specifically related his concern that the Constitution would subvert "sacred freedom" and would encourage an "Aristocratical" government.[99] While his comments reflected dominant Antifederalist thinking, the article revealed more about the uncomfortable nature of the press in Georgia than actual politics.

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[97] Joseph Clay to John Pierce, Savannah, 17 October, File Copy, Clay Letterbook, GHi (*DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 232) and William Grayson to William Short, New York, 10 November, Recipients Copy, Short Papers, DLC; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 262. While there are other personal letters that discuss the Indian issue, these two are the only existent record of citizens suggesting a connection between the Indian crises and Georgia's interest in ratification.

[98] Interestingly, "A Georgian" revealed his prescience by suggesting that the representation figures in the Constitution gave the North voting advantages in Congress. Such an inequality, he suggested, was sure to have repercussions on Southern control over the slave trade.

[99] "A Georgian," *Gazette of the State of Georgia*, 15 November 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 236–243.

Comments made about the validity of who was allowed to speak and the role printers should play in "policing" the content printed caused the biggest stir surrounding the ratification decision. "Demosthenes Minor" began his response to "A Georgian's" critique of the constitution addressing his article to Friends and Federalists. He described "A Georgian" as one whose "pen may inflame weak minds, but time will discover the fiction, and the author will be victim to his own folly." His ad hominem attack continued. He accused the editorialist of not representing the proper social standing and therefore of not having credibility in voicing critiques. "Shall such a person then set himself up for the oracle of state and put his judgment in competition with (to use his own words) the political saviors of their country?" Clearly "A Georgian" had upset an elite by daring to challenge others above his social/political standing. Though the state may have known political wrangling, the idea of legitimate dissent was lacking. The distrust with which "Demosthenes" approached "A Georgian" revealed his inability to understand "A Georgian's" critiques as anything but unpatriotic and disruptive to the political order. In this vein, "Demosthenes Minor" accused "A Georgian" of having a "distempered brain and bad heart, producing noxious and infectious fruit." A "demon of discord and faction," "A Georgian's" expression about the Constitution was neither correct nor appropriate.[100] "A Farmer" joined "Demosthenes Minor" in his accusations against "A Georgian." Suggesting that he was a foreigner who happened to blow in with the wind, unversed in American principles nor devoted to her liberty, he warned that "it is a very unfortunate truth that the bulk of civilized society would much rather let a designing, specious

[100] "Demosthenes Minor," *Gazette of the State of Georgia*, 22 November 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 246–8.

demagogue think for them than either be at the trouble of thinking for themselves or letting those whose fortunes and happiness are combined with their own think for them."[101] In speculating who this "fabricator" may be, "A Farmer" conjectured that "he can be no tried friend to Georgia, nor no native of its soil; his sentiments proclaim the former, and his foreign idiom the latter."[102] While the content began as focused upon ratification issues, it quickly disintegrated into a debate over social standing and print.

These Federalists not only scurrilously attacked "A Georgian," but also turned on the printer who published his article. Fearing that "there is too great a door left open for every adventurer to disturb its tranquility and to frustrate the views of its real patriots," "A Farmer" wrote that Mr. Johnson (the printer) should "keep a register or list of all your literary correspondents containing their real, not their assumed names, and make their acquiescence in this measure a condition of publishing their performances."[103] Hoping to shame this man and his fellow "knaves and blockheads" by posting their names publicly, "A Farmer" suggested that once his social standing (or lack thereof) was known, "perhaps the public would never have had his heterogeneous performance foisted upon them." "A Citizen" then wrote defending the rights of individuals to express their ideas freely, and without receiving personal abuse, the debate stopped.[104] Interestingly, the argument focused on who was or was not supporting the document and not their reasons why. This newspaper debate revealed the intent of the Georgia Federalists to browbeat their public into support based on social position and not on the merits of the document.

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[101] "A Farmer," *Gazette of the State of Georgia*, 29 November 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 249.
[102] Ibid., 250.
[103] Ibid., 249.
[104] "A Briton" also wrote in favor of "A Georgian," but no records of a public response to his article exist.

Federalists clearly understood the press as a voice for the elite (enlightened) leaders and not a public marketplace of ideas.

Further, the debate in Georgia revealed the very strong local impulses that guided the debate over national concerns. The juxtaposition of these two issues displayed the flexibility of the press to merge issues previously separate and to slowly push previously local arguments into a national context.

Much like with New Jersey, Georgia's elites on both sides of the aisle appear to have become strange bedfellows in their support for the Constitution. A prominent judge writing from Chatham County (a lowcountry county known for being more traditionally conservative and home to colonial elites) wrote of his confidence in the document because "the many illustrious characters who compose the greatest part of that august assembly gives a well-grounded hope that a stable and efficient frame of government will be the result."[105] This rather expected trust from an elite Federalist was further confirmed as the general disposition of the state by an Antifederalist politician. In writing to a friend, he noted, "The popularity of the framers is so great that the public voice seems to be for adopting the Constitution in the lump on its first appearance as a perfect system without inquiry or limitation of time or matter." He noted the strange unison that had arisen over the constitution, "it is really astonishing to see [the] people [of Georgia] so reluctant lately to trust Congress with only 5 percent duties upon imports for a short time to pay the national debt expressly, and so jealous of the sovereignty of their respective

[105] Chief Justice Henry Osborne's Charge to the Chatham County Grand Jury, 2 October, Manuscript, Chatham County Superior Court Minutes, Vol. I (1782–1789), G-Ar.; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 231.

states, so eager now to yield these and everything else into their hands forever and to become the State, instead of United States of America."[106] A Savannah merchant and planter wrote to his brother about the Constitution, "This system of government, like all other human production, may have, and no doubt has, its faults, …[however] it is very well calculated to promote the general welfare—certain it is that any government is better than the one we have and under which I am certain we could not much longer exist as a people."[107]

Georgia's ratification convention moved quickly. Letters from the event recorded that the document was "read over paragraph by paragraph with a great deal of temper; and, if it had not been thought rather too precipitate, I believe would have been assented to as it stands by a very great majority." The next day this same convention delegate wrote again, "The new Constitution [probably will be sp?]eedily adopted by this state as it seems to have a good many friends in the Convention."[108] Of the few delegate biographies in existence it appears that all of the leading delegates at the convention were Federalists. Unfortunately, because we lack sources regarding the individual elections of each county and public interest in the Constitution it is difficult to know whether the election of these Federalists was due to a concerted effort on the Federalist part or to a lack of interest on the public's part. Newspapers remained silent on the issue—even to

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[106] Lachlan McIntosh to John Wereat, Skidoway Island, 17 December 1787, File Copy, McIntosh Papers, GHi; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 259.
[107] Joseph Habersham to John Habersham, Augusta, 29 December 1787, Recipients Copy, Dreer Collection, Old Congress, Phi; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 272–3.
[108] Joseph Habersham to John Habersham, Augusta, 29 December 1787, Recipients Copy, Dreer Collection, Old Congress, Phi, and Joseph Habersham to Mrs. Joseph Habersham, Augusta 30 December, Recipients Copy, U.B. Phillips Papers, CtY; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 272–3.

the extent that the state Assembly did not require the newspapers to publish the Constitution once it had arrived in the state. Further, at the close of the convention, while most states had an average of 700–800 copies of their ratification document printed, Georgia only ordered 200 and dispersed them mainly among political officials.[109] Georgia ratified the constitution as was predicated. A ceremonial celebration took place; albeit only one is reported in stark contrast to the large number of celebrations reported in other states. In the midst of battling Indians along their borders, Georgians quickly turned once again to the pressing issue of protecting their homes and financing an increasingly expensive war.

The question of why Georgia ratified is a difficult one to answer. Certainly, fears of Indian attacks and financial struggles encouraged ratification support. Maybe George Washington was correct when he wrote, "nothing but insanity, or a desire of becoming the allies of the Spaniards or savages, can disincline them [Georgia] to a government which holds out the prospect of relief from its present distresses."[110] In spite of a history of political infighting and disturbance, unity blanketed the state when it came to ratification. What is important to note is the fact that in spite of having a history of involved citizenry and a vocal and rising middling class, almost no public dialogue surrounded ratification. The elites carried the day—and with very little known

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[109] "Ordered, That the said copies be apportioned in the following manner, viz. for the counties of Chatham, Effingham, Burke, Richmond, Wilkes, and Liberty 15 copies each; Glynn, Camden, Washington, Franklin, and Greene 7 copies each; that one copy be sent to the President of Congress; one to each of the governors of the different states; one to the President of the Convention; and one to each of the ratifying members, the remaining 36 for the use of the Executive," Executive Council Minutes, 31 January, 1 February, Manuscript, Minutes of Council, G-Ar.; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 281.
[110] George Washington to Henry Knox, Mount Vernon, 18 January 1788, Recipients Copy, Knox Papers, MHi; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 263.

organization. Elite desire for control in a traditional deferential way appeared in glimpses in the newspaper and in private correspondence. As with Delaware and New Jersey before them, Georgians listened to the expressed fears of the Federalist elites and followed their lead in the passage of the Federal document.

Obligatory Deference—Connecticut's Elite Ratification Convention

In the minds of the traditional elites of Connecticut, deference protected society and government. Connecticut's leaders argued that by acknowledging the proper roles that each held in society a wise system of government was ensured. Of course, those very leaders were the recipients of the deference.

A Federalist-controlled state, Connecticut's elites stood in unified support of the Constitution. Their role as self-appointed leaders of the state meant that the public heard, read, and saw solely pro-Constitution materials. The newspapers orchestrated a relative blackout of all Antifederalist materials. Such control meant that it was not until a few days before the convention until anyone learned that a few counties had (shockingly) voted against ratification. While Delaware and New Jersey seemed to fall back into not so typical elite-led political action, Connecticut followed the direction their state had been traveling for many years. While the state provides a perfect foil for analyzing the later popular unrest that occurred in neighboring Massachusetts and Rhode Island, it does beg the question of whether underneath the pristine unity there existed any signs of unrest and possible challenge to the status quo. One key sign that not all was as in order, as the elites would have liked, was the fact that Connecticut, unlike the states previously looked

at in this chapter, did not unanimously ratify the Constitution. The final vote for Connecticut's ratification was 128 to 40.[111] Due to the control the elites exercised over the press, it is difficult to determine the true nature and extent of the unrest that occurred underneath the surface. In analyzing the public representation of the ratification debate within Connecticut, the Federalist elite managed to retain control over public distrust and concerns. While Connecticut lacked the democratic history of New Jersey and Georgia and the political unrest characteristic of Delaware, their divided ratification numbers (as the fifth state to ratify) reveals the slow but growing confidence Americans were gaining in utilizing their political voice. Their political voice may have been limited to the vote in this state, but it did not remain locked in that realm for long.

Connecticut's citizens were locally focused and generally trusting of their leaders. The enshrinement of the political elite arose from the state constitution, which was its original English charter, its colonial-style government (also a carry-over from England), its local tendencies, and its ingrown electoral practices that reinforced the election of the elite "Standing Order." Far from being a harsh elite-forced political regiment, as historian John Kirby noted, "it was through a habit of social subordination rather than by a process of political and economic coercion that non-democratic elements governed."[112] Centralized power remained among the elites due to the political structure of the election process in the state. Many in the early years of colony and statehood considered those elected, as John Treadwell of Farmington wrote, "a perfect mirrour, in which the features

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[111] Donald S. Lutz, "Connecticut: Achieving Consent and Assuring Control," Gillespie and Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 117.
[112] John B. Kirby, "Early American Politics—The Search for Ideology: An Historiographical Analysis and Critique of the Concept of Deference," *Journal of Politics* 32 (1970), 810.

and lineaments of the people are most accurately discovered."[113] Whether the state's leaders accurately reflected the state's population remains debatable. For the elite leaders, perception carried more power than reality. In political and social matters perception kept the public at ease. Connecticut's election method itself was a multi-layered process whereby eligible men in a community submitted applications to the local leaders in order to gain the right to vote. Once allowed to enter the protected realm of the enfranchised, local and statewide delegates were selected for local and/or state elections from a pre-chosen pool of individuals. The layers and cycles of voting which went into determining who was eligible to vote and to run for office ensured the stability of the Standing Order. These elements combined to create a state influenced by a select group of elite leaders and hence, when they supported the Constitution, the majority of the state followed suit.

Known as a quiet and politically stable colony, one jurist boasted "no instance has ever been known where a person has appeared [in] public … and solicited the suffrages of the freeman." The fact that this statement would constitute a "boast" as opposed to a reproof reveals the level of political subservience and social deference rooted in Connecticut society. Even during the American Revolution, a period clearly marked by upheaval and re-evaluations of the meaning of liberty, Connecticut remained at peace with its political system. At the close of the Revolution, as colonies took up the task of writing new constitutions, Connecticut simply reenacted its 1662 Charter, excising the word "King" and replaced it with "the people." State leaders conducted this business

[113] "Conn. Courant, September 23, 1783" in Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 428.

without submitting the matter to popular vote.[114] At a Fourth of July oration in 1787, lawyer David Daggett described Connecticut's government previous to the revolution in fond terms as "a most perfect aristocracy."[115]

The elite, or "the Standing Order," kept Connecticut politics localized. Homegrown and inbred, elite families married elite families and governed surrounding towns, colleges, and churches. While classical republican principles shaped the state's political theories, in practice it was the fear of the masses that encouraged the elites to keep a strong hold on the charters governing the method of governance and voting. As described by historian Jeffrey Pasley, local elite Ezra Stiles believed "democracy's free market of ideas and opinions should still be contained by the Standing Order institutions, and public opinions should be shaped by and expressed through the 'enlightened characters' [such elite organizations as] Yale produced."[116] The consistent rule of the elite meant that the state only elected seventeen governors in 150 years.[117]

Such a deferential culture kept the press in check. The colony's first newspaper arrived in 1755, which was relatively late among the colonies. The papers that were established vocalized support for the Standing Order and printed little outside the usual course of commercial information, staid political literature, and poetry.[118] While Federalist articles dominated the press up and down the Atlantic seaboard, Connecticut remained particularly awash in Federalist materials. In spite of this acknowledged trend,

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[114] Jeffrey Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers' Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2001), 132–33.
[115] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 316.
[116] Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy*, 275.
[117] Jeffrey Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 132.
[118] Ibid., 134.

the dearth of Antifederalist literature in Connecticut in the months preceding the ratification convention brought George Goodwin and Elisha Babcock, editors of two Hartford papers, under particular scrutiny.[119] Such was the bias of the Connecticut press that they neglected to report the fact that a few counties had voted against the Constitution until just a few days before the convening of the ratification convention. While grudgingly admitting the division within the state, the Federalists continued to flood their papers with pro-ratification arguments. The spirit of support for the Constitution was so strong that a Federalist traveler in the state, upon meeting a man who expressed concerns with the document, sent this "detractor's" description to the press so that Connecticut patriots might be warned and avoid his presence.[120]

The general deferential attitude of Connecticut's public meant that the argumentation in Federalist newspaper articles highlighted the reputability of the Constitution's writers and thus vouched for its merit. "Observator V" assured his readers, "The members of the Federal Convention, are confessedly, men of the first character in this country for wisdom, knowledge, integrity, and patriotism. We may, therefore, be assured that the subject they are convened upon will be thoroughly investigated, examined, and maturely considered; that there will be as little partiality and selfishness, in the deliberations and determinations of this council."[121] Not only were the reputations of the Founders noted, but notices about elite approbation of the Constitution were also

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[119] The Hartford Newspapers Deny Partisanship, 10, 24 December, *Connecticut Courant*, 10 December, *Connecticut Courant* and *American Mercury*, 24 December; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 493.
[120] "A Traveller," *American Mercury*, 8 October; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 359.
[121] "Observator V," *New Haven Gazette*, 20 27 September; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 349.

printed across Connecticut newspapers. At the "Meeting of New Haven County Congregational Clergy" on the 25th of September, "the subject of the Constitution proposed by the Convention was discussed… and we are assured that every gentlemen present expressed his approbation of it." This notice was published in the *New Haven Gazette* on the 4th of October and then reprinted in two other Hartford newspapers, as well as a host of other newspapers across the state.[122] The elites remained vigilant and expressed confidence in their ability to direct the public. Their self-confidence, expressed in their many public articles, became even more apparent in their private correspondences. In one letter from Benjamin Gale to William Samuel Johnson, Gale wrote about a town meeting where convention delegates were elected. Of the 150 voters in attendance, only a handful cast a ballot. Remarking on the reason for such low participation, Gale wrote, "All the others would not vote at all and are really against it [the Constitution], but you gentlemen of the [Constitutional] Convention … have fobbed off our Assembly and the people nicely."[123] One of the few recorded Antifederalists in the state, Gale revealed his frustration at the lack of power citizens had to criticize the document through his smug description of the powers the Federalists held over the people. Ability to silence the majority of franchised men reveals the compliance deference commanded in Connecticut society—majority did not rule, even among those who were part of the voting elite.

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[122] Meeting of New Haven County Congregational Clergy, 25 September, *New Haven Gazette*, 4 October; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 351.
[123] Benjamin Gale to William Samuel Johnson, Killingsworth, 13 November 1787, Manuscript, Gale papers, Bienecke Library, CtY; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 429.

Similar to Massachusetts' politics, Connecticut towns held local meetings where the townsmen gathered and voted to send delegates to the Convention. Unlike the more vocal and involved Massachusetts town meeting tradition, Connecticut records reveal almost no debate and disagreement. Of the ninety-eight towns in the state that held meetings, only three recorded initiating actions to instruct their delegates to ratify the Constitution and three to instruct their towns to vote against ratification.[124] Only one Antifederalist speech written against the Constitution survived with the town records of Killingworth. It remains unknown whether this speech was actually published or publicly delivered. Apart from this speech, very little exists to provide any insight into or indication of large-scale unrest vocalized at town meetings.[125] While quite a few Massachusetts towns record lengthy discussions or instructions delivered to the elected delegates, only the town of Preston, Connecticut recorded a lengthy address. Interestingly, the instructions leave the final decision of the vote to the two delegates. The address clearly revealed the distrust with which the "Gentlemen" of the town viewed the Constitution. However, they eventually deferred and concluded that trust in their delegates' "candor" allowed the townsmen to leave the decision to these two men. "We trust from your candor you will peruse these our sentiments with deliberation, and we doubt not you will give your assent or dissent as you shall really think will terminate for the best good of the people of these states."[126] In late November, when most of the town elections had concluded, the *Connecticut Courant* noted "the principle towns acted, at the

[124] John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., "The Election of Convention Delegates 12 November 1787"; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 405.
[125] Speech by Benjamin Gale, 12 November 1787, Manuscript, Gale Papers, Bienecke Library, CtY; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 429.
[126] Preston, [12 November]; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 441.

election, with uncommon unanimity in favor of the Constitution. In many of them there was scarcely a dissenting voice; particularly, in those where the people have the best means of information."[127] Clearly connecting being well informed with supporting the Constitution, the *Courant* represented the Federalist perspective. Mum remained the catchword for any dissenters among the Connecticut public.

The "Standing Order" made a good showing at the Ratification Convention. Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. writing to Jeremiah Wadsworth noted the large number of clergymen elected to the convention. "It seems you are to have a [synod?] of Bishops, our brother [William] W[illia]ms says very improperly. I tell him the clergy are interested, as well as other men, if not so much for themselves, at least for their posterity."[128] The clergy's involvement in politics was seen as a favorable thing—one to be sought rather than avoided. Their involvement in the ratification convention only offered further proof of its importance and the support that the Constitution deserved. One writer published in the *Newport Herald* described the Connecticut ratification convention was composed of "the most respectable [men] ever assembled in the state." He went on to describe the delegates as "men distinguished for abilities and the love of their country—men whose minds spurn the fetters of local views, which would lead others to sacrifice the interest and honor of America to the narrow politics of their own state." Such a revered group of men led this author, and by his example the others in the state, to "feel happy in resting the decision of the important question with a council so truly adequate to judge and

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[127] *Connecticut Courant*, 26 November 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 455.
[128] Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. to Jeremiah Wadsworth, Lebanon, 17 November 1787, Recipient's Copy, Wadsworth Papers, CtHi; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 453.

decide." Ezra Stiles noted in his diary that "the Convention sitting at Hartford, [is] the grandest assemblage of sensible and worthy characters that ever met together in this state." Elites had gained a good representation at the convention. However, as Stiles went on to note in his diary, not all who attended fell into this distinguished category. "There are a number determined inferior members." While Stiles may have disagreed with some of the delegate choices, the state watched with interest as the convention delegates began their deliberations. Stiles described the spectators who gathered to attend the meetings as "a great conflux of gentlemen from all parts of the state."[129]

The first New England state to call a ratification convention, Connecticut's delegates convened at the State House and then, in order to accommodate the growing number of spectators, they moved to the First Church (also known as The North Meeting House). The official convention record describes the move as orchestrated by two delegates, whereupon "the delegates repaired in solemn procession to the North Meeting House, where… the proposed CONSTITUTION was read, together with the several public resolves, official letters, etc."[130] The "solemn procession" both in description and in action underscored the pomp with which elites surrounded these circumstances. This proved yet another means of commanding the deference of the public. Such formal obsequious actions underscored for those involved and those observing the necessity of handling politics with the gentility and refinement mastered by the Standing Order.

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[129] Ezra Stiles Diary, New Haven, 3 January 1788, Manuscript, Bienecke Library, CtY; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 523.
[130] The Connecticut Convention, Thursday, 3 January 1788, Convention Proceedings; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 542.

While the Standing Order sought to canvass the state with a Federalist blackout that suggested solid unity for the Constitution, convention records revealed a different story. Convention logs recorded the execution of criticism and arguments that raised concerns over adopting the Constitution. However, while the nature of this criticism was summarized in the convention records, the full speeches of these Antifederalist dissenters were not recorded. The Federalist leaning convention record kept careful transcriptions of Federalist speeches, but only summarily recognized the arguments of the Antifederalists. In a letter printed in the Hartford press regarding the opposition, this author (also a delegate) merely passed off the opposition as "dwindling to nothing… they have been weak."[131] Convention proceedings for the 9th of January (and reprinted in the *Connecticut Courant* on the 14th) noted in a quite high-handed tone that the Constitution "was canvassed critically and fully. Every objection was raised against it which the ingenuity and invention of its opposers could devise." Mixing commentary with fact, the scribe opined, "Suffice it to say that all the objections to the Constitution vanished before the learning and eloquence of a Johnson, the genuine good sense and discernment of a Sherman, and the Demosthenian energy of an Ellsworth."[132] In the end, Federalist clout that had hovered over the state calling all into alignment succeeded and the convention ratified the Constitution 128–40.

While many states watched the Connecticut convention carefully, few state leaders were able to command the deference and relative silence of the opposition as

[131] Extract of a Letter from Hartford, 6 January, *New Haven Gazette*, 10 January 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 547.
[132] The Connecticut Convention, Wednesday, 9 January 1788, Convention Proceedings and Debates, *Connecticut Courant and the Weekly Monitor*, 14 January 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 555.

Connecticut leaders. Neighboring Massachusetts—another conservative state, especially in the wake of Shays' Rebellion—was not even able to replicate the strong Federalist blackout that the Connecticut Federalists orchestrated. Such was the dedication of the Standing Order to its rule that one of the key Antifederalist dissenters, James Wadsworth, was defeated in his subsequent run for Council and was then replaced in his position as state comptroller. While he was reelected for a judgeship, he declined refusing to take the mandatory oath supporting the Constitution.[133] In a letter sharing the news of ratification, one observer in describing the opposition wrote, "This day the NEW CONSTITUION was RATIFIED… It is remarkable that no man of consequence in Convention was among the nays but ———————— W——————, Esquire, well known here by the name of ——— Wronghead."[134] Far from having a democratizing effect on politics in the immediate future, as late as June of that same year, Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. wrote to George Washington of the effects of the convention upon Federalism in the state. "The Triumph of Federalism has been great in Connecticut since last winter. The opposition which then existed is now dwindled into mere unimportance." Further celebrating the ratification and the continued domination of Federalists, he continued, "Indeed, much pleased have I been in the course of our late sessions of Assembly to observe a disposition toward public measures much better than has prevailed for some years past."[135] The colony remained relatively peaceful and unified by their leaders. Although

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[133] John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., "The Aftermath of Ratification"; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 563.
[134] Letter from a Member of the Convention, Hartford, 9 January 1787, *Boston Gazette*, 14 January 1787; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 565.
[135] Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. to George Washington, Lebanon, 20 June, Recipients Copy, Washington Papers, DLC; *DHRC*, III, [Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut]: 600.

this strong method of governance secured ratification for the state, other states observed the method of passage and the arguments exchanged. Connecticut's public followed suit as expected, but their actions—unknown to the Federalists at the time—set the stage for further debates about the true nature of politics and freedom. A mere two years following ratification, the "Revolution of 1800" brought about the accession of the Jeffersonian-Republicans to the seat of power in the same federal government that Connecticut Federalists had led their state to ratify.

Conclusion

Four states, four conventions, four ratifications. Just a brief overview of these states reveals the diversity of people and political traditions that came together across the Atlantic seaboard to discuss one relatively short document. Facing difficult economic problems, the ravages of distrust bred during the Revolution, and various other inner-state arguments, Federalists indeed had an uphill battle in their fight for ratification. Yet, with amazing speed they swept through Delaware and New Jersey, even pulling a typically difficult and non-communicative state—Georgia—into the conversation at record speed. One may look at economic issues alone and decide that ratification proved the most logical solution to financial woes. While this reasoning appears persuasive in hindsight, nothing was certain at the time, and in light of the many competing fears and interests of the period, such swift ratification was unprecedented. The most amazing part of this equation though, is not what the Federalists accomplished in achieving ratification. Rather, as one begins to explore the subtle and sometimes, not so subtle shifts in

ratification conventions from state to state, the reality of what the Federalists unleashed in public political participation becomes the story.[136]

Across these four states similar themes appear. First, who was writing (or speaking) often assumed greater importance than what was said. Federalists across these states relied upon status to conduct the influence they wanted. However, frequent appeals to "the people" for authority eventually democratized the "authoritative" people and undermined the special social position many Federalist elites held. Second, the localism of each states' concerns remained a clear issue for individuals as they debated the merits of the Constitution. Once again, though, by very means of its trans-state application, the Constitution brought local politics up to national concerns. Issues of local concern began to be inflated to issues of national concern and the topics of the one often began to include topics of the other. Rather than feeding a disassociated confederation of states, the Constitution (and the press through which it was spread) began to force the public(s) across the union to speak the same language and to debate the same issues. To say the Constitution forged a national unity would be to oversimplify the issue. However, I do argue that it began to provide a more clearly defined playing field upon which to debate the issues.

[136] One may suggest that this argument sounds similar to the one expressed by Gordon Wood in his *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. While I am arguing for the unpredicted radicalization of politics, my argument differs from his in that my evidence and focus remains more upon the actual political process as being more influenced by active participation rather than by social changes occurring around the political process. I do find these social changes an important element of what I discuss, but they are not the main focus of my argument. This argument, therefore, remains more in line with what Gary Nash argues in his concise article, "The Transformation of Urban Politics 1700–1765," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Dec., 1973), pp. 605–632.

The early ratification states are key markers in setting the necessary contrast—the before part of the before and after, if you will—in the growth of public politicization. The trajectory of the thirteen ratification conventions was not totally unhindered or always clearly one-directional. The growth and development of an American political tradition, however, was born out of the necessity of debating a federal system of government town-by-town and then state-by-state. Such active, hands-on involvement in determining their future brought the realization of what political involvement could mean to backcountry farmers as well as to city merchants.

The awakening of the middling classes to their potential came in great part through the press. Growing access to political information—albeit even if the majority of this information was Federalist—proved to empower individual readers and listeners. While the elite leaders may have seen the press as a traditional "pacifier"—the means of informing rather than engaging the public—the public did not long continue in this attitude. The press became both a mediator of information as well as a method for stirring its readers into action. As news spread from state to state and conventions were called one after another, the press moved from being simply an instigator to an integral part of the political process.

Newspapers were quick to publish articles that denigrated British tyranny and warned the public that without the passage of the Constitution British slavery was sure to return. Embracing an "American" identity, then, the press and its public took on these ratification debates not merely as arguments over what form or method of governance would win out, but what American politics truly meant in contrast to British—and

Continental—politics. While the stakes seemed high after the first four ratification conventions, the rhetoric that continued to be generated for the following only raised the stakes and forced Americans further into discussion over what it meant to exercise "American politics." Tied to economic motivations and social and religious concerns, the American public—specifically the middling classes—forged a new identity in political life. Not content to sit on the sidelines as spectators, they moved into the political drama and began a new dance with political elites to define the meaning of American political participation.

Pennsylvania took up this dance with great gusto and kept many watching with bated breath. The first state to witness a dramatic clash between Federalists and their detractors, this clash heightened fears on both sides as each claimed that passage or non-passage spelled doom to the great American experiment. As the third state to ratify (ahead of Georgia and Connecticut), its press and public involvement signaled the signs that public involvement and unrest was to become a marked aspect of American politics. With the peaceful conventions of Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut examined, we now turn to the beginning of the stormy season that began the process of defining and refining what American political participation came to mean.

CHAPTER 2: Blueprint: The Public Prints arising from Pennsylvania's Ratification Convention

The building, while architecturally pleasant, lacked the same grandeur of Christ Church—where many of the city's leaders attended. Christ Church boasted members from the leading Revolutionary generation. Its rector had offered opening prayers at the First Continental Congress in 1774. Commanding both architecturally and historically, Christ Church's fame grew out of the fame of a more modest, yet more influential building—Independence Hall. Within the walls of Independence Hall leading men of Pennsylvania and of the thirteen colonies had formalized their rebellion against Britain in their proclamation of the Declaration of Independence. A few years later, the Second Continental Congress gathered in its halls to nominate George Washington general of the Continental Army. In 1787, for four muggy summer months, leaders from twelve of the thirteen states locked themselves in one of its meeting rooms to write the Federal Constitution. With such influential meetings occurring in this place, this building signified for Pennsylvanians the contributions its great minds had made in the forming of a free and united confederation of states. Bringing together the best and the brightest of Pennsylvania's political leadership, Independence Hall however did not always feature such pristine political events.

When the meeting of the Pennsylvania State Assembly received the Federal Constitution in September 1787 the idyllic excitement that had emanated from the

Federal Convention shattered. As the official copy of the Federal Constitution moved from the hall downstairs to the State Assembly above, long-recurring tensions between state factions immediately appeared. Far from being the easy passage that the Federalists of the state had hoped, the Federal Constitution focused decades of political wrangling upon one central document. Pennsylvanians had witnessed their share of political violence and rhetorical hyperbole throughout their history. However, with more years of experience leading a state and a nation, the political leaders of Pennsylvania exhibited greater confidence and tenacity in their political convictions. The Constitutional debates showed that the confederated states—Pennsylvania included—had passed their honeymoon phase. Entering their maturity with more assurance in their political acumen, leaders on both sides felt they better understood the ills and the remedies necessary for America to remain a profitable and respected nation—and they stood ready to fight for them.

As political rhetoric intensified, it attracted a larger audience. The public clamored for information and the political leaders strategically sought to win public support. Both sides coalesced around the press as the means of both transmitting information and staying informed of the latest information. The first state to witness a large and heated public deliberation over the Constitution, Pennsylvania's leaders and their followers learned reliance on the press. The necessity of courting public support positioned newspapers as key in the ratification campaign. The involvement of citizens from all classes in the debate over the Constitution produced a diversity of printed materials. Not only had the Constitution been written in their state, but the ideas

formalized in the document had been widely debated in Pennsylvania previous to the Federal Constitutional Convention. Pennsylvanians knew the arguments for and against a Federal system of government, and each party strategized to keep the discussion on their terms. As a result of such a publicly "printed" debate, Pennsylvania's leaders and their supporters wrote the script from which other states took their cue.

Historians have typically acknowledged Pennsylvania as a leader in the ratification debates, setting the blueprint for state campaigns to come. Historian George Graham summarized the dominant historiographical argument when he wrote, "In practical terms, Pennsylvania was the heart of the new nation both socially and economically. In symbolic terms, it was its political center. During the ratification process, this symbolic status proved to be in many ways the most significant."[137] While correct in identifying Pennsylvania's role as a leader, the real significance of Pennsylvania's ratification convention arose in its use of the press to court public support. Pennsylvanians had long argued over many of the issues addressed in the Constitution. However, by its very nature the Constitution raised the stakes of these debates and further polarized the citizenry. The primary means of spreading such polarizing arguments came through the press. The cycle continued as the debates intensified and the reliance on the press to distribute arguments increased.

[137] George J. Graham, Jr., "PENNSYLVANIA: Representation and the Meaning of Republicanism;" in Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 52–3, 57. Also see, Paul Doutrich, "Pennsylvania: From Revolution to Constitution, Pennsylvania's Path to Federalism," in Patrick T. Conley and John P. Kaminiski, eds., *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House Publishers, 1988), 37–53.

Pennsylvania's ratification debates reveal the transformations of early American political life from one primarily dictated by personal reputation and influence to one controlled by the process of public dissemination of ideas through print. George Washington confirmed the influence of the press when he commented to an associate that "[ratification] will depend … on literary abilities and the recommendation of it by good pens."[138] The press spread arguments across the state and up and down the seaboard. Most importantly, the money spent to circulate pamphlets and spread newspaper articles signified the growing role of the press in early American political life. Pennsylvania's ratification convention signified the emergence of the press as a developing ad hoc fourth branch of government.

As the press seeped through the political life of the state, it became the unifying source of each faction and its supporters. The intensity of differences between Pennsylvania's parties caused each to dramatically increase their reliance on their supporters. Such reliance invigorated the already active citizenry to assume more responsibility in the political process and to demand response from their leaders, even if this meant using force. As the second state to ratify the Constitution, Pennsylvania's response to the ratification established the press as a formative part of the emerging nation's political culture.

[138] Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 20.

Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Legacy

The political history, ethnic composition, and religious traditions of each of the thirteen states played an important role in determining the receptivity and response of the citizenry in each of the thirteen states. While each state's unique constituency created a distinctive political environment, citizens across states shared much in common. The press played a key role in spreading familiar arguments. Along with arguments presented to the public, the larger-than-life character of the leaders involved in the framing of the Constitution often influenced the attitudes the public assumed toward the Constitution. Hyperbolic rhetoric and, at times, outbursts of violence, revealed the significant attention and concern that united or divided citizens.

Each party claimed to be the sole heir of the Revolution and to be devoted to the protection of its legacy.[139] Understanding Pennsylvania's historic divisions and the public's relationship to the Constitution places the hostility of the ratification debates in context. It provides insight into understanding the receptivity (or lack thereof) among the people for the Constitution. Most importantly, it reveals how the ratification process enshrined the press as a key element of participatory politics across the state.

The citizens of the state represented a diverse crowd politically and socially. Joseph Reed, George Bryan, and William Findley led the Constitutionalist (Antifederalist) Party. Made up principally of Western-based Presbyterians, their party catered to independent farmers and carpenters who distrusted centralized government and

[139] I am using the term "party" to describe the two political groups (be specific) vying for control of Pennsylvania politics. I do acknowledge that the idea of party, at this point in American history, was not recognized. For the development of the idea of party as a legitimate political entity see Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (University of California press, 1970).

supported the freedoms guaranteed in the 1776 state constitution. John Dickinson, James Wilson, Robert Morris, and Frederick Muhlenberg led the Republicans (Federalists). As Anglicans, their more traditional views toward centralized power left them open to criticism for seeking to restore elite hierarchical structures to Pennsylvania's politics and society. Out west, the Scottish Presbyterians dominated, while in the east Anglicans and Quakers composed the majority. Ethnic Germans made up a substantial part of the state's population as well. While many remained enshrined in German social practices, their interest and participation in politics gave them political influence. Pennsylvania's public thus represented a wide-ranging audience with competing interests.

In Pennsylvania history, the 1776 state constitution stands as a key document in establishing the state's political factions and public expectations. The state constitution of 1776 was one of the most forward-looking documents to arise out of the fervor of the American Revolution. In the upheaval of 1776, radicals in the state ousted British and conservative state leaders and in September of that year established their own state constitution. Calling themselves the "Constitutionalist Party," those in power penned one of the most democratic constitutions of the era. The document began with language similar to that in the Declaration of Independence, and decried the actions of the British Crown against the colony. They pronounced "[t]hat all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and inalienable rights, amongst which are, the enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety." The first section of the state constitution promised freedom of religion and religious expression, the right to vote and

hold office, the right to be judged by a jury of one's peers, the right of access to a free press, the ability to own private property, the right against unjust search and seizure, and the right of assembly. The second section of the constitution focused upon the form and rules of the government. To be eligible to run for office, Pennsylvanian's merely had to pay taxes and have resided in their representative county for two years. All tax-paying men could vote. A single house ruled the state and the press held a mandate requiring them to inform the public of the government's actions.

State residents grew accustomed to open government. Not only could anyone attend the State house to listen to the debates on the floor, but the state constitution mandated the printing of votes and proceedings weekly. Importantly for transparency's sake, the law called for the votes to be recorded with the names of those voting and "with the yeas and nays." The constitution guaranteed that all public bills be reprinted in local newspapers to allow for citizen engagement. Further, printing was to occur before the last debate in the assembly so that any who had issues could come educated and prepared to argue for amendments. Not only did the state constitution require public laws to be printed before their passage, but it went further to require explanation of such public laws. For every bill passed, the assembly was constitutionally required to include a preamble explaining the bills significance and reason for existence. Of particular importance in inviting public involvement in politics, the constitution ordered that, "[t]he printing presses shall be free to every person who undertakes to examine the proceedings

of the legislature, or any part of government." In sum, the Constitutionalist Party authorized the press to protect the liberties of the people.[140]

From its original passage, many of Pennsylvania's leading politicians feared the state constitution lacked the restraints necessary to keep the economy strong and to ensure the election of worthy leaders. Known as the Republicans, they mounted attacks on the Constitutionalists and the two factions dueled for state control over the next twenty years. In 1787, the Republicans controlled the State Assembly and had been gaining in popularity. Blaming the Constitutionalists for the economic woes of the state, they had been raising support for rewriting the state constitution. When the Federal Constitution reached the Assembly chamber in September of 1787, the Republicans held the majority and determined to ratify the Federal Constitution and write a new state constitution.[141]

When the Federal Constitution arrived in the Pennsylvania Assembly, Constitutionalists or Antifederalists and Republicans or Federalists staked out opposing positions. Antifederalists feared the Federal Constitution removed too much power from the states and centralized it in the hands of too few. Federalists warned that without the adoption of the Federal Constitution the state would fall into economic depression and collapse. One Pennsylvania leader compared the vehemence on both sides as, "'tis as

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[140] "Constitution of Pennsylvania, September 28, 1776," *The Federal and State Constitutions Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America, Compiled and Edited Under the Act of Congress of June 30, 1906* by Francis Newton Thorpe (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909). http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/pa08.htm (accessed 11/19/2007).

[141] For ease of reading, I will use the terms Federalist and Antifederalist to refer to the Republican and Constitutionalist parties in Pennsylvania.

great as the Tories ever had against the Whigs."[142] With sides taken, the debate intensified. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote a colleague noting the state's early ratification battles and the great vigor with which each side attacked the issue. He wrote that the great sticking point arose from old battles over the balance between the branches of government.[143] Positions were taken and grounded in the larger debates of the last few decades, and the debate over ratification in Pennsylvania represented a struggle over who would write the history of the Revolution. While the press had existed as an important element in the political life of the state, the ratification debates roused the press into a new position as central disseminator of political information. As arguments traversed the state, the press formed the center stage upon which participatory politics was performed. Building upon a firm foundation, newspaper editors and their readers relied upon print to enshrine their voices in the process of politics.

The Battle Begins

Federalists enjoyed the benefit of having been influential in the original press announcements that circulated around the Federal convention. Because the convention delegates worked in blackout, news came only from the insiders. The nature of Philadelphia's press and the limitations of the news delivered meant that reports remained

[142] William Shippen, Jr. to Thomas Lee Shippen, Philadelphia, 18, 22 November (excerpts), in John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution by States: Pennsylvania* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 288. (Hereafter referred to as *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]).

[143] Louis-Guillaume Otto to Comte de Montmorin, New York, 10 October [1787], (RC (Tr), Correspondance Politique, Etas-Unis, Vol. 32, ff. 368–69, Archives du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Paris, France. [From the editorial footnote:] "Otto had been French charge d'affaires since 1785 and was France's principle diplomatic agent in the United States until the arrival in January 1788 of the Comte de Moustier as minister plenipotentiary. The Comte de Montmorin was the French Minister of Foreign Affairs." *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]:.

positive and supportive of the Convention.[144] As historian John Kaminski noted, "Newspaper articles enumerated the defects of the central government under the Articles of Confederation and painted a picture of economic and political distress. Other newspaper items contained plans for improving the central government, praise for Convention delegates, and hints about the Convention's proceedings."[145] Historian John Alexander's *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention* further refines Kaminiski's argument stating that, "With few exceptions, the news media had over the months urged support—even blind support—for the convention."[146] In initially reaching out to the public through the press and by establishing the requirements of public involvement through the conventions, the Convention aided the Federalists in preparing a public outreach strategy that in the end convinced the majority of the state's delegates to side with them.

When the Federal Constitution arrived in the State Assembly each side knew the significance of the debate about to ensue. Federalists, however, shocked the Antifederalists by the speed at which they took the debate. Antifederalists assumed that since only a few days remained before the close of the Assembly, the decision to call the ratification convention would be debated by the new Assembly (after the New Year). Realizing that a new Assembly may be Antifederalist-led (and thus, anti-ratification), Federalists immediately called for convention elections across the state.

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[144] See John K. Alexander, *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention: A History of News Coverage* (Madison: Madison House, 1990).
[145] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 34.
[146] John K. Alexander, *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention*, 176.

The Federalists held the upper hand in establishing the terms of the debate. Not only did they control the Assembly, their members had held significant roles in the Federal Convention. James Wilson and Gouverneur Morris delivered more speeches to the Philadelphia convention than any of the other delegates. Further, they held detailed knowledge of the document as Wilson had served on the drafting committee for the Constitution and Morris on the style committee. The other Pennsylvania representatives attending the convention hailed from Republican-dominated Philadelphia and all but one supported the Federalists. Well aware of the contents of the document and rehearsed in many of the opposition arguments, Pennsylvania's Federalists held a clear advantage.

The process of ratification that the authors of the Constitution had created necessitated public interaction. Not only had the public waited for the final pronouncement of the Federal Convention with much anticipation, their participation was required by its authors. When the Constitution arrived in the state Assembly, the Federalists convened a special session to read the proposal for the election of convention delegates out loud. Addressing the state Assembly, Assemblyman Fitzsimons reminded his fellow assemblymen that the Constitution "was essentially interesting to the people." Using required public participation to the benefit of the Federalists, he proposed that the next morning be dedicated to hearing reports from the Philadelphia convention delegates.[147] Mr. Fitzsimons knew the Pennsylvania delegation to be pro-ratification and thus sought to use the public's interest to spread Federalist arguments. Mr. Fitzsimons' acknowledgment of the gallery showed the public-consciousness of those in power and

[147] "Newspaper Report of Assembly Proceedings," *Pennsylvania Herald*, 18 September; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 59.

their active courting of public support for ratification. The public's awareness of these political activities marked their growing expectation of involvement in state, and now federal, politics.

The Federalist-supporting public immediately joined the ratification effort. In line with their strategy to strike fast, pro-Federalist and pro-ratification citizens began submitting petitions to the Assembly requesting an immediate call for convention elections. Two hundred inhabitants of Germantown (Philadelphia) submitted a petition recording their pleasure at seeing the proposed Constitution. They noted having "seen with great pleasure" the Constitution and noted their belief that indeed the document was "wisely calculated to form a perfect union of the states." They admonished the assembly to make every effort to adopt the document "as speedily as possible." So eager were these Federalists that they submitted their petition to the Assembly before it even had a chance to direct the state printers (Hall and Sellers) to print public copies of the Constitution.[148]

The process of ratification created reliance on the press. As news of the calling of the convention needed to be spread across the state, the Assembly decreed that five thousand copies of the Federal Constitution be printed in English and fifteen hundred in German.[149] In receiving the Germantown petition, and in utilizing valuable Assembly time to determine printing specifications, the Assembly remained aware of the public's expectation for receiving political news through the press.

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[148] In the recorded order of business of the Assembly, the petition of the Germantown inhabitants was presented before they voted on the number of copies to have the printer make of the Constitution.
[149] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Assembly Proceedings, Monday 24 September 1787; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 62–63.

The extended debate over when to call the ratification convention elections further revealed the Assembly's awareness of the public. Assemblymen acknowledged a listening gallery filled with people ready to record their arguments verbatim and to use these arguments to determine which side they threw their support behind. Two days after the announcement of the Constitution and during the debate over calling elections for the state ratification convention, William Findlay (an Antifederalist) in replying to the previous speaker (Daniel Clymer, a Federalist) noted that Clymer had addressed the wrong person. Findlay's response indicates the delegates' awareness of the gallery. "Well then, I don't consider that part of his speech as not addressed to the House, but" he noted, "merely to the gallery."[150] An editorialist calling himself "Ego" and writing in the *Pennsylvania Packet* further described the involvement of the gallery. "I have heard in the gallery the whispers of approbation circulate, as true Federal sentiments have been well expressed or happily introduced by the members." Those in attendance did not sit as mere spectators, but saw themselves as participants worthy of determining the issue as well as the delegates. "Ego" thus reported witnessing attendants "who went there undetermined depart in full decision to support [ratification]."[151] State assemblymen realized to whom they spoke and utilized their words to seek to influence public opinion.

The people and the press remained at the center of the argument over calling convention elections. Robert Whitehall, a Constitutionalist representing Northumberland County in western Pennsylvania, argued against the immediate call for elections. The

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[150] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Friday 28 September 1787, Assembly Debates, A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 71.
[151] "Ego," *Pennsylvania Packet*, 8 December [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 315.

state was large and he recorded concern over whether the western part of the state was able to receive information as quickly as the eastern part. Realizing he stood among an eastern-based audience, he reminded his listeners of the size of the extensive size of the state. Whitehall noted that while the people of Philadelphia and the surrounding areas had the advantage of being well-acquainted with the Constitution, this was not the case with those in the western part of the state. "I may venture to say, that so far from being the general voice of the people… [Philadelphia] … is but a small part of the whole state."[152] Recognizing the dominance of the Federalist perspective in the surrounding counties, Mr. Whitehall pleaded for more time for the sake of the people of the western part of the state. Federalists responded to Mr. Whitehall and his associates, assuring them that the people had plenty of opportunity to be exposed to and reasonably analyze the Constitution. Placing the argument in national perspective, one Federalist added, "The influence which this state may acquire by decision will be lost, and many of the advantages lessened by an unnecessary delay."[153] Public image and perception drove the arguments and the attitudes of the debate.

Losing the argument over the timing of the ratification convention, Antifederalists turned to a more basic argument—the legality of the Federal Constitution itself. The Philadelphia Convention had convened to address and resolve issues within the Articles of Confederation. Congress had never authorized eradicating the document altogether and creating a totally new system of government in its place. The Antifederalists argued that

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[152] The Pennsylvania Assembly, 28 September 1787, Assembly Debates, A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 72.
[153] Ibid., 81.

the Philadelphia Convention delegates lacked the authority to assume the power to do so. In response, the Federalists answered that the "authority of the people" had dictated such drastic measures. Strategically seeking to utilize the Antifederalists' arguments against them, they assured the public that "[a]ll efforts to restore energy to the federal government have proved ineffectual." This situation left the delegates with only one choice, to take the decision of governance back to the people. Thus the Pennsylvania Assembly noted resoundingly, "recourse is once more had to the authority of the people."[154] The Antifederalists prided themselves on representing the voice of "the people." In justifying the Federal Constitution, Federalists used the Antifederalists own arguments and appeals to attempt to silence them. Further, by making ratification dependent upon independent bodies elected by the citizens of each state, the Federalists claimed they indeed were giving the people the right to decide their own government.

The Federalists defended their actions by appealing to the people and also by reminding the Antifederalists of the distinction of the Federal Convention delegates. Significantly, both appeals came through the press. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* described the Federal Convention representatives as an "august" assemblage.[155] Other Federalists wrote articles mythologizing the convention leaders. Through carefully crafted newspaper articles, the Federalists praised the leaders of the convention and argued that these men contained such unmatched virtue and wisdom that their recommendations could, and should, be trusted. The flooding of the public sphere with printed reminders of the heroic nature of the Constitution's authors positioned the press as a key mediator in

[154] Ibid., 87.
[155] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 22 August [1787]; *DHRC*, XIII, [Commentaries on the Constitution, 1]: 189.

the ratification debates. Elites utilized the press as the means of disseminating their message while the public clamored to read the latest articles to remain appraised of the latest events. Each turned to the same source in this growing political maelstrom.

The very process of calling the ratification convention encouraged the press to be enshrined as the official mouthpiece for all key political events. As Federalists organized events to heighten awareness of the document, the press became the mediator sharing news and descriptions of these events through its pages. One such event occurred when the Federalist members requested early dismissal to attend a social gathering with the Federal Convention delegates. They requested that the Assembly adjourn early so they could attend a social meeting with those who had conducted such an "accomplishment of so arduous a task," (i.e. the convention delegates). [156] As Federalists orchestrated such events, they relied upon the press to share them with the state and hoped such reprinting would encourage support for ratification.

The Federalist Assemblymen also utilized the visit of the Federal Convention delegates to the chambers to create another "media-worthy" event. In morning opening remarks to the Assembly in September (1787), Assemblyman Clymer urged his companions to remember the strong endorsement Benjamin Franklin had given in favor of the Constitution.[157] Clymer was referring to the visit of Franklin and his associate convention delegates when they delivered the Federal Constitution to the State Assembly just a few days earlier. The anticipation built around this delivery had by nature of the

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[156] *Pennsylvania Herald*, 18 September [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 59.
[157] The Pennsylvania Assembly, 28 September 1788, Assembly Debates A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 77.

conventions' secrecy been building. The Assembly heightened anticipation further by appointing a special committee to welcome and introduce the delegates from the Federal Constitution Convention to the state Assembly.[158] The official record referred to Benjamin Franklin as: "His Excellency the President." The formalities of the event surpassed the usual formality of the Assembly and indicated to an observant gallery and press the solemnity of the event. Franklin introduced the document as one that would "produce happy effects to this commonwealth, as well as to every other of the United States." His carefully worded introduction only advanced Federalist tactics connecting the sagacity and respect of the founders with the necessity of ratification.[159] By state law, the observant press sat in the gallery and transcribed all of the solemn events for public notice.

Aware of an observant press and a curious public, the Federalist Assemblymen seized every opportunity to remind their citizenry of the status of the individuals involved in drafting the Constitution. Assemblyman Daniel Clymer urged the Assembly to honor the great character of the leaders "of liberal sentiments, patriotism, and integrity." He further warned that had not these men been involved in the creation of the Constitution "it might never have been perfected."[160] The statement thundered Federalist approval of the Constitution, for the character of the gentlemen equaled the creation of a "perfected" government. Through such mythologizing, leading politicians transformed respect for the founders into semi-deification.

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[158] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Tuesday 18 September 1787, Assembly Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 59.
[159] Ibid., 60.
[160] The Pennsylvania Assembly, 28 September 1788, Assembly Debates A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 77.

Benjamin Franklin (a master of self-transformation himself) understood the power of the press in enshrining the heroic status of the Constitutional delegates in the public's mind. Franklin relied upon his growing legendary status as a Revolutionary hero as a tool for convincing the public to support ratification. As an "august statesman," seasoned and wizened through his political experience, he allowed the press to celebrate his involvement and to warn of the insanity and self-destruction of going against his wishes. When convention elections commenced, the *Philadelphia Herald* proudly reported that Franklin had been nominated to be a state delegate. "His worth as a patriot and his wisdom as a politician entitle him to that distinction and as he enjoys the unbounded confidence of his fellow citizens it is hoped that no personal consideration will induce him to waive this important service, at so critical a juncture." The editors of the paper propagated the "mythologizing" of Franklin by reminding the public that such a worthy man could not err in his recommendation in favor of the new system of government. This announcement appeared that same day in the *Evening Chronicle* and two days later in two other Pennsylvania papers—the *Independent Gazetteer* and the *Pennsylvania Packet*. The announcement spread to surrounding states, and presses reprinted it fourteen times by the 4th of December (a full month later).[161] Franklin's aura loomed large over the ratification debates. As the hero of the Revolution, the Federalists sought to utilize his name as credit to purchase the votes of the undecided. Most significantly, Franklin used the currency of print to make his transaction.

[161] *Pennsylvania Herald*, 3 November [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 226–227.

The press transmitted such mythologizing language and continued to report on local activities related to the Constitutional delegates. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Packet's* editors described a trip George Washington had taken to Valley Forge during a recess of the Federal Convention. "How great," an editor wrote, "… must be the satisfaction of our late worthy Commander in Chief, to be called upon a second time, by the suffrages of three millions of people, to save his sinking country?"[162] Of course, three million people had not voted to send the General to Philadelphia, but the epic tale of dramatic liberation would surely enshrine (in the minds of the public) pro-Constitution politicians as the saviors of the land. Situated as the mediators in this growing spectacle, the press copied the language being bandied about in the Assembly and beyond.

Antifederalists utilized the press and the hero-ification of the founders for their purposes as well. In an address to their constituents, state leaders noted that several of the Constitutional delegates had not given their full support to the document. They listed Virginia's Governor Edmund Randolph, Colonel George Mason, and Massachusetts Eldredge Gerry as three key men opposed to the Constitution when they left the convention. Following the names of these elite Antifederalists, the Antifederalists assured their readers these men were those "whose characters are very respectable."[163]

While each party realized the importance of reputation in winning public support, elite leaders believed elements of their own "mythologizing." As the leaders of society

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[162] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 22 August [1787]; *DHRC*, XIII, [Commentaries on the Constitution, 1]: 189–90.
[163] "The Address of the Seceding Assemblymen," 2 October [Philadelphia 1787], (Broadside, Rare Book Room, DLC); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 60.

they felt it only right and necessary that the public trust their decisions—whether it be for or against the Constitution. Many elite leaders cited reputation in their arguments because they believed that reputation of good character would make or break a leader.

Leaders of Pennsylvania acknowledged the public as actors in their epic tale as well. The leaders of the state referred to the public as the ultimate authority looming over the political structure of state and country. "America has seen the Confederation totally inadequate… Hence resulted the necessity of having again recourse to the AUTHORITY OF THE PEOPLE."[164] In seeking to prove the legitimacy of the Federal Convention, Assemblyman Brackenridge wrote, "the first and every step was federal, inasmuch as it was sanctioned by the PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES."[165] In a debate during the state convention, James Wilson grandly acknowledged the people as the authority behind the convention and the Constitution. "We the People—it is announced in their name, it is clothed with their authority, from whom all power originated and ultimately belong." Rooting such an assertion in classical history he announced "Magna Charta is the grant of the king. This Constitution is the act of the people and what they have not expressly granted, they have retained."[166] As evidenced by Wilson, Federalists in particular, expressed their mythologizing in classical terms. However, while Antifederalists believed in a more practical exercise of democracy, the Federalists preferred to keep the authority of the people ambiguously situated in epic prose. Regardless of the strategy employed,

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[164] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Friday 28 September 1787, Assembly Debates A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 87.
[165] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Friday, 28 September 1787, Assembly Proceedings A.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 93.
[166] The Pennsylvania Convention, Wednesday 28 November 1787, Convention Debates, [Wayne's Notes, Cox Collection]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 384.

both sides used the press to reach the public and to seek to influence their thoughts regarding ratification.

The mythologization of political leaders signified the transformatory power the press held at this time. As Franklin had so ably demonstrated, the press and the written word provided a forum for crafting one's public image into whatever one wished it to be. As the authors of many of the articles printed, elites held the keys to influencing image projection. This proved to be a double-edged sword, though. As the elite sought to form their image through the press and carefully worded rhetoric, the public critically compared idealistic language to practical experience. Few remained satisfied with ambiguously situated prose. Demanding action and real politics, the press straddled the worlds of press as manipulator and press as motivator. Each side battled for control over the debate. As they did so, the press increasingly became central to Pennsylvania's ratification debates.

Ratification rhetoric filled the press and through the press, the public sphere. Hoping to strike while interest remained high in the document, the Federalists strategized to have the State Assembly call the state ratification convention before local elections could give more power to the Antifederalists. Concerned at the speed at which the Federalists were taking things, the Antifederalists decided to pull an old political strategy of their own. When arguments over convention elections became heated, assembly leaders decided to push deliberations to the following day. As the House met the next morning and called role, the gathered assemblymen discovered they lacked a quorum. A tactic used by both sides in state politics, the Antifederalists had sequestered themselves

in order to block passage of the convention election resolution. Sending the Sergeant-at-Arms to retrieve the absent members, the Assembly waited for his return. Upon his return, the Sergeant-at-Arms reported that he had found the missing Assemblymen gathered at Mr. Boyd's—a Constitutional boarding house. In seeking to bring the members to the State House, he reported that "Mr. Whitehill replied, there was no house; and that they, the members to whom his message was directed, had not made up their minds, and for that reason would not attend."[167] Unable to form a quorum the Assembly dissolved and determined to reconvene the following morning.

Again on September 30 a group of Antifederalists absented themselves. Again lacking a quorum, the assembly speaker dispatched the Sergeant-at-Arms (this time accompanied by the assistant clerk) to summon the absent members. Upon their return, the Sergeant-at-Arms reported that he had met quite a few of the Antifederalists across town, but that either in his conversation with them or by their flight he had been unable to persuade any to return with him. In the official record, after the rehearsal of the failures of the Sergeant-at-Arms, the minutes strangely record that "Mr. M'Calmont and Mr. Miley [Antifederalists] appeared in the Assembly chamber, and there being a quorum, the House resumed the consideration of the remainder of the motion postponed yesterday."[168] In the official record, the Antifederalist members appeared of their own will and business resumed as normal. A significant information source, the following day the press reported

[167] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Friday 28 September 1787, Assembly Proceedings P.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 95.
[168] The Pennsylvania Assembly, Saturday 29 September 1787, Assembly Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 99.

a very different account of how and why M'Calmont and Miley appeared in the Assembly chamber.

As recorded by the press, upon entering the Assembly one of the Constitutional members, Mr. M'Calmont, addressed the speaker and told him that he had been brought to the Assembly meeting against his will. "JAMES M'CALMONT informed the House, that he had been forcibly brought into the Assembly room, contrary to his wishes, this morning by a number of the citizens, whom he did not know, and that therefore, he begged he might be dismissed by the House."[169] The Speaker and members of the House sought to placate him by merely noting that if he had suffered unjust treatment he should record his complaints with the judicial system. Still distressed by his forced entrance and seeking a legal means of excusing himself, M'Calmont sought to pay a fine in lieu of his presence in the Assembly. As he poured his five shillings upon his desk, the reporter noted, "This ludicrous circumstance occasioned a loud laugh in the gallery." The Assemblyman had been forcibly taken to the State House by a Federalist, pro-ratification mob, and they had stayed to ensure his compliance. Not only did they jest and verbally abuse him, but upon rising to make for the door M'Calmont was forcibly blocked by the gallery.[170] Blocked by the crowd, M'Calmont returned to his seat and provided the warm body necessary for a quorum. A simple political maneuver had backfired and turned into an extra-legal debacle. The Assembly passed the resolution calling for ratification elections against the Constitutionalist Assemblymen's and presumably their constituents' will, and in the process infringed upon the civil liberties of two of its members.

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[169]Ibid., 104.
[170] Ibid., 106.

While the physical events of the assembly remained important to understanding the environment of the debates, the press mediated knowledge of the event and public reaction to it across the state. The next day six Antifederalist Assemblymen published an address to the public (via the press) explaining their reasons for seceding from the Assembly and reporting the gross violations experienced by their members. They accused the mob of premeditation, noting the men "were seized by a number of citizens of Philadelphia, who had collected together for that purpose." Not only did they accuse them of premeditation, but of using violent force against the Assemblymen. They recounted having their lodging violently entered, their clothing torn, and their persons violently dragged through the streets to the State House. Most shockingly to the Antifederalists, the abuse did not end when M'Calmont and Miley arrived at the State House. They blamed the Federalist members as active participants who encouraged the behavior of the mob. Condoning the mistreatment, the Assemblymen noted that the Federalists had viewed the mistreatment of their own members by the mob and had not stopped it, thus becoming tacit participants in violence themselves.[171] Responding angrily through the press, the Antifederalists cried foul. They warned that such illegal actions revealed the motives of the Federalists and raised suspicions about the form of government they advocated. Trusting the public over the courts, the Antifederalists relied upon the press to be their advocate and defense.

The Philadelphia press, overwhelmingly pro-Federalist, charged the Antifederalists with "slacking" in their official responsibilities. The *Pennsylvania Herald*

[171] The Address of the Seceding Assemblymen; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 112–119.

reported, "A correspondent laments the scandal to which our legislature was yesterday exposed by the wanton desertion of nineteen of its members. ... [Their actions] appear a willful deviation from the legislative duties they were appointed to perform."[172] While the Antifederalists used the press in the western counties to defend themselves, the Federalists carried the sentiments of the eastern press and people and thus passed the resolution calling for the ratification convention.

What is so revealing about this episode is the role the Antifederalists and Federalists relied upon the press to play. The Assembly journal noted nothing of the illegal activity that created a quorum. Rather, the press reported the dramatic episode the following day. Significantly, rather than relying upon legal methods to confront their attackers, the Antifederal Assemblymen used the press to call their fellow assemblymen and citizens to account for their behavior. The Antifederalist leaders viewed the press as a superior means for holding their political leaders to account. They viewed its reach and activity as able to garner more public attention and action than other more traditional means. Such a reliance on the press revealed its growth as an unofficial fourth branch of government at this time.

In keeping with the state's tradition of printing key legislation, the Assembly ordered that three thousand copies of the resolution calling for a convention be printed (one thousand of which were to be translated and printed in German). Hall and Sellers, the printers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, transcribed the resolutions from the minutes of the Assembly and printed them as a broadside. Reprinted eight times across the state and

[172] *The Pennsylvania Herald*, 29 September 1787; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 112–119.

nineteen times up and down the eastern seaboard, the broadside became an important Federalist tool in encouraging ratification in other states. The Federalists had correctly understood that passing the resolution would set them apart as a leader among the states. The ratification debates moved forward with the press established as the chief bully pulpit.[173]

While the incident with the mob infuriated the Antifederalists, it had little negative impact upon the people of Philadelphia. They flocked to the State House gallery on the day the Assembly read the Constitution out loud. Samuel Hodgdon described the event as attracting "a crowded audience." Further, the Constitution "seems," he noted, "to be generally approved, indeed we have been in high glee ever since [the reading]; bells ringing and congratulations in every street. I think it is a well-digested paper, and abundantly more equal to our wants than the Confederation Articles."[174] When the official resolution from Congress, which called for the ratification conventions to be organized by each state, arrived in Pennsylvania, the people in Philadelphia again demonstrated their "glee." As reported by the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on the 3rd of October:

> In consequence of the arrival of the unanimous resolution of Congress, and the adoption of it by our Assembly, the bells of Christ Church rang during the greatest part of Saturday. Many hundred citizens of the first character attended in the lobby, and at the door of the State House… and testified their joy upon the resolves being passed for that purpose by three heartfelt cheers. In short, unusual joy appeared in every countenance.[175]

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[173] The Pennsylvania Assembly, 29 September 1787, Assembly Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 102.
[174] Samuel Hodgdon to Timothy Pickering, Philadelphia, 17 September (excerpt); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 131.
[175] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 3 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 124.

Amazingly all of this drama had taken place merely over whether to follow the recommendations of the Federal Constitutional Convention and call a state ratification convention. Once this had been legally, or not so legally, decided by the Assembly, the real debate over the Constitution and who should attend the ratification convention began. As tensions heightened, the press assumed an even greater role in the politics of public relations.

The Debates leading up to the Convention

As each side defined its position, the pen became the political vehicle for fighting battles and rallying supporters. On October 5, a resolved Antifederalist Samuel Bryan published the first in a series of articles under the pseudonym, "The Centinel." Republished up and down the Atlantic seaboard, Bryan's article became one of the most popularly cited Antifederalist works. His series of essays proved to be the most provocative and outspoken of the attacks made by a Pennsylvanian against the leaders of the Federal Constitution. Bryan's series of essays established the official Antifederalist position against ratification. Significantly, his first essay discussed the freedom of speech. Under this heading he clamored that Pennsylvanians needed to respond to defend their freedom of speech in writing and publishing. If they refused to act, he warned their liberties would soon disappear.[176] His inaugural attack highlighted the prized position the press held in Pennsylvania's independent society. The Antifederalists celebrated Bryan's articles. The Federalists swiftly responded. The next day James Wilson delivered an

[176] "Centinel I," *Independent Gazetteer*, 5 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 158.

impassioned and formative speech at the State House Yard in Philadelphia. Establishing basic Federalist creed, his speech (as delivered in person and then reprinted in the press) spelled out Federalist "talking points," which like Bryan's spread from Pennsylvania to Rhode Island.

Not only did the Federalists respond quickly with Wilson's speech, they used this to launch an extensive newspaper campaign. As the press took central stage, hyperbolic writing became the norm. Federalists called Antifederalists traitors to their country. Antifederalists called Federalists monarchists. Individuals from each side took on provocative names such as "Tars and Feathers," who appeared in the *Independent Gazette*. The author expressed wonder at another editorialist's audacity in criticizing the Constitution. After all, who would assault such a universally popular document? Citing much of the popular rhetoric surrounding the Constitution he marveled at the vehemence coming at a document promising so much peace and happiness. For "Tars and Feathers" as well as other Federalists, the idea of criticizing the Constitution proved an unforgivable and punishable offense. "Tars and Feathers" went so far as to threaten his fellow editorialist with branding or worse, as his pseudonym suggested, tarring and feathering.[177]

The concept of legitimate dissent lacked support—at least in the printed world. Federalist editorialists took criticism against the Constitution personally and called Antifederalists to account for slandering the venerable names of those who had penned the document. Federalist writer, "Avenging Justice," attacked his opponent for arrogantly

[177] "Tar and Feathers," *Independent Gazetteer*, 28 September [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 148.

insulting George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, in particular.[178] Each side saw the debate in life or death terms. State history had pitted Antifederalists against Federalists. Now with the future of the state and the union in the balance, the rhetoric increased with heightened political stakes.

The mob event in the Assembly in September became, for each side, the touchstone revealing the true character of the enemy. Federalists in Carlisle quickly gathered at a public meeting to record their opinions against the actions of the Antifederalists. "[T]he withdrawing or absenting of a member of Assembly… is an offense most destructive to good government and the happiness and true interest of the state." Further, they warned fellow citizens that "any member who is guilty of such desertion and breach of trust is unworthy of the confidence of the people and unfit to represent." Carlisle Federalists sought to use this situation to garner further support for their party and their cause.

Not only did the Carlisle Federalists censor their opponents, they joined the official Federalist bandwagon in repeating the mantra of absolute universal approval of the Constitution. They reported that a recent public meeting had attracted a large group of respected citizens all who expressed great singularity of support for the Constitution. Never missing an opportunity to position themselves as the true heirs of the American Revolution, they claimed this meeting gathered those who should be described as "the true lovers of their country."[179] Strengthened by such apparent unanimity, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* printed a wanted add offering a reward for anyone who

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[178] "Avenging Justice," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 192.
[179] Carlisle Meeting, 3 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 173.

apprehended the eighteen Antifederalists who had absented themselves from the final meeting of the Assembly. Promising financial remuneration for anyone who apprehended the Antifederalists, they also roundly criticized those members for fleeing from their duty. Federalists described the Antifederalists as deserters who had fled Philadelphia and disappeared across the state. They further compared the men to unclean swine from the Biblical story into which Jesus had cast evil spirits. "[H]ad they ran into the Delaware, it would have been well for their country."[180] While the Antifederalists decried the crime committed against two of their Assemblymen, the Federalists controlled the printed reports in their favor.

Because they controlled the majority of the printing presses in the state, Federalists more easily kept the public informed of their opinions. Between 1787 and 1788, the state hosted fifteen newspapers and two magazines. Of the fifteen newspapers, ten were published in Philadelphia, which was a Federalist and pro-ratification stronghold. The *Independent Gazetteer* (a Philadelphia paper) began as a neutral paper printing articles from both sides. However, after November of 1787 the editor only printed Antifederalist pieces, as it was one of only two papers in the state to devote its pages to the Antifederalist cause.[181] Throughout the ratification debates of Pennsylvania and following states, this paper became the source for Antifederalists materials reprinted elsewhere. Federalist pressure on *The Pennsylvania Herald, and General Advertiser*, forced the publisher to dismiss editor Alexander Dallas for "biased" reporting of the

[180] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 178.
[181] The other devoted Antifederalist paper was Francis Bailey's *The Freeman's Journal: or, the North-American Intelligencer*; [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*: II, [Pennsylvania]: 37.

Assembly debates over the Constitution. In sheer numbers, the Antifederalists printed more major articles than the Federalists. However, the Federalists utilized their presses to print a greater number of short items and squibs, which they spread throughout the state. Despite their printing success, Federalists complained about Antifederalist printed materials. "[S]ome of their party [the Antifederalists] are continually publishing the most abominable lies and perverse misrepresentations to deceive the people and raise the clamor among them against it."[182] Though their printed arguments lacked the detail of the Antifederalists, their constant repetition of unanimous support for the Constitution, of its amazing merits, and of the bad character of any who opposed it, flooded the state with pro-ratification sentiment.[183]

Despite the publishing effort of the Federalists and their attempts at intimidation, the backcountry of the state resisted ratification. Such resistance created uncertainty among the Federalists. Gouveneur Morris wrote to George Washington, "With respect to this state, I am far from being decided in my opinion that they will consent… I dread the cold and sour temper of the back counties."[184] Northumberland (covering a large territory in the Northwest) and Westmoreland (covering a smaller territory in the Midwestern part of the state) represented the two areas of greatest resistance. Previous historians have grouped the state's division into backcountry versus city. However, historian Owen

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[182] Timothy Pickering to John Gardner, Philadelphia, 11 December [1787] (excerpt), (RC, Gardner Family Papers, MHi.); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 586.
[183] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*: II, [Pennsylvania]: 180.
[184] Gouveneur Morris to George Washington, Philadelphia, 30 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 206–07.

Ireland has argued that geographic divisions alone did not explain alliances.[185] Religion and ethnicity played a significant role in determining affiliations. Regardless of the reasons for division, each side believed they fought for the legacy of the Revolution and for freedom itself.

While newspapers printed articles and rebuttals, towns gathered to elect delegates to the convention scheduled to meet in December. As with later state elections, such as Massachusetts, the rules for election to this convention followed those of the state Assembly. Towns met and elected eligible candidates; some instructed their representatives, others left it up to the delegates to follow their conscience. A few towns, so upset at what they perceived to be a gross injustice in calling the convention, refused to send delegates. In Cumberland County, the franchised men of the county met. After choosing a chairman to oversee the electing of the delegates, the newspapers reported that he "exhorted us [those in attendance] to unite and act as one man for the public good." Clearly aware of the factious divisions occurring across the state, he pled with the gathered "to consider the good of our country, as infinitely to be preferred to the narrow interest of party."[186] Such appeals to the grander interest of national good only further incited divisions between each side as each claimed the mantle of defending the greater good.

While the county ticket for Cumberland appeared to move forward seamlessly, the citizens of Chester County faced difficulties. "A Friend to Efficient Government,"

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[185] See Owen S. Ireland, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
[186] Cumberland County Meeting, 25 October [1787], printed in the *Carlisle Gazette*, 31 October; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 228.

wrote "To the People of Chester County," apprising them of the fact that though plans had been made to hold a county meeting for elections, the opposing party had already constructed a ticket and authorized these pre-selected men to act as the county's representatives to the convention. Apparently a man calling himself "Agricola" had previously "nominated [delegates] for each of the districts composing the county."[187] Such sleight of hands only reinforced the drastic measures each county took as they sought to send representatives to the convention.

In Luzerne, battles over delegate elections waged as well. Ebenezer Bowman wrote to Timothy Pickering of his work in securing the election of Pickering himself. As he described it, "I then thought it my duty… to exert myself to prevent, if possible, a person being chosen who would object to the proposed Constitution."[188] Far from being a calm affair, the contested election of delegates filled the newspapers, further heightening tensions and distrust.

Despite their distance, each county did not act in isolation. The press provided citizens across the state with materials both pro and anti-ratification. The meeting notes of the citizens of Pittsburg indicate their dependence upon printed material to determine their feelings toward the Constitution. Their reliance upon newspapers underscores the central role the press played in directing the debate across the state. "[H]aving had an opportunity of hearing … both sides," they noted, "in conversation, in the gazettes and in other writings," they made their decision in favor of ratification. Pennsylvania was a

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[187] A Friend to Efficient Government, To the People of Chester County, 31 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 231.
[188] Ebenezer Bowman to Timothy Pickering, Wilkes-Barre 12 November [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 256.

large state, and the city of Pittsburgh stood at the opposite end from Philadelphia. Yet, meeting records noted Pittsburgh's public read the arguments of each side in "gazettes and other writings." In fact, such was their confidence that they understood the debates that in this same meeting the Pittsburgh citizens recorded official support for the Constitution.[189] They made this decision on November 12, 1787. The Assembly had sent out the resolution calling a convention at the end of September. News traveled fast.[190]

While printers distributed their papers through subscription, the intensity of the battles waged within their pages caused each party to become engaged in personal distribution. Timothy Pickering (a Federalist) sent printed materials for distribution to his friend Ebenezer Bowman in Luzerne County. Bowman expressed concern that a majority might rise in opposition to the distribution of such sentiments. In order to keep the locals as calm and supportive as possible he assured Pickering that he had purposefully hid the fact that objections to the Constitution existed. "I … carefully avoided letting them know that any objections were made to the Constitution as I knew they were so prone to opposition that they would readily join in any to prevent that excellent plan from taking place." In his letter, Bowman also noted that others had also distributed pamphlets in the county. The Antifederalist comptroller, John Nicholson, had sent pamphlets of the Constitution into the area as well. Bowman disparagingly described these pamphlets as

[189] Pittsburg Meeting, 9 November [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 286.
[190] While much news did travel, the Antifederalists complained that the mail system purposefully interfered in the delivery of their materials so that more Federalist materials were available to the people of the state than Antifederalist. [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 642.

containing a number of "full futile remarks upon it."[191] Controlling access to information (whether for good or for ill), became an important strategy for the Federalists.

This habit of sending materials from county to county to be printed in the press apparently proved an integral tactic of the Antifederalists, as well as the Federalists. John Jordan sent his friend John Nicholson copies of three articles and requested that they be printed in order to "show the public the spirit of opposition that takes place here against the Constitution." The Antifederalists, in particular, considered the press to be the voice of the people and utilized it to spread opinions across the various counties. Antifederalists hoped that by publishing their sentiments in pro-ratification areas, that they might show the Federalist mantra of "unanimous support" to be a lie.

Not only did political leaders seek opportunities to spread their voices through the press, they also put their wallets behind such efforts. One Antifederalists noted of a printing request by his friend John Jordan, "It will cost a good deal to have it printed and our friends here is not of the richest sort." Jordan also sent along a newspaper with requests for soliciting subscriptions. He hoped that those inundated with Federalist propaganda might find in the dissent a welcome voice and put their wallet behind their convictions. In closing his letter he noted that he planned to send another manuscript from the Constitutional assemblyman to be printed in the Philadelphia press. "I am requested to solicit you to have it published in as many papers as you conveniently can."[192] Another man—from the same region as John Jordan—in following up on the

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[191] Ebenezer Bowman to Timothy Pickering, Wilkes-Barre 12 November [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 256.
[192] John Jordan to John Nicholson, Carlisle, 26 January [1788], (RC, Nicholson Papers, PHarH. Endorsed: "Reed Feby 2d 1788; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 693.

publication issues, spelled out more clearly just how much the people in Carlisle had spent to have their voices heard in the press. "The Pamphlet for which we sent you the Subscription paper is in the Press and will be out emediatly we have engaged to pay the Printers 15 Pound for Printing 1400 Copies I am persuaded 3 times that number of them would sell." He continued asking whether Nicholson had been able to secure any subscriptions for their paper in the city.[193] The political leaders and citizens of Pennsylvania realized the central role that the press played in the battle over ratification, and they stopped at nothing to ensure that their materials were published when, where, and how they wanted.[194]

William Shippen of Philadelphia, writing to a family member, reported on the intensity of emotion pouring into the debates over ratification. "You would be surprised to see what violent hatred is conceived by all the Federalists against everyone who dares to speak a word against the new Constitution; tis as great as the Tories ever had against the Whigs. They would hang them all."[195] Such a description proved realistic. On the eve of the election of delegates in Philadelphia a mob attacked the house of Major Alexander Boyd—the same house from which M'Calmont and his friend were dragged in September and which was used as an interim lodging for western (Antifederalists) Assemblymen. While Antifederalists raised the issue in the state assembly, the effort to

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[193] William Petrikin to John Nicholson, Carlisle, 24 February [1788], (RC (LT), Nicholson Papers, PharH. Endorsed: "Letter from William Petriken Reed March 5h 1788 per Geo. Hacket."); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 695.

[194] For an indepth analysis of middling class printers becoming more politically active, see Jeffrey Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers': Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

[195] William Shippen, Jr. to Thomas Lee Shippen, Philadelphia, 18, 22 November (excerpt); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 288.

capture the rioters proved half-hearted. Tellingly, no Pennsylvania newspaper reported on the event.[196]

The voice of the Antifederalists in Philadelphia, the *Independent Gazetteer*, wrote after tallying the votes for delegates across the state that "the virtuous 24, who compose the minority of the Convention, obtained their seats in that body, by a much greater number of the votes of the people of Pennsylvania, than the 44 who compose the majority; yes the 24 had above 1000 more votes than the 44." He celebrated the fact that less than one-sixth of the eligible voters had participated in the convention elections. Such a low voter turn-out confirmed for the Antifederalists their suspicion that not everyone had had the needed time to review the document. Further, they hoped it also was a sign of the waning popularity of the Federalists.[197] Regardless of voting statistics, the majority of the convention delegates heralded the pro-ratification flag. While Antifederalists hoped to rile up the people and put pressure on the delegates to vote against ratification, everyone realized the convention would be an uphill battle for the Antifederalist "virtuous 24."

As the delegates to the convention prepared to meet, the state stood back in anticipation. The amazing speed at which the Assembly had reviewed and proposed the convention, the elections called, and the people "informed," had proved a whirlwind of Federalist political stratagem. The Federalists, emboldened by their recent rise in state power and influence, acted while they could and sent the Antifederalists into a frenzy

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[196] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 225.
[197] *Independent Gazetteer*, 5 December [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 264.

seeking to pull together their support and strategy in short order. Significant for the political culture of the state, at the heart of the Federalist strategy stood the press.

The Convention, the Press, & the Public

Once again Independence Hall attracted the attention of the state and the world as Pennsylvania delegates gathered to debate the merits of a document many of their esteemed leaders had penned in the hot days of the previous summer. Like many of the state conventions to come, the Pennsylvania ratification convention ordered the doors to remain open for the public, and the public responded by arriving in large numbers.[198] The press also appeared and competed over who would be allowed to be the "official" reporting source. Hall and Sellers and Pritchard and Hall submitted letters requesting to be appointed the official convention printers. Hall and Sellers, the official printers of the Assembly, received the appointment. Reflecting the diversity of the state, the convention also requested that a number of the minutes of the convention be translated and printed in German by one of the leading German printers, Mr. Steiner. The convention ordered that "the number of English copies be 3000, [and] the number of German 2000."[199]

As the convention addressed initial housekeeping matters, the opposition requested that their complaints be noted for the record. After a period of discussion, the House decided against this practice, noting that the press served as the primary means of informing the people and not the convention record. They claimed that the entrance of

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[198] The Pennsylvania Convention, Friday 23 November [1787], Convention Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 330.
[199] The Pennsylvania Convention, Tuesday 27 November 1787, Convention Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 368–9.

such protests into the official record would only inflame and distract. Significantly, they recommended those with protests look to the press as their mouthpiece. Turn to the press, they recommended, for "newspapers were open [to] the minority for protests and addresses, and … they had a much more extensive circulation and influence than the Journal of the Convention could possibly have."[200] While their original recommendation may have been done out of expediency, the Federalists ended up empowering their adversaries. Those entering protest indeed relied heavily upon the press and in the process made its records as important, if not more so, than the official journal of the convention.

The Federalist majority, as they had to this point, orchestrated the convention to continue to raise public expectations and support for the Constitution. The pro-ratification community in Philadelphia turned the convention into a spectacle of sorts as various groups appealed to the assembly as one would a gathering of celebrities. An example of such spectacle-like activities came when the German school in Philadelphia invited the convention to come and observe its students. The ministers and vestry of the German Lutheran Congregation invited the convention delegates to their church (Sion Church) to "an examination of the pupils in the German language."[201] The convention delegates agreed to attend the next day.

As the convention continued, the gallery became more participatory. Mainly composed of local Philadelphia residents, most of whom were Federalists, the spectators

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[200] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 381.
[201] The Pennsylvania Convention, Wednesday 28 November 1787, Convention Proceedings; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 382.

proved to be quite vocal and not surprisingly, in support of the Federalist delegates. Mr. Smilie from the Western part of the state, upon noting cheers following Federalist presentations, rose and addressed the President. Mr. Smilie expressed resentment as such disproportionate support and addressed the President of the convention noting the apparent biased nature of the gallery. Mocking the Federalists, he claimed that they did not need to rely upon clever arguments for "the gentlemen on the other side have, indeed, an argument which surpasses and supersedes all others—a party in the gallery prepared to clap and huzza in affirmance of their speeches." Representing the interests of his constituency, he further noted, "But, sir, let it be remembered that this is not the voice of the people of Pennsylvania… No, sir, this is not the voice of the people of Pennsylvania; and were this Convention assembled at another place, the sound would be of a different nature, for the sentiments of the citizens are different indeed." He reprimanded the convention for what he perceived to be insulting behavior on their part. Gathering momentum, his address took on the tones of Patrick Henry and other great rhetoriticians. "I will add that such conduct, nay were the gallery filled with bayonets, such appearance of violence would not intimidate me, or those who act with me, in the conscientious discharge of public duty."[202] Such speeches reminded the assembly that their perceived majority might not, in fact, be representative. However, while such speeches may have emboldened the opposition, the Federalists continued to hammer home their arguments and receive accolades from their boisterous supporters.

Meeting for twenty-two days in total, the convention agreed to debate the

[202] The Pennsylvania Convention, 10 December 1787, Convention Proceedings; Reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Herald*, 12 December; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 547.

Constitution section by section. However, most of the speeches delivered discussed the document as a whole. The Antifederalists sought—albeit, to no avail—to have the convention location moved to a more central part of the state. They hoped moving to a more central location would provide a more balanced audience to (hopefully) apply pressure on the delegates. At the very least, they hoped such a move would lengthen the days of the convention. A petition from Philadelphia citizens did in fact request that the convention be postponed. They cited the fact that other sister states were allowing their public the ability to review the document before calling for movement toward a convention. They argued that Pennsylvania's Assembly had short-changed its citizens by calling the convention so quickly. As a result they requested more time for public "forming, collecting and expressing their sentiments by petitions or instructions before you come to a determination which may preclude further deliberation." In order to have time to fashion their perspectives they requested that the convention be postponed until April or May of the following year.[203]

Cumberland County submitted two petitions, one against ratification and one in favor. The pro-ratification petitioners noted that those who had signed the petition represented "all the clergy, principal burgesses, members of the learned professions and principle inhabitants of this place; men, who possess the means of information, and are entirely exempt, from any private or party interest." Of particular importance, they qualified themselves as those "exempt, from any private or party interests." Eschewing the idea of party—as all did in this time—they asserted that their support arose from a

[203] Philadelphia County Petition to the Pennsylvania Convention, 11 December [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 316–19.

rational assessment of the document and a reasonable engagement with the issues at hand.[204] Their status in society coupled with their unanimous support of the Constitution led them to conclude that the public must be absolutely thrilled with the document. The petition encouraged the convention to serve this unanimity in the state by quickly ratifying the document. Along with vouching for their integrity, they also described themselves as those who "posses the means of information" for determining the appropriate position in this debate. For them, as for the many other voices weighing in on the debate, they acquired their information primarily through the press.

The rhetoric for or against the Constitution covered a range of topics. However, one of the predominant topics in Pennsylvania centered on the economics of the Constitution. Just as many other states had claimed financial difficulties as a reason to support a federal government, Pennsylvania too had its share of pro-ratification and anti-ratification arguments based on financial issues. Antifederalists, as indicated in their "Address," feared the Constitution removed the state's control over financial matters and removed the ability of individual citizens to apply direct pressure to the state government over financial issues. Antifederalists went so far as to claim that Federalists such as Robert Morris supported the Constitution from purely selfish reasons in order to escape paying their debts.[205] The economic question had, in fact, been one of the main reasons the Federalists desired to rewrite the state constitution. They believed that too much

[204] Cumberland County Petition to the Pennsylvania Convention, 28 November [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 298.
[205] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 642.

freedom had pushed the state into its current tenuous financial situation.[206] Historian Woody Holton described the Federalists as those who "believed the assemblymen's excessive accountability to popular pressure had led them to grant too much relief to debtors and taxpayers."[207] They argued such responsiveness had landed the state in its current tenuous financial situation.

However, the flipside to the "excessive" argument proves just as important to understanding Pennsylvania history. Holton argued about this period, "What has not been fully appreciated is that thousands of other Americans were angry at the legislatures for precisely the opposite reason—for adopting fiscal and monetary policies they considered far too harsh."[208] The Antifederalists expressed this anger in their condemnation of the Constitution. As summarized in their "Address," Antifederalists noted with horror the reality that under the Federal Constitution states lost great power over taxation and revenue. "As there is no one article of taxation reserved to the state governments," one horrified Antifederalist penned, "the Congress may monopolize every source of revenue, and thus indirectly demolish the state governments." A personal letter written by Pennsylvanian Matthew M'Connell, confirmed that people were well aware of the economic implications of the new Constitution and whom it would benefit. He argued that if the Constitution were adopted it would benefit the creditors and hurt those in debt.

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[206] Woody Holton's book, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), analyzes the growth of violence across the states and argues that this arose as a result of the people's anger at not being listened to by their political leaders. He argues that far from being a liberating document, the Constitution was designed to stop the economic freedom and responsive politics emerging as a result of the violence across the states.

[207] He also believes that many contemporary historians follow this interpretation and blame the economic woes of the states in the 1780s as the fault of over-responsive state governments.

[208] Woody Holton, "An "Excess of Democracy"—Or a Shortage? The Federalists' Earliest Adversaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Fall 2005), 346.

Not only would creditors be favored in the new government, but Antifederalists feared that the new Federal government would subsume the powers of the state legislature under their powers.[209] In another personal exchange, a lawyer from Philadelphia, Charles Swift, suggested that both the extremely poor and the wealthy hated paper money. It was "the middling sort, being generally in debt or wishing to contract debts, [who] loves a currency which by depreciating sanctifies their rapacity and legally authorizes fraud."[210] While clearly siding with the "wealthy," his comments revealed the economic implications of the adoption of the Constitution.

Alongside loss of financial power and the potentially unequal financial benefits the Constitution would bring, Pennsylvania Antifederalists also noted the abridgement of state powers that would come through the loss of representation in the House of Representatives. The Constitution provided one representative for every 50,000 inhabitants. Antifederalists feared that "the liberties, happiness, interests, and great concerns of the whole United States may be dependent upon the integrity, virtue, wisdom, and knowledge of 25 or 26 men."[211] One Constitutional satirist writing under the name "John Humble" connected these political losses with financial losses. He described the Constitution as a document for the "600 wellborn" executed on the backs of the "lowborn, that is, all the people of the United States." Concluding, "John Humble" wrote, "Now we the lowborn… do by this our humble address, declare and most solemnly

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[209] Matthew M'Connell to William Irvine, Philadelphia, 20 September (RC, Irvine Papers, Phi.); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 132.
[210] Charles Swift to Robert E. Griffiths, Philadelphia 18 October [1787], (excerpt), (FC, Swift Family Papers, Phi. Endorsed: "Copy of letter Dated Octr: 18th: 1787 to Robert E. Griffiths. Manchester [England]." *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 199.
[211] "The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of the State of Pennsylvania to their Constituents," 18 December 1787, *Pennsylvania Packet*; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 629, 631.

engage that we will allow and admit the said 600 wellborn immediately to establish and confirm this most noble, most excellent and truly divine Constitution." Comparing their situation to slavery, he noted they would support the wellborn "namely by the sweat and toil of our body."[212] While part of an intense hyperbolic battle, "John Humble" clearly voiced the concerns of the Antifederalists. The financial and the political represented two sides of one coin. Significantly, the Pennsylvania print industry remained the solvent currency. Both parties understood that he who controlled the press, controlled politics, and through politics, economics. This understanding led each to fight for control over the world of print.

Petitions and debates notwithstanding, when the time came for the question of ratification to be brought to vote, the Federalists dominated. Resolving in favor of adopting the Constitution as the new governing document of the United States of America, the convention ordered the printing of the resolution and of the Constitution and planned to announce the final decision to the public at the Courthouse.[213] William Shippen recorded the response of the public, "This evening the question was put to adopt or reject it in toto and a great majority rose to adopt it; and the mob in the streets are huzzaing triumphantly on the great event, perfectly ignorant whether it will make them free or slaves."[214] The procession that occurred the following day featured many of the

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[212] John Humble, Address of the Lowborn, *Independent Gazetteer*, 29 October [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 206.
[213] The Pennsylvania Convention, 12 December 1787, Convention Proceedings, P.M.; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 591.
[214] William Shippen, Jr. to Thomas Lee Shippen, Philadelphia, 12 December (excerpt); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 601.

prominent political elites in the town and included the convention delegates.[215] Progressing from the State House to the Courthouse, the delegation met a "concourse of citizens, who testified their applause by [offering] three cheers" at the close of the reading of the ratification document. The *Pennsylvania Packet* reported that Philadelphia's ship carpenters showed their support by wheeling a ship on wheels throughout the city. With the ships decorated with flags and various emblems, the carpenters cheered on the new Constitution and the hopes for political unification and economic prosperity it represented.[216] It would seem that such a celebration would have ended the factious newspaper wars and public outbursts over ratification. However, the Antifederalists truly believed the people of the state had been denied a voice in the haphazard way the Federalists had produced ratification. Far from being settled, the newspaper debate regarding ratification continued as intensely as it had before the convention.

The Aftermath

Believing the ratification convention had been conducted improperly the Antifederalists published a pamphlet titled, *The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of the State of Pennsylvania to their Constituents*. The press became the first resource utilized by the Antifederalists as they relied upon it to spread their *Address* across the state. In the document, they described the political history of the

[215] Public Reading of the Form of Ratification, Thursday Noon, 13 December; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 604.
[216] *Pennsylvania Packet*, 15 December [1787]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 606.

state, the involvement of the Constitutionalist party in politics to date, as well as their very detailed analysis and criticism of the Constitution. A sweeping political document, the *Address* warned of the loss of control over financial and military issues if the Constitution became the law of the land. They cautioned that state power would be subsumed under federal control and individual legislatures would become merely rubber stamps of the national will. Seeking to add further validity to their concerns, they assured their supporters that they had analyzed the Constitution not merely from local interest but from the interests of all the American people. Believing themselves defenders of the grand concept of liberty, they spread their concerns abroad hoping to protect the future of those across the states.[217] The Antifederalists in this public letter revealed the ratification debates to be a fight over the definition of the Revolution. If the Federalists succeeded in passing the Constitution, they would effectively control the legacy of American Revolution.

The lack of assurances regarding the freedom of the press continued to be a frequent concern. As demonstrated in the Pennsylvania convention and the 1776 state constitution, the press played an integral role in the political culture of the state. Antifederalists feared that without the liberty specifically guaranteed in the Constitution, this freedom would be lost; especially among those who would dissent from the majority position. This fear may not have been that far-fetched. Federalist John Montgomery wrote to his friend, James Wilson, of threats of violence reported against one of the local printers. He described how local printers were publishing whatever articles were being

[217] *The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of the State of Pennsylvania to their Constituents*, 18 December 1787, *Pennsylvania Packet*; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 627, 639.

sent to them. The Antifederalists disagreed with this strategy and, as narrated by Montgomery, called two of the local printers to a local meeting and accused them of partiality. Further, they threatened that if the printers did not change their behavior their printing offices may suffer the wrath of the local crowd.[218] Interestingly while the Antifederalists argued most vigorously for the freedom of the press, in this case it was the Federalists who worried about their freedoms. Regardless of which side dominated in the print war, the press held a central role in spreading politics and conducting the politicking that each party understood to be essential for winning public support.

For the citizens of Pennsylvania, words did have their limits at time. Feelings of frustration boiled over in Carlisle and a riot broke out against the Federalists in the town. On December 26, Federalists gathered to celebrate the passage of the Constitution. Strolling through town, they were met by an Antifederalist mob who were determined to stop the celebrations and send a loud message that the convention had not represented the people's will. While the Federalists had been behind the mob activity in Philadelphia, the Antifederalists dominated in this situation.

Politically motivated violence had existed in the state even previous to the debate over the Constitution. Historian Woody Holton reported that increasing frustrations at the lack of response over the financial crises had led to an increase in violence against elected officials. "[T]hreats that anti-relief politicians would be defeated at the polls… seem to have been vastly outnumbered by old-fashioned threats of violence." Holton

[218] "[T]he Printers [Kline and Reynolds] were sent for yesterday by some of the leaders of that party, accused of partiality, and their printing office threatened." John Montgomery to James Wilson, Carlisle, 2 March [1788], (RC (?), James Wilson Correspondence, James A. Montgomery Collection, Phi.); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 705.

reported that the *Massachusetts Centinel* had printed in 1785, "If you persist to cram this law down our throats, I forewarn you that it will be resisted."[219] In April 1788, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* printed notice of a violent opposition to the Federal Constitution in Washington County. About a month later, private correspondences corroborated the newspaper report, confirming that eight men had been killed in a brawl between pro-and anti-Constitution supporters.[220] While these reports attracted local attention, a riot in Carlisle received national attention.

Significantly, the press became the main medium through which the two sides argued over the violence in Carlisle; mainly over what had happened and why. Articles between "An Old Man" claiming to present unbiased facts were roundly attacked by "One of the People" and "Another of the People" for being false fabrications.[221] One Pennsylvania citizen commented that violence pervaded both sides and that the press only provided another medium for the bickering to continue.[222] While violence existed as a significant factor in the Pennsylvania ratification battle, the press mediated and propagated it.

On January 2, the *Freeman's Journal* published the announcement of a petition campaign to request a new ratification convention. Interestingly this announcement reported that both farmers and Assembly delegates had joined together to call another

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[219] Woody Holton, "An "Excess of Democracy"—Or a Shortage? The Federalists' Earliest Adversaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Fall 2005), 370.
[220] James Marshel to John Nicholson, Washington, 2 February 1788, (see footnote 2: Mfm:Pa. 631; Mfm:Pa. 676); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 713.
[221] "An Old Man," *Carlisle Gazette*, 2 January 1788; "One of the People," *Carlisle Gazette*, 9 January 1788; "Another of the People," *Carlisle Gazette*, 16 January 1788; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 680.
[222] James Montgomery to William Irvine, 19 January 1788, (RC[LT], Mfm:Pa. 346); *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 684.

convention. Citing the Antifederalist belief that the first convention had been called in an illegal manner they hoped that the new convention would allow for a fairer method for reviewing and amending the Constitution. Of particular importance, they raised the issue of creating a bill of rights to be included in the revised Constitution. The editorialist expressed high hopes for the calling of this meeting when he concluded with an exclamation of joy over having "so easy a method of accommodating such an important business to the satisfaction of all classes of citizens, and thereby prevent much disorder, confusion, and anarchy."[223] The petition campaign was started by Antifederalist comptroller general, John Nicholson, and it spread throughout at least nine counties. The first printed copy was found in the *Carlisle Gazette* on the 30th of January. By March, 6,005 people from Northampton, Dauphin, Bedford, Franklin, Cumberland, and Westmoreland had signed the petition. Other petitions were signed, but some did not reach the Assembly in time to be recorded, and in Lancaster County fears of retribution against the Antifederalists kept them from spreading the petition.[224]

The petitions remained a heated issue across the state. In the town of Huntington, the *Freeman's Journal* reported that after a public "tearing" of the petitions from the county, that the Antifederalists "collected and conducted upon the backs of old scabby ponies the EFFIGIES of the principles of the junto." As this group passed the house of the chief of the court, he ordered that the men in parade be arrested, which in turn stimulated a riot. In response to the arrests, the Antifederalists gathered more supporters

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[223] *Freeman's Journal*, 2 January 1788; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 710. William Shippen Jr. wrote to Thomas Lee Shippen a few days later, "There will be much opposition in the western part of the state, and numerous petitions to the next Assembly to call a new convention to reconsider the Constitution."
[224] "The Petition Campaign for Legislative Rejection of Ratification, 2 January–29 March 1788;" [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 709.

and freed the "sons of liberty so unjustly confined." They attracted a large crowd, for the newspapers reported that when the Antifederalists left the jail they were greeted by spectators reportedly loudly celebrating and spreading threats against local Federalists.[225] The energy that was still infusing the state over the legality of the ratification convention created much unrest for many months to follow.

In the end the petition campaign failed. However, it kept the press wrapped up in the perceived injustices of the Antifederalists for a good part of the spring. Newspapers printed reports detailing numbers of supporters county by county either for or against the Constitution. In the end, the level of intensity of personal verbal attacks circulating in the newspapers even shocked Benjamin Franklin, who was in many ways the father of the press in the state. In response, he wrote an article "On the Abuse of the Press" to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*." In it Franklin decried "the spirit of rancor, malice, and hatred," evident in the pages of the press. Such newspaper articles, he worried, gave off the impression that the state "is peopled by a set of the most unprincipled, wicked, rascally, and quarrelsome scoundrels upon the face of the globe." He called upon editors to be more discerning in what they published. Revealing the level of tension existent, Franklin's own paper refused to print his article.[226]

The Antifederalists lost their request for a new convention, for a review of the violence committed against them, and even for an initial drafting of a bill of rights. However, as historian Owen Ireland noted, they may have lost a few battles, but they did not lose the war:

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[225] "Federal Intelligence," *Freeman's Journal*, 19 March [1788]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 718.
[226] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, II, [Pennsylvania]: 645.

> Antifederalists … defined a potentially powerful position that transcended partisanship and antagonized no identifiable ethnic or religious group. … it spoke with equal or greater force to audiences outside of the state and therefore provided the basis for constructing a common front with Antifederalists beyond the bounds of Pennsylvania. In short, the Antifederalist rhetoric at the convention had created a broad and solid foundation from which to launch a campaign for popular repudiation of the Federalists' initial victory.[227]

The aftermath of the convention only emboldened and strengthened Antifederalists in other states to utilize the arguments and the strategies which, though they had failed in Pennsylvania, had certainly caused the Federalist cause to be a much more difficult one to make. Fuel for these states came primarily through the printed legacy the Antifederalists left for their fellow ratification opponents. Thus, across the states, print united a diverse opposition and provided them with a central means for spreading their message.

Conclusion

Violence in public and in print defined the ratification experience from start to finish in Pennsylvania. If such heated actions could raise the concern of a seasoned statesmen such as Benjamin Franklin, a Revolutionary hero who himself encouraged much opposition in his life, one can begin to get a picture for the virulence of the words passing between the two sides. The aftermath of the ratification revealed that rather than succumbing to the circumstances of life, Pennsylvania politicians and their supporters were determined to remain in control of their political destiny. Print stood as the central

[227] Owen Stephen Ireland, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 106–07.

political tool utilized by both sides to form their arguments and inform their public. Historian Saul Cornell's work on the Antifederalists, *The Other Founders,* argued that the only unifying factor among the diverse group known as "Antifederalists" was print. While unifying the Antifederalists, more broadly, the press provided the stage through which American participatory politics evolved. "The publication of the Constitution in September 1787," Cornell argued, "inaugurated one of the most vigorous political campaigns in American history. In arguing over the merits of the new plan of government, Americans not only engaged in a lively inquiry into the meaning of constitutional government; they helped make constitutionalism a defining characteristic of American political culture."[228] As constitutionalism became a defining topic in American political culture, the press became the medium through which its discussions proceeded.

Aside from setting the tone of the rest of the conventions by providing the "party lines," of both pro and anti-ratification supporters, Pennsylvania provided the medium through which American politics evolved. The large amount of materials printed first in the state and then from Massachusetts to Georgia established a precedent for looking to newspapers for political information. Pennsylvania's press set the thirteen states upon a clear direction of discussion and provided them with strategies for gaining the necessary access and approval from their publics. Through the ratification convention of Pennsylvania the press was indirectly inaugurated as the fourth branch of government; the branch that accessed and sought control of public opinion. Men's minds and wallets

[228] Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 19.

became engaged in what they saw as a debate over the future of their liberties. In doing so, they were forming American political culture into one dominated by the media—and the media in the 1780s was the press.

CHAPTER 3: The Public is Political: Middling Class Political Activity in the Massachusetts Ratification Convention

Massachusetts' convention attracted spectator crowds that were far larger than those found at the previous six ratification conventions. Arriving in Massachusetts in September of 1787, the newly released Federal Constitution pulled elite politicians and the public into a polarizing debate that overflowed into a lively convention in Boston.[229] One Massachusetts observer wrote to his friend that "3 or 400 [delegates] besides a Numerous Collection of Spectators [the public] made a formidable appearance" at the recently convened convention.[230] This "Numerous Collection of Spectators" actually ranged between 300–400 people, which meant that when added to the 300–400 elected convention delegates, the numbers filling the Massachusetts convention space reached 800 some days.[231] In a letter from one friend to another, an observer wrote that the convention "is much crowded and is by far the most numerous representation this State ever saw."[232] Another agreed that the "the Galleries are crowded every day."[233]

Traditional interpretations portray the convention as an elite phenomenon. However, the statewide public reaction to ratification revealed widespread popular

[229] In referring to the public, again, I am aware that most of those engaged in public events at this time were white property owning males. These men, however, were not solely elite, rather, they were composed of a growing middling sort—which encompassed merchants, farmers and tradesmen. Thus the public I describe is neither completely elite, or necessarily representative of the lower classes, different races, and women.
[230] "William Lambert to Enos Hitchcock, Boston, 12 January 1788"; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 697–8.
[231] John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds.; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 1110.
[232] "Theophilus Parsons to Michael Hodge, Boston, 14 January 1788"; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 708.
[233] "William Cranch to John Quincy Adams, Boston, 22, 27 January 1788"; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]:, 1543.

interest in the debate over the Constitution and the political future of the state.[234] Historians have traditionally argued that ratification occurred because elite Federalists made a quid-pro-quo agreement with influential convention president and Massachusetts Governor, John Hancock, and Revolutionary War leader Samuel Adams.[235] Political leaders invoked the people as the theoretical rightful judge in determining their form of government. Elite politicians assumed the public would deferentially follow their lead, as they had done during the Revolutionary War. However, refusing to exist merely in the theoretical realm, the public engaged in the ratification debates through town hall meetings, newspaper editorials, and as convention spectators. In the process, they began expressing more suspicion toward the elite political leaders and conveyed their right to participate in a more broadened political sphere. Though participation remained limited, the ratification convention marked an important development in American participatory politics. The citizens of Massachusetts pushed politics toward a middling sort dominated event that became framed not in local terms, but in emerging nationalist terms.[236]

The reasons behind ratification are not my direct concern in this chapter. While the state had a history of conservative politics, and even experienced a resurgence of this

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[234] The Massachusetts' elite can be defined as those with substantial property and privilege in the community. Traditionally, this included a fairly small, but well-known group of wealthy merchants, large landowners, clergy, and distinguished politicians. As can be expected, they were white protestant men whose stature in their specific community afforded them deference and honor by right of their title.

[235] See Patrick T. Conley, *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1988) and Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

[236] By using the term "middling sort" or "middling classes" I refer to a wider swath of people whose lives, as Margaret Hunt suggests in her book, *The Middling Sort* (University of California Press, 1996), were tied to commerce. During the late eighteenth century, this group became increasingly influential in American society. Through the entrepreneurship available in the newly forming country they became more politically and socially involved and in the process disrupted elite domination.

conservatism after Shays' Rebellion, ratification remained uncertain through the months leading up to the convention (September 1787 through January 1788) and during the convention itself (January to February 1788). The final vote ratified the Constitution by a slim margin of nineteen votes. Three hundred and fifty-five delegates voted, with 187 in favor and 168 against.[237] Rather than explaining why the state decided to vote in favor of ratification, this chapter studies who engaged in the debates and how they envisioned participatory politics, specifically through the form of the press. In the end, the fact that the Constitution was ratified meant far less to the middling sort than the victory they had gained in inserting their voice into the political process through the press. An examination of this traces the simultaneous growth of citizen reliance on the press and participatory politics.[238]

Historiographical Considerations

The historiography discussing Massachusetts's ratification convention remains relatively slim. The Federalist position in Massachusetts has been described by historians such as Max Edling and Terry Bouton, as the conservative choice; a movement toward a more centralized government.[239] Similarly many historians have argued that ratification

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[237] "Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, Boston, 6 February 1788"; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1580.
[238] For various viewpoints on Shay's Rebellion and ratification see: Robert A. Feer, "Shay's Rebellion and the Constitution: A Study in Causation." *New England Quarterly* 42 (1969): 388–410; Joseph P. Warren, "The Confederation and Shay's Rebellion." *American Historical Review* 11 (1905): 42–67; and Robert Gross, "A Yankee Rebellion? The Regulators, New England, and the New Nation," *New England Quarterly* 82:1 (2009): 112–135. For a demographic overview of those involved in the rebellion see, Robert Lord Keyes, "Who Were the Pelham Shaysites?" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 28:1 (2000): 23–55.
[239] See Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

came as a result of Federalist manipulations of John Hancock and Samuel Adams (the two strongest ratification opponents). Historians assert that fear of Shays' Rebellion combined with elite manipulation created a conservative backlash that secured ratification. However, this interpretation does not take into account the surge in middling class participation nor even the known characters of Hancock and Adams.[240]

Scholars such as Bernard Bailyn and Pauline Maier have argued that public political interactions increased and affected politics during the Revolutionary War. I argue that the ratification debates (specifically through the press) solidified middling political activity in the state and infused traditionally local politics with a nationalistic rhetoric that moved beyond community interests.[241] The ratification debates moved public political action from episodic events of public outrage to expected civil interactions. Part of this transition came with the transition of language. As more and more individuals expressed distrust toward the aristocratic leanings of the political elite, more of the middling class began assuming qualification for inclusion and inserting themselves into the political debates. While the "conservative," elite-favored decision for

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[240] For a traditional account of the ratification convention in Massachusetts see, John J. Fox, "Massachusetts and the Creation of the Federal Union, 1775–1791," in Patrick Conley and John P. Kaminski, *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House, 1988), 113–130.

[241] See Bernard Bailyn, *The Idealogical Origins of American Politics* (New York: Balknap Press, 1992) and Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1992), both of which broadly discuss the role of public participation in political events. Maier describes public participation as more episodic and reactionary than established and expected in the day-to-day operations of local politics. I argue that the ratification debates changed the nature of political participation by transforming it from episodic to expected. To specifically read about crowd action and its development from its British roots to Anglo-American practice see Paul Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Gilje describes the existing British practice of crowd action as used by the public to correct perceived political injustices by the reigning authorities. Again, these actions were often dramatic and episodic and understood by the public as occasional means to right wrongs. They were not understood as invitations to join the political structure or even alter its functioning

ratification won, the middling class gained politically through the process of ratification. By casting aspersions and suspicion on the idea of privilege, participatory politics moved toward a nationalistic framework that celebrated the emerging middling nature of American politics.

This chapter joins the wider historiographical debate over political culture in arguing that the dynamics of power in early America were negotiated as much through traditional political means—such as voting—as through developing political culture; such as newspapers, public debates, broadsides, and meetings in taverns.[242] Rather than seeing the interactions between the elite and middling sort as a linear relationship, the public activity in the conventions suggests a much more dynamic and synergistic relationship. Expanding public spaces—either concretely in physical spaces or in the form of print—blurred distinctions between public and private, elite and communal. These spaces provided a stage for the execution of the participatory politics that enabled the public to express their growing political ideas and beliefs. By highlighting the specific ways that the Massachusetts middling sort began to express their ideas of expanded participatory politics, I show the central role that print held in shaping the ratification debates and in the process, the development of participatory political practices.

Scholars have described many early American political events as elite strategies

[242] For the dominant literature on political culture, and specifically the use of non-traditional political means as political expression see: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1994); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). In particular, this chapter focuses on political gatherings and celebrations as a growing method of public political culture. For authors who have developed this sub-field of literature see, Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986; Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Orator and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

for making the public feel empowered—symbolic activities that paid homage to a symbolic people. In the end, these practices have been described as meant to affirm the authority of the leading elite. By all appearances, the elites in Massachusetts followed these patterns. They did so by rhetorically appealing to the people as an imaginative authority that legitimized the rule of the enlightened elite; an elite who in turn represented the people. Historian Christopher Grasso utilized printed media and public oratory to show how the public began to call the elite's bluff in his history of Connecticut.[243] I utilize the ratification convention to illuminate the same pattern in Massachusetts. As the press spread news of the ratification debate topics and as the city of Boston—and others across the state—began sharing information, the public began adapting elite rhetoric for their own purposes. Through such adaptation the middling sort participated and broadened definitions of participatory politics in Massachusetts.

The movement toward a wider definition of politics occurred in and was mediated through spirited commentary in print (through newspapers and correspondence); in semi-public conversations (in taverns and coffee shops); and in public celebrations (through parades, military convocations, and public toasts). As information spread, emerging political practices began moving beyond formal acts of voting and office holding, to encompass much wider cultural activities. These cultural activities—aimed at influencing politics—formed the beginnings of American nationalism as it looked to define itself both within the existing thirteen states and to an observant Atlantic world.[244] In the

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[243] Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[244] Nationalism has been a well-studied concept and this paper relies upon the theoretical basis provided by such authors as Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. One cannot discuss nationalism without

following sections, I explore the public involvement in the Massachusetts ratification convention first by analyzing the representations and perceptions of the public through town meetings and through the public's depiction in the press. Second, I focus on the public's perception of itself and its voice through the convention itself and its aftermath.

The Context

Historian Michael Allen Gillespie well described the political climate of Massachusetts in 1787. "[O]n the eve of ratification the situation was polarized and politically unpredictable."[245] Massachusetts entered this period of ratification in terrible economic straits and as a result, experienced social unrest. British restrictions on trade, the decline of home manufacturers, limited currency, and high rates of taxation aimed at paying off Revolutionary War debts left the state severely weakened politically and socially unhappy. Shays' Rebellion in 1786 represented expressions of unbridled frustration by those in the western part of the state on the verge of losing their land. Led by a former officer of the Continental Army, Daniel Shays, this group of men demanded protection for their mortgaged lands, the printing of paper money, and a cancellation of debts. While the state militia subdued the rebellion quickly, it became the catalyst that voters used to send many conservative state leaders back home. Likewise, those political

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mentioning Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Authors in the field of early America who analyze the rise of nationalism David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic*; Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*, and Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print*. For a recent article that summarizes some of the main themes debated, see John L. Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 1–33.

[245] Michael Allen Gillespie, "Massachusetts: Creating Consensus," in Michael Allen Gillespie, ed., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 144.

leaders seen as sympathetic were elected to the state assembly in Boston. Voters also sent the state's political leaders to the Confederation convention first in Annapolis and then in Philadelphia to discuss serious amendments to the Articles of Confederation. With the arrival of the Federal Constitution in September the polarization that had been slowly simmering within the state burst forth.[246]

While the polarization has attracted much scholarly attention "from the bottom up," the ideas and notions of those "from the top down" equally contributed to social formation at this time. Of supreme importance among Massachusetts' leadership was the notion of interest; specifically in its attachment to notions of virtue and honor. John Adams described this public virtue as: "The interest of the people is one thing—it is the public interest… The interest of a king, or of a party, is another thing—it is a private interest, and where interest governs, it is a government of men, and not of laws."[247] This interest was a call to rise above the meaner, baser appetites of men, and Adams and many of his companions believed true political leaders neutralized the natural appeals to personal appetite and acted virtuously for the public good. In Massachusetts as the colonial unrest that set colonists against British leaders increased, rhetoric over the "rights of the people" quickly took center stage. Historian Richard Beeman noted the expectations that surrounded this rhetoric:

> [H]owever much provincial leaders claimed to be acting in the name of the people, they also fully expected the people to be virtuous enough to recognize who their natural leaders should be—not a group of royal placemen but, rather,

[246] Important histories of Massachusetts politics during this period are as follows: Stephen E. Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) and Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s–1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
[247] John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, quoted in Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Secularum*, p.72.

> local patrons who by dint of their property, talent, and connection to their local communities were most likely to be able to distinguish between private and public interest.[248]

While provincial leaders may have changed over time, seventy-five years later the state's elite still operated under the same assumptions of deference.

When the Constitution arrived in the state in September 1787, the public greeted the document with support. The emotionally charged atmosphere that initially positively greeted the Federal Constitution eventually turned into political disillusionment. Governor Hancock transmitted the document to the legislature who promptly voted 129 to 32 in favor of calling a ratification convention. However, as reports of Federalist illegalities in Pennsylvania's convention appeared in local newspaper articles, the public began expressing doubt and distrust. The political polarization and unpredictability highlighted by Shays' Rebellion only deepened tensions as the state faced ratification.

Convention details were similar to those executed in Pennsylvania (without the games the Pennsylvania leaders had played). The state convention lasted from January 9, 1788, until February 7. The demographic make-up of the convention delegates strongly favored the Federalists, as all of the state's prominent pro-ratification leaders, none of the Antifederalist leaders, had been elected. (All the Antifederalists lived in strongly pro-ratification areas). Deliberations began on January 14 and, in a favorable move for the Federalists, the assembly agreed to debate the Constitution paragraph by paragraph as opposed to a complete unit. Convention delegates elected the popular governor, John

[248] Richard R. Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteen-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 73.

Hancock, to be president of the convention, although due to poor health he did not attend until January 30. As a member of the Federal Constitution Convention, Eldridge Gerry was invited to attend the convention in order to provide helpful commentary. However, frequently interrupted and silenced by the dominant Federalists in the convention, he stopped attending and never presented his views to the convention. On February 12 an article in the *Massachusetts Centinel* proposed the ratification of the constitution with amendments.[249] From that point on, the Federalists worked hard to use this suggestion as a compromise in gaining support from the Antifederalists.

The emotionally charged atmosphere of the state and the growing suspicion toward traditional political leaders created a perfect storm. As the public began demanding increased participation and interaction and the leaders felt that their positions were in jeopardy, political expectations for both middling and elite citizens began shifting. Just what the public began demanding is the focus of the next section.

The Public

Upon its presentation to the Massachusetts' public, commentary immediately began about the public's interaction with the document. Mercy Otis Warren, an elite Antifederalist, wrote to a friend three days after the Constitution appeared in the state via the press. "[A]lmost every one whom I have yet seen reads with attention[,] folds the page with solemnity, & silently wraps up his opinion within his own break. [A]s if affraid of interrupting that calm expectation that has pervaded all ranks for several months

[249] John Fox, "Massachusetts," in Patrick Conley, *The Constitution and the States*, 122.

past."[250] Penned behind closed doors and among men sworn to silence the language used by Warren highlighted the great expectation everyone held—Federalist and Antifederalist—for the Constitution. She recorded the number of days that had passed since the document's arrival and the anticipation with which they waited. She justified her (and the public's) interest by appealing to the Constitution's authors as a "respectable body." When describing public interaction with the document, Warren painted their participation in solemn and deferential terms. She recorded how the reader "folds the page with solemnity" as if the document represented a sacred heirloom worthy of respect. Not only did Warren comment on public deference, she further indicated the public's obeisance by describing their response in private terms. He "silently wraps up his opinion within his own break." Understood presumably as an elite matter, Warren assumed the public response would be one of deference and private acceptance.

Political leaders and those engaged in open debates moved beyond Warren's descriptions to symbolically memorialize the public's role in the upcoming ratification. "All power is derived from the people," an editorialist from the *Boston Gazette* claimed. "THAT is its only legitimate source.—The AMERICAN CONSTITUTION is accordingly to be presented to THE PEOPLE for their adoption or rejection; this will give it its proper BASIS."[251] In traditional role playing, the elite led and the public quietly followed, thus legitimizing the activity of their leaders. Another writer, calling himself "One of the

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[250] Mercy Otis Warren to Catherine Macauley Graham, Milton, 28 September 1787, (*DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 22–23). Mercy Otis Warren was an influential Antifederalist. She came from a politically active family and was good friends with John and Abigail Adams. For an insightful biography of Warren, see Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* ((place?) Harlan Davidson, 1995).

[251] *Boston Gazette*, 29 October, 1787, *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 167.

People," offered his editorials to "the publick" as those who naturally adjudicated the matter.[252] Likewise, in the *Worcester Magazine*, "the people" alone were deemed worthy of judging the merits of the proposed system of government.[253] Another author, identifying himself as the "voice of the people," by signing his editorial, "Vox Populi," suggested that the public would carefully analyze the document. "To the PEOPLE of MASSACHUSETTS. Fellow-Citizens, At this all important crisis you should allow no object however great to divert your attention from the proposed system of federal government."[254] His appeal assumed a certain level of public participation—even beyond the elites. "An American" writing in the *Independent Chronicle*, extended the call to action even further: "No form of government, will make a nation happy, unless there is an active vigilance, in the people, to watch over it, and see that it is well administered."[255] While a tradition of public involvement existed, the level of involvement often remained scripted. So, while the public was symbolically enshrined with rights, the elites never expected them to personally practice such active governing. In the minds of the elite, the people existed as part of a theoretical rights system led by those educated in the finer arts of political practice and theory.

As the elites used the public to justify their decisions, they fashioned a perception of the public as both prudent and malleable. John De Witt IV writing in the *American Herald* relied on language frequently used by such authors to justify the public's perceived will:

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[252] "One of the People," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 17 October, 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 82.
[253] *Worcester Magazine*, 4 October 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 35.
[254] "Vox Populi," *Massachusetts Gazette*, 23 November 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 309.
[255] "An American," *Independent Chronicle*, 6 December; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 399.

> To you, my fellow-citizens, let me now appeal: To you, who do not expect immediately to taste the sweets that flow from unlimited power, who determine upon principles that are immutable, who are not warped by private interest, and do not see through different mediums on different days.[256]

A disinterested, virtuous public presumably would support wise leaders because its moral character would ensure wise judgment. Such flourishes of praise remained enshrined in ambiguous prose that while celebrated an enlightened public never explicitly empowered that public. These amorphous descriptions allowed the elites to decorate the public with a theoretical authority that in reality offered no tangible rights of participation.[257] The rhetoric allowed politics to remain an elite-dominated affair.[258]

The elites utilized fear to seek to control the public. Public leaders believed in the manipulability of the people and frequently reminded the public of its vulnerability. One author noted their manipulability when he wrote in a personal letter, "The people can be convinced that their most important interests will not only be promoted by adopting the constitution, but also that misery & slavery will in all human probability be the consequence of its rejection."[259] References to slavery played upon public fears of losing

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[256] "John De Witt IV," *American Herald*, 19 November 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 265, 267.
[257] For a detailed history of the development of participatory politics within the Anglo world see Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).
[258] For excellent studies on the development of rhetoric during the Revolution and early Republic see, Andrew Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790–1900* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); John Howe, *Language and Political Meaning in Revolutionary America*, (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); and William Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).
[259] "Theodore Sedgwick to Henry Van Schaack," Stockbridge, 5 December 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 384.

hard-earned rights gained in the Revolution.[260] From the *Massachusetts Centinel*, one author noted "it can certainly be of no service to the common interest, to have the publick mind prejudiced and harrassed by fears, surmises, jealousies, and carpings pervious to the meeting of these Conventions."[261] These warnings, offered by both Federalists and Antifederalists, reminded the public that they remained in danger.

Writers also placed themselves above the public, by situating fear-mongering rhetoric in classical terms.[262] A writer calling himself, "Cassius I" warned, "Citizens of Massachusetts, look well about you; you are beset by harpies, knaves, and blockheads, who are employing every artifice and falsehood to effect your ruin."[263] The title "Cassius I" harkened back to a Roman general who had proposed redistributing land. This obvious satire aimed at a classically educated audience revealed the writer's attitude both toward the public and his assumption that educated elites would be reading the paper. Further, he haughtily suggested another author, calling himself "Vox Populi," was "conceited." "Cassius I" disparagingly referred to "Vox Populi," and "others of his class" as those not worthy of consideration or of holding enough power to actually effect change. He placed

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[260] While I do not address racial slavery in this dissertation there is much scholarly work connecting the existence of racial slavery among the states as a strong impetus defining political slavery/political rights for free whites. See Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), and *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004).

[261] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 13 October 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 71–72.

[262] Historians spent a good deal of text arguing over classical references during the 1990s in the Republican versus Liberalism debates. For a summary of the republican arguments see Joyce Appleby, ed., "Republicanism in the History and Historiography of the United States," special issue of *American Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, (1984) and *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (1992). For the liberalism side, see Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (1978). For a good summary of the historiography, see Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (June, 1992), pp. 11–38.

[263] "Cassius I," *Massachusetts Gazette*, 16 November 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 258.

himself within an elite group who understood themselves as the educated protectors of society. Classically-understood, the people held the sacred bond of liberty yet required the leadership and protection of those educated, morally upright leaders of the society to guide them.

When writing of themselves, elite leaders expressed knowledge that their heightened positions meant heightened responsibility. The responsibility that the leaders felt required them to engage with the public on ratification. To refrain from such leadership equaled abdicating one's moral duty to society. On hearing of a distinguished politician refraining from comment on the Constitution, an editorialist criticized him, "for if those who ought to be 'eyes to the blind and feet to the lame,' withheld their opinions and superior intelligence from the people, at this momentous juncture, we have to anticipate every degree of perplexity in adopting the form of federal government now proposed."[264] The public required the leadership of the political leaders. Their "superior intelligence" placed elites in their designated roles as social leaders.

Elites further revealed their paternalistic attitude as they discussed the participation of the middling classes. In a letter between a religious leader, Ebenezer Hazard, and his friend, Jeremy Belknap, Belknap expressed the paternalistic attitude these social leaders held for the public. "It gives us great Pleasure to hear some of the honest sensible independent yeomanry speak in favor of the Const[ituio]n," Belknap noted. "Their feelings, their natural Language—their simillies—are highly

[264] "Examiner," *Hampshire Gazette*, 21 November; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 129.

entertaining."[265] Similar to views later associated with Thomas Jefferson, the people held a sweet naiveté that ensured honest pure thoughts toward the Constitution and politics. In such "entertainment" elites such as Belknap, revealed patronizing and hierarchical view of society. Keeping the public at bay and separate from vulgar details ensured the public's ability to wisely support the best political leaders. Wisdom, prudence, and maturity; these were the characteristics and qualifications of a politically involved public. The rhetoric of the elite celebrated the public, while refusing to empower them.

As much as the elites forecasted danger if their advice was ignored and the Constitution was not adopted, the middling classes wisely turned their language on its head. Specifically any rhetoric that showed signs of representing aristocratic tendency evoked criticism. One editorialist noted that the greatest threat to the public resided in that bogus power source of so-called aristocracy. Aristocracy became the great threat to true freedom. The middling classes quickly honed in on this rhetoric as a significant argument against ratification. One editorialist warned, "The hideous daemon of Aristocracy has hitherto had so much influence as to bar the channels of investigation, preclude the people from inquiry." Accusing the elites of manipulating the free flow of information and retarding any true public investigations and inquiries, this editorialist continued with further damming accusations. "[The daemon of Aristocracy] exstinguish[s] every spark of liberal information of its qualities." Rather than providing the public with facts from which to make independent decisions, the author accused the

[265] Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, Boston, 25–26 January; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1547–49. Jeremy Belknap was the pastor of the church where the state convention was held. He was an influential social and religious leader in the community.

elite of creating a blackout that extinguished all such true knowledge. Strong suspicions against any semblance of elitism and aristocratic airs had dominated the state since Shays' Rebellion. When the Federalists delivered their long classical oratories, rather than being respected for their eloquence and knowledge, the public—such as the editorialist above—distrusted them further. Turning the high rhetorical style of the elite on their head, the middling classes qualified this very method of speaking and writing as proving dangerous to a free society. After all, it was the middling classes that spoke and wrote with such sensible independent language.

Complaints against the elites continued in printed discussions. The topics continued to revolve around suspicion of aristocracy and limited access to information. "Those furious zealots who are for cramming it down the throats of the people, without allowing them either time or opportunity to scan or weigh it in the balance of their understandings, bear the sam[e] marks in their features as those who have been long wishing to erect an aristocracy in THIS COMMONWEALTH."[266] The association of elite with aristocrat, while certainly not new to American rhetoric, highlighted the level of polarization and distrust that pervaded the state at this time. A "husbandman" wrote to a paper, concerned that the Constitution may be an aristocratic institution. "Mr. Russell. I am an husbandman… I am not one of what is commonly called the rich or aristocratick partuy—[the papers] have informed me that the rich people were going to chain us down to tyranny."[267] Such distrust of aristocracy, wealth, and privilege provided a rhetorical space for the middling classes to assert their virtue. It also revealed the growth of a new

[266] "A Federalist," *Boston Gazette*, 26 November 1787; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 320–21.
[267] "A Farmer," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 January 1788; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 665.

identity as husbandman; as such, and others in similar stations began questioning the "rich people" and the "aristocratick partuy." The terms of who could speak in the public sphere were widening at the same time that class became as much of a liability in gathering a following as an asset.

Among the middling classes who participated in these printed debates and public activities were small farmers and mechanics. An interesting alliance emerged between the two middling classes, as they looked to determine their position on the Constitution. "A farmer" noted their similarity of interest:

> The tradesmen of Boston, and the farmers in the country, I have always considered as brethren; and what will injure one, we know will injure the other—and we well know, that if they thrive, our produce will sell well, and find a ready market.—If they are enslaved, we know we shall be—and if they are free—the sam[e] freedom will apply to us.—In short, we must rise or fall—languish or revive—live or die together.

This farmer continued by articulating his (and that of his middling class) distrust of the elite. "[T]he rich merchants, and lawyers… [and] the negociators, for right or wrong, we always suspect them."[268] Another author, calling himself, "A Countryman," provided perspective into the paternalism that many of the middling classes felt came from the elite; and noted his displeasure at such attitudes. He described himself as reasonable and honest man. "I am a plain countryman; I came into Boston under the confidence of my town who are Freeman;—I came to hear arguments, and to bend to conviction." He began his article in a deferential manner highlighting his willingness to "hear arguments" and "bend to conviction." He continued building his argument and began expressing greater independence. He articulated pride at having "spoken my sentiments." Further, he also

[268] "A Farmer," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 January; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 665.

suggested that unfortunately his sentiments had not been well accepted. Interestingly, while accepted when expressing deferential language, as soon as he expressed more confidence in expectation of political involvement he was attacked. “I am pointed at and abused in the streets, for what? Because I feel the independence of a Freeman, and act according to my sentiments. All wisdom is now supposed to be concentrated in one town, and we seem to be considered as mere cattle.” He reminded his readers of the sacrifice many of the Massachusetts farmers suffered during the Revolution and suggested the liberties promised during the Revolution remained illusory. “We are aware, that there are many men of rank and eminence, who are in favour of the New Constitution.” Interestingly, this was not the first time the middling classes had received poor treatment from the elite. “And we are sorry to observe, that the sam[e] sentiments, the same contempt for the rusticity of low life, and the same scorn of our abilities, as men in office had before the revolution, still remains in our country.[269] Once again the Revolution became the standard for determining the political freedoms experienced. And once again, the middling classes remained disillusioned and upset. “A Countryman's” outspoken accusations revealed the decision of the middling classes to refuse to be silent. His indictment of the elites revealed the changing nature of politics.

The act of naming the public “judge” placed the people of Massachusetts at the center of the ratification debate. By using elite fashioned rhetoric as legitimization, the middling sort owned the ratification debate as a public event and pushed for participatory rights. The dualistic nature of the rhetoric about “the publick” created a spectacle few

[269] “A Countryman,” *American Herald*, 21 January 1788; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 757.

elites ever envisioned. This expression of rights marked significantchanges in the political landscape. In the end, it broadened participatory political practices that (while still remaining unequal and largely unrepresentative) expanded the world of Massachusetts's politics further into the public sphere.

Town Meetings

When Massachusetts's middling class positioned themselves as participants in the ratification debate, they simply expanded precedent. As scholars such as Kenneth Lockridge and others have argued, Massachusetts had a long and established tradition of political town meetings where townsmen gathered to govern themselves.[270] This was "the original and protean vessel of local authority," as Lockridge described it.[271] John Adams (with some cynicism) exclaimed that "You may get more by studying Town meeting, and Training Days, than you can by reading Justinian and all his voluminous and heavy Commentators."[272] When it came to the ratification convention, the tradition was not only practiced but widened to encompass more than local concerns.[273] With politics previously town-centric, these participatory practices became nationalistic in focus. Previously localized political behaviors took on new significance as the decisions made in one town

[270] Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985).
[271] Lockeridge, *A New England Town*, 38.
[272] John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, 1:96. I note the cynicism because a few paragraphs later, Adams notes "After attending a Town Meeting, watching the Intrigues, Acts, Passions, Speeches, that pass there, a Retreat to reflect, compare, distinguish will be highly delightful." (1:96.)
[273] At this time Massachusetts had 401 communities. Only 46 did *not* send representatives. John Fox, "Massachusetts," in Patrick Conley, *The Constitution and the States*, 121.

were now seen as having state and federal consequences.[274] What at one time functioned as necessary political meetings for the effectual functioning of a small town now became significant events understood in national terms.[275]

While the Constitutional Convention began nationalizing local communities, Massachusetts's town meetings had already established a culture familiar with political participation. Massachusetts' 1780 state constitution provided broad voting rights for the lower house of the State Assembly. The voting requirement was £60 and while originally the constitution included that one's economic value must be "clear of debt," this was later removed. The stipulation for holding office was £400. Broad voting rights created town meetings that accurately reflected the town's demographic make-up. Worcester County's town meetings provide a good example of the diversity of those who participated. Historian Jackson Turner Main described the voting representatives between 1784 to 1787 as being comprised of "25 farmers, 4 innkeepers, 3 millers, 2 large land-owners, 2 artisans, a shopkeeper, a lawyer, and one whose occupation is unknown."[276] Thus Massachusetts's local political culture provided a solid framework for the interaction that occurred when news of elections for the upcoming ratification crossed the state.

As towns understood the seriousness of the ratification debate they vied for greater state involvement. For example, the town of Dalton in Berkshire County send a

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[274] In making this argument, I am disagreeing with Trish Loughran's argument that the press encouraged more, rather than less localization in the Early Republic. See Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print*.
[275] Beeman notes that in the first quarter of the eighteenth century the combination of fairly sizable land ownership combined with lax application of the law meant that approximately 75% of the free adult males in each town were able to vote. Beeman, *The Varieties of Experience*, 75.
[276] Jackson Turner Main, *Political Parties before the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 85 (footnote 3). He provides detailed and varied statistics describing the composition of the Massachusetts Assembly from 1784–88 on p. 93.

representative to the convention; instead, the town wrote a letter of protest. From their town meeting on the 27 of December they agreed, "that the Resolve of the General Court above mentioned, which excludes this Town from a Representation in the State Convention… to whom the said Constitution is submitted for their Assent and Ratification, is partial and a manifest Infringment of our natural Rights as members of this Community."[277] The townsmen of Dalton proved to be educated as to the political activities of the state. Further, they believed they had a political right to participate in the governance of not just their small town, but also their state. They understood their denial of participation as a denial of natural rights and utilized their public voice to participate in the debate—even if it could not be in the method of convention attendance. Such an immediate and impassioned response revealed the growth of the public sphere in Massachusetts and the political rhetoric quickly filling it. Further, the middling class was gaining confidence in expressing their ideas of political participation and their expectation of contributing to political development. And finally, rather than operating in a vacuum where concerns and political behavior went no farther than the county line, these citizens understood themselves as part of a larger growing political entity, and chose to actively engage in it as self-nominated members.

Records from various counties described public participation as not only electing delegates to the convention, but further, in publicly reading the Constitution and then often electing sub-committees to review the document and decide what recommendations to send with the elected delegates. A few towns even voted to push their delegate

[277] Dalton, Bershire County, 27 December, Town Meeting; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 949.

elections back a few days so that the public would have more time to read the Constitution for themselves.[278]

Town meetings varied in size, participation, and methods of conduct. One gains a good idea of the participants at these meetings from the notes of a meeting held in Cumberland County. Their records note "At a Meeting of the Male Inhabitants of the Town of North Yarmouth, of twenty one Years of Age, and upwards, qualified as by the Constitution of said Commonwealth is provided, to vote for Representatives."[279] Those able to vote had to be twenty-one or older and property owners. However, the numbers that appeared at these events indicated widespread interest.

Activity at these meetings varied. Some towns merely gathered to decide whether to send a delegate or not.[280] At times, townsmen determined to elect delegates but not to send them with any instructions.[281] Others engaged in more detailed public scrutiny of the document. They held multiple meetings to discuss the Constitution article-by-article, section-by-section. They voted in support or rejection of the Constitution, and then, some even drafted amendments to send with their delegates. A transcript from the county of Bristol on the 17th of December, recorded, "Voted to Except the Constitution with amendments Such as the Comm[un]ity hereafter mentioned Shall make."[282] Bristol

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[278] Lenox, Berkshire Count, 17 December, Town Meeting, 10 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 976.
[279] North Yarmouth, Cumberland County, 4 December, Samuel Merrill (Y), David Mitchell (Y), Town Meeting, 4 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 999.
[280] Brunswick, Cumberland County, 8 December, John Dunlap (Y), Town Meeting, 18 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 944.
[281] Danvers, Essex County, 11 December, Israel Hutchinson (N), Samuel Holton (A), Town Meeting, 11 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 950; Oakham, Worcester County, 3 December, Jonathan Bullard, Instructions, 10 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 1001.
[282] Bristol, Lincoln County, 17 December, William Jones (N), Town Meeting, 17 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 940.

citizens met multiple times in sub-committees to determine which position their community supported. The debates gained momentum as information spread from town to town and news of one town's decision influenced others. An editorialist calling himself, "Many Citizens," wrote in the *Massachusetts Centinel*, urging, "A HINT, As several towns have instructed their Delegates to oppose the Constitution—common prudence requires, that this town should also instruct theirs."[283] Regardless of whether the town was pro or anti-ratification, communication existed between each on such an important political matter.

Each town expressed its unique local impulses while also understanding the ramifications of their decisions within nationalistic terms. Citizens shared debates around one central document—the Constitution—and further reformed their political identity around publicly expressed thoughts toward this document. National consciousness may not have been their intent, but this indeed formed a perfect instrument for pushing the various segments of the state toward utilizing a similar political vocabulary and arguing over the practical definition and exercise of political rights.

Interestingly, many of the town meetings that recorded detailed instructions were Antifederalist. One such town was Great Barrington. Concerned for the security and peace of the nation, they penned an extensively detailed report for their delegates. The town of Fryeburg also wrote a detailed letter to their delegate, concluding that, "we would not wish that it should be entirely rejected, as we esteem it with proper

[283] "Many Citizens," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 29 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 938.

amendments to be well calculated to promote the welfare of the Union."[284] Regardless of the specifics, each town understood the ramifications of their decision within national terms.

While these town meetings began as discussions over whether to send delegates to Boston or not, they often acted as the first battleground waged between Federalists and Antifederalists. Arguments sure to surface in Boston first emerged locally.[285] In the town of Ipswich, Samuel Adams recorded that Antifederalists tried to call a second town meeting (after a delegate had been chosen at the first) to have an Antifederalist delegate elected.[286] Townsmen understood the seriousness of the situation, as did the delegates representing them. One delegate, realizing his duty to represent his town's feelings when he felt his own had changed, wrote from the convention to the town seeking to secure approval for changing his vote. George Benson wrote of this event to Nicholas Brown a few days before the final vote was taken:

> Mr. Sprague (Lancaster) a Gentleman of Ability & reputation inform'd the President that he was Chosen to Oppose the Constitution & for that Purpose was instructed & that his Constituents had specificed their objections &c. but that in the Course of his attendance in Convention he had heard that respective articles of the Constitution so amply Discuss'd & the Propriety evinc'd with such Perspicuity & Candour, that he had obtain'd Leave of the Town to exercise his own Judgement &c. &c....[287]

Others complained about the practice of sending delegates with explicit directions, citing the purposelessness of debate if each town would not allow its delegate to compromise or

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[284] Fryeburg, York County, 6 December, 6 December, Moses Ames (N), Town Meeting, 6 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 954.
[285] Newbury, Essex County, 4 December, Essex Journal, 2 January 1788; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 985.
[286] Samuel Adams Diary, Ipswich, 25 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 974.
[287] George Benson to Nicholas Brown, Boston, 3 February 1788; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 976.

debate.[288] At least one newspaper recorded the resignation of a delegate because he could not follow the instructions given him by his town. Other newspapers balked at these restrictions and one letter from William Cranch to John Quincy Adams noted that "Several who had instructions for their towns, convinced of the Goodness of the Constitution, have returned home & have resolved that if the town will not withdraw their Restrictions & allow them to vote according to the dictates of their Consciences, they will not return to the Convention."[289] The interaction between the delegates in Boston not only formalized the imagined statewide public sphere that was emerging, but united the state in negotiations for representation. On either side of the debate, town meeting notes revealed the active ownership middling classes took in this political activity. Drawing attention to themselves, the middling sort understood their town halls as parts of a larger statewide debate initiated by the elites and answered by an engaged public.

Many times, regardless of difference of approach, town records indicated the nationalist terms with which the townsmen understood the debate. Instructions given to Jonathan Bullard of Worcester presented his duty as elected delegate in nationalistic prose, informing him that "the decision of which depends ye. Rising or falling of ye. American Empire."[290] Town meeting attendants in Hampshire County noted their concerns for the "Design of the general Union," and also indicated their national interests as they referenced debates in Pennsylvania.[291] Another town chided its inhabitants to

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[288] "Marcus," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 January 1788; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 1017.
[289] William Cranch to John Quincy Adams, Boston, 27 January; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 1075.
[290] Oakham, Worcester County, 3 December, Jonathan Bullard, Instructions, 10 December; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 1001.
[291] Bernardston and Leyden, Hampshire County, 26 November, Agrippa Wells (N), Town Meeting and Instructions, 26 November; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 904.

closely consider, "It is not a Subject that ought to be passed without the most careful Attention, the most serious Consideration and the candid Discussion of the People in general, as well as those Gentlemen who are already & may yet be appointed & chosen to take it into Consideration."[292] Each town remained keenly aware of the larger Union and their role in forming this Union. The nation's future was at stake and each town saw itself involved in this historic event.

Massachusetts men of varying status and position engaged in the ratification debate and owned it as their own. In these meetings, men of elite and middling status met and engaged in dialogue and argument over the nature of the future of the nation. The strength of resistance to the Constitution required that the elite gain the support of the middling classes and keep it. This necessity of dialogue and support combined with the growing ownership of participatory politics by the middling class meant that the politics of the emerging nation would be much more defined by elite and middling negotiations than by elite leadership.

The Press

Massachusetts at this time had approximately twelve presses—a large number for this period—and all of them eagerly engaged with ratification. Boston boasted the largest number of presses, topping at out five (the *Massachusetts Centinel*[293], *American Herald*, *Boston Gazette*, *Independent Chronicle*, and *Massachusetts Gazette*). Newburyport,

[292] Dwight Foster: Minutes of an Address to the Town, 17 December, Brookfield, Worcester County; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 5, 941.
[293] Benjamin Russell, apprentice to the famous colonial printer Isaiah Thomas, was the printer of *Massachusetts Centinel*.

Salem, Worcester, Springfield, Northampton, Portland (Maine), and Pittsfield each printed newspapers as well. The most well known Boston papers, the *Massachusetts Centinel* and *Massachusetts Gazette*, appeared semi-weekly while all the others appeared weekly. The *Massachusetts Centinel* represented the dominant Federalist voice, while the *American Herald* printed Antifederalist materials. The *Independent Chronicle*, the *Massachusetts Gazette*, and occasionally the *Boston Gazette* also printed Antifederalist materials. Not only did the press provide a stage for the exposure of public arguments for and against ratification, but also it arguably represented the most vitriolic and influential aspects of this spectacle. Significantly, it was both a mediator and participant. Through its engagement, it gave voice to a growing "public" opinion.[294]

While the elite fashioned some of the prose that appeared in the press, they could not control all of the materials or the content of those materials that appeared in various presses across the state. As an educated and highly literate public, the readership of Massachusetts closely monitored the freedom of the press. Hence, an editorial in the *Massachusetts Centinel* noted "The several Printers on the Continent are requested to notice in their papers, that since the commencement of the present year, the Printers in the northern States, have received scarce a single paper, printed beyond the Hudson.… the channels of information should be kept as free as possible."[295] Others complained of the restrictive publication policies employed by some of the printers. For example, printer Edward Eveleth Powars complained about Russell's pro-Federalist printing bias. He in

[294] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: li-lii.
[295] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 16 February; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 820.

return received criticism himself for doing so.[296]

As the eyes of the public, the press served an integral part of the convention itself. Printers attended the convention and sat in assigned seats in order that the full details of the debates could be printed across the state.[297] Editors knew what the public perceived as their right and engaged in an active printing business that mediated the convention for the public. One observer affirmed the central role that newspapers played in transmitting the information from the convention to the wider state: "I send a Number of Papers, could not obtain all the Debates in Course—the Editor of the *Centinel* takes them Down in short hand & from his Paper the other Printers Transcribe." Interestingly, he also noted that they were behind in their printing. He described their current status as being "several Days in the rear, but will be up soon—a Subscription is Open to publish the whole in a Pamphlet."[298] As editors struggled to keep up with the massive influx of data many papers chose to omit some articles on traditional issues in favor of convention-related materials. Their reasoning for doing so revealed a faith in the important role of the press as transmitter of political information necessary for governing. "The free debates in Convention throw great light on the proposed Federal Constitution; by them shall we be enabled to discover its imperfections as well as its perfections, and thereby form a better judgment of its answering the end intended."[299] The more materials the press printed from the convention debates, the more public the spectacle became and the more a vocal middling populous utilized such knowledge to assert their opinions and become

[296] "The Boston Press and the Constitution," 4 October 22–December; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1].
[297] Theodore Sedgwick to Henry van Schaack, Boston, 18 January; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 740–1.
[298] George Benson to Nicholas Brown, Boston, 29 January; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1556.
[299] *Worcester Magazine*, 31 January; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1564.

important participants in the political world.

The press was, and became part of the debate as various factions utilized it to seek to convince others of their position. Where this is most evident is in the city of Boston, whose laborers and mechanics learned to utilize the presses for their own purposes. The tradesmen and mechanics of Boston were an emerging influential middling class in Boston politics. Federalists and Antifederalists courted this constituency frequently through newspaper articles and editorials. After a meeting among some of Boston's elites, a rumor was spread, allegedly through Samuel Adams, that his main constituents—the artisans and mechanics of Boston—opposed the Constitution. These artisans—angered their views had been misrepresented—called a meeting to determine their true position (which according to them, had not yet been decided nor publicized). As narrated by the press, Nathaniel Gorham learned that the leaders of the tradesmen "intended that Evening to have the most numerous Caucas ever held in Boston to consider what was to be done in consiquence of Mr Adams declaration." The tradesmen relied heavily upon the press to gather their members. Two days after rumors of unrest had emerged, the *Boston Gazette* ran the following announcement: "The real TRADESMEN of the Town of Boston, are requested to meet at the Green Dragon Tavern THIS EVENING, at Six o'clock, on Business of the first importance."[300] More than 380 tradesmen gathered at the tavern and unanimously adopted five resolutions announcing their wholehearted support

[300] "Notice to the Tradesmen," *Massachusetts Gazette*, 8 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1616–17.

of the Constitution.[301] These five resolutions and narrative of the event promptly appeared in the press.[302] The artisans and mechanics in Boston used the press as more than a mediator. They used it to negotiate a voice in the debate and in the process presented themselves as a force to be reckoned with in Boston politics.

This use of taverns as political meeting places was becoming more and more common. John Adams complained that they were "becoming in many places the nurseries of our legislators." Of further concern to him were the ways that men "plott[ed] with the landlord to get him, in the next town meeting and election, either for selectman or representative."[303]

The other unique debate that occurred through the press—showing it to be more than simply a mediator, but part of the debate itself—was a debate that emerged over whether or not pseudonyms were appropriate to use when editorializing. Federalists began claiming that Antifederalists used the title of "Federalist" to catch attention and then, in fact, argued against the Constitution. Because of this perceived trickery, they called for individuals to identify themselves by name. "DEFINITIONS! A FEDERALIST is a Friend to a Federal Government—An ANTI-FEDERALIST is an Enemy to a Confederation."[304] Names and titles were assumed to hold potential authority to influence; their misapplication was thus dangerous.

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[301] The use of the tavern as a political gathering space is a growing field of study. See David Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999).
[302] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 8 January; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 629.
[303] John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Volume 1, 1755–1770, 128–129. The Adams Papers Digital Edition, ed. C. James Taylor. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008).
[304] "Agrippa V," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 11 December; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 405.

In this case, the political leaders desired to have names printed because they believed arguments were legitimate only by being linked to "legitimate" people. Further, knowing who supported what cause was another means of applying public pressure. One Antifederalist town voted for this exact purpose in their town meeting. They wrote their delegate instructing him to vote against for ratification. Further, they requested that they should "move in Convention when the grand Question is Put whether said Constitution be adopted or not that the Question be decided by Yeas or Nays and that the *Names be Published* that the world may know who are friends to the Liberties of this Commonwealth and who not."[305] An "Observer" writing in the *Independent Chronicle* confirmed this role, "it is the indispensible duty of the people to drown formentors of disturbance in a torrent of contempt; the power of doing this, is in the people, and is one of those precious liberties, which we now properly call our own."[306] Fears of misuse of print sparked a huge debate over the purpose of names and the authority they conveyed in print, thus making what was usually a conduit for the debate, a debate itself.[307] Through such events as the public meeting of Boston's tradesmen and the pseudonym argument, the presses' central role in both widening and intensifying middle classes participation steadily grew.

The Official Convention

Hundreds of Massachusetts citizens attended the convention debates in Boston

[305] Town Meeting, Great Barrington, Draft Instructions, 26 November"; *DHRC*, V, [Massachusetts, 2]: 960. (Italics mine.)
[306] "Observator," *Independent Chronicle*, 4 October"; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 39.
[307] "The Boston Press and the Constitution, 4 October– 22 December," (selections); *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 41–50.

daily. Nathaniel Freeman Jr., wrote to John Quincy Adams, "I have spent the week past in Boston to hear the debates of the Convention, and my time has been so entirely occupied by my attention to the interesting subject of their deliberations & to company, that I could not find a moments leisure for writing."[308] While originally convened in the State House, the legislature quickly found that the number of delegates, combined with the spectators wishing to observe the debates, along with representatives from local newspapers resulted in too large a number of people to comfortably fit in the current building. The need became so great that the convention created a sub-committee to search out an appropriate meeting venue. One local church was tried, but participants found they could not adequately hear the speakers, and so they returned to the state house until another building could be secured. Eventually, the Reverend Mr. Belknap offered the services of his church building. Other generous individuals from the city provided stoves to heat the large space and thus the convention moved its approximate 400 delegates and equally large spectator crowd to the Long Lane Meeting House.[309] In this building, seating arrangements were prescribed for the various constituencies desirous of attending. The convention journal noted:

> Voted That the Pulpit be assigned for the Gentlemen of the Clergy who may in Town, and that the Monitors provide seats for such as cannot be accommodated there. Voted That the Stairs under the Galleries be assigned for the Printers.[310]

The seating arrangements revealed the hierarchical attitude adopted by the organizers of the convention. With the honoring of clergy as its first appointment, the convention

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[308] Nathaniel Freeman, Jr., to John Quincy Adams, Medford, 27 January; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1551.
[309] Committee Report on Place of Meeting, 16 January; *DHRC*, VI, [Massachusetts, 3]: 1224.
[310] Convention Journal, 17 January, P.M.; *DHRC*, VI, [Massachusetts, 3]: 1235.

delegates revealed their biases. However, elite and middling interactions through their physical presence as both delegates and more significantly, as spectators in the convention building, turned an elite-led event into a state-wide negotiation for power.

Once convened, the delegates agreed to discuss the Constitution section by section, ensuring a lengthy debate. Some fretted over what this meant for its passage. Rufus King, writing to James Madison, noted "Our convention proceeds slowly—an apprehension that the liberties of the people are in danger, and [shows] a distrust of men of property or Education."[311] Such a note from a leading politician revealed the divisions among the delegates and the distrust that existed between the elite and the middling sort. The debates droned on day after day, and in an effort toward fairness, delegates were allowed to speak at will.[312] These lengthy debates created tensions that put not only those speaking on edge, but also affected the convention audience. One attendee recorded: "Yesterday a boy clapped his hands in the Gallery & some who were by cried hush with a continued sound of the sh—this was interpreted as a hiss—they s[ai]d they were insulted & were for removing or shutting up the galleries & it was above an hour before they would the matter subside."[313] The offense indicated the tense nature of the event. Public observance and scrutiny only heightened an already publicly contested event.

Another issue that furthered distrust was the nature of the divisions between the speakers. A spectator, taking special note of the speaking abilities of the convention delegates, recorded that "When the Convention met, the division of the members was

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[311] Rufus King to James Madison, Boston, 20 January; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1539.
[312] Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, Boston, 25–26 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Massachusetts, 5]: 1547–49.
[313] Ibid., 1547–49.

very striking." He reported that eloquence remained only on the side of the Federalists, which left the middling Antifederalists at a severe disadvantage. "All the learning and eloquence was on one side, while the plain dictates of common sense suffered from the want of powers of expression, on the other." Continuing on in his commentary, he suggested, "With such disproportioned abilities the discussion could not be satisfactory."[314] While the Antifederalists may have suffered from a lack of eloquence, the skepticism of the spectators forced the Federalists to employ all their rhetorical arts in order to convince a dubious public of the validity of their position. Further, the previously discussed distrust the public expressed toward any suggestion of aristocracy meant the elite had a careful word-dance to conduct. The authority social positions previously guaranteed decayed as the public listened more closely to the rhetoric expressed. This increased pressure proved yet another arena where the public used the ratification debates to move politics from the realm of private elite to that of the publicly engaged middling sort.

While serious negotiations emerged between elite and non-elite over the course of the convention, those attending the convention also saw it as entertainment. The convention helped push politics out of the secret and the private and into the unrestricted and the communal. During this transformation American nationalism became increasingly defined by public political decision-making. One convention attendee noted, "[I] have attended the Debates this day in Convention, & as I went early in the forenoon & afternoon I fortunately posses'd myself of a very advantageous situation for seeing &

[314] George R. Minot Journal; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1599.

hearing—and have been richly entertaine'd."[315] The public was fully immersed in the event, eagerly awaiting the outcome that none could predict. While the realm of politics had previously been conducted in private among the elite, now all was in the open. On the day of the final vote for (or against) ratification, the public waited in the gallery during the two-hour break that occurred between the adjournment of the morning session and the declaration of the outcome of the votes. "I attend in the Gallery from 9 O[']C[lock] in the morning until within a half an hour since, & eat my dinner there on Ginger bread & Cheese, which I sent a boy to buy in a Neighboring Shop—the Gallerys remain'd full the whole time of the Adjournment of the Convention from 1. to 3 O[']C[lock]—such was the anxiety of the minds of the people on this important question."[316] The debates produced a spectacle that existed as far more than a stage for elite manipulation. As people watched, journaled, editorialized, and publicly debated the occurrences of the convention, they produced a public event far beyond the control of the elite. They also fashioned American political culture into a much more public activity.

From the depiction of the public in the press and the vitriolic rhetoric and fears expressed by both groups, the Massachusetts ratification convention proved to be more a state-wide public event than a privately orchestrated elite-led affair. Further, the closeness of the final vote reveals not only the divisions across the state, but also the compromises and negotiations that flew back and forth as each side sought to sway enough votes. The conference ended with an affirmative vote, but not before it was agreed in the convention that the ratification would be submitted with a list of

[315] George Benson to Nicholas Brown; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1557.
[316] Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, Boston 6 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1580.

amendments.[317] The existence of these amendments and their relationship to the passage of the Constitution, further confirms the dynamic negotiations with which elites and their public engaged. The public nature of the convention debates revealed the movement of the spectacle from a privately directed political manipulation to a publicly influenced negotiation.

Public Parades, Toasts, and Celebrations

While town meetings, the press, and the convention itself formed crucial parts of the emerging public voice, the most convincing examples of the growing public national consciousness emerged in the celebrations afterwards.[318] The *Massachusetts Centinel* reported some of the more popular celebrations to be activities such as artillery showings for the public and dining at local taverns. Of the numerous citizens offering toasts, they often framed these toasts in nationalistic prose praising the wisdom of General George Washington and the Federal Convention in Philadelphia. They celebrated the Constitution as the necessary lineage in defending the hard earned rights of the Revolution. And, finally, the proud citizens of Massachusetts toasted the prudence of the state in leading the way by ratifying the new document. "As OLD MASSACHUSETTS

[317] The list of Amendments submitted by Massachusetts can be summarized as: 1) States reserve rights not assigned, 2) Changes to equation for representatives, 3) Further rights to alter representatives, 4) No direct taxation unless otherwise agreed, 5) No company of merchants should be established by Congress, 6) Grand Jury right to death penalty crimes, 7) The Supreme Court should be limited in cases crossing state lines, 8) Right to trial by jury, and 9) No titles of nobility should be held by anyone holding public office in the United States.

[318] For literature on the significance of public celebrations to the growth of nationalism see, Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), and Mary P. Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth Century Social Order," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkley: UCLA Press, 1989), 131–153.

took the LEAD in the late glorious revolution, may she be the first to give a sanction to the AMERICAN CONSTITUTION of government."[319] Once again, a deeply localized state pushed local politics into a newly emerging national consciousness.

Middling involvement in the debates flowed over into elite celebrations. In the town of Berwick, the press reported that many of the inhabitants gathered at a local household to privately celebrate the passage. While this particular gathering began as an elite event, it quickly—as described by the press—widened its participation. "To render the joy universal, and communicate to the breasts of their fellow citizens, a share of that pleasure which they felt—a general invitation was given to the Mechanicks and Yeomanry of the neighborhood, to meet at an adjacent house, where a frugal repast was provided by subscription, for their entertainment."[320] Clearly, the elite leaders of the state realized their growing dependence on the middling class and made efforts (if grudgingly) to acknowledge their involvement. This was then followed by a series of nationalistic toasts celebrating the Constitution and the thirteen states that they hoped would now solidify the United States of America.

While elites privately gathered in the legislative chambers after the passage to congratulate themselves on their victory, Boston proper owned the celebration outdoors with great cheer.[321] One participant reported public reaction in Boston, noting "The moment the Ratification was declared outdoors, the whole of the Bells in Town were set a Ringing & a general Joy & Congratulation took place throughout the Town—every

[319] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 3 October; *DHRC*, IV, [Massachusetts, 1]: 33.
[320] *Independent Chronicle*, 21 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1609.
[321] *Massachusetts Gazette*, 8 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1611.

class of people, assembled as it were in an instant in State Street, which was crouded with thousands, & to express their Joy with one heart & soul sent three Huzza's the Heaven fair."[322] Newspapers reported the response of the public to be in line with this memory. "[A] multitude of people, from all quarteres, moved into State-street, where they manifested the joy they felt from this event, by incessant tokens of approbation, and loud huzzas."[323]

A more important aspect of the public celebrations in Boston at this time appeared through the citywide parade. A unique development in popular parades of the eighteenth-century, Boston's Constitutional parade not only saluted the public, but featured the middling classes. A first in public festivities, Boston's political celebration was organized by the mechanics and artisans of the city and featured the many hard-working groups in the city and nearby suburbs. The mechanics invited public participation by the following publication in the local newspaper:

Notice to the Tradesmen

> THE COMMITTEE of MECHANICKS appointed at their meeting the 7th ult. present their compliments to the several TRADESMEN, MECHANICKS and ARTISANS of every description in the town of Boston, and request their attendance at Faneuil-Hall, this morning, at NINE o'clock, in order to form and proceed in GRAND PROCESSION there from, to testify their approbation of the ratification of the Federal Constitution, by the Convention of this commonwealth the 6th instant. They recommend that the procession be formed as follows—First, a plough, drawn by a horse, with husbandmen carrying proper utensils—to proceed by trades; each trade with one person at its head—With the ship-builders, &c. will be a boat, drawn by horses, properly manned. They request that the procession may be as full as possible; that the procession, that the several drummers, fifers, and other musicians in the town, will join the procession with

[322] Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, Boston, 6 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1580.
[323] *Massachusetts Gazette*, 8 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1611.

their instruments. The route[e] of the procession will be mentioned at the Hall.[324] This invitation was significant for its source, the artisans, and its audience, the general public.

This public celebration was not about the elites at all, but was orchestrated by and featured the middling classes. The parade first featured representatives from Massachusetts' hard-working farmers as "The Farmers with a plough and other implements of husbandry led the procession." Boston was a strong naval center, and the farmers were followed by "a Ship called the new Constitution fixed on a Sledge drawn by 13 horses, with a number of men on board represented a flourishing commerce.—followed by a great number of merchants." This metaphor of the Constitution as a secure ship sailing for freedom had frequently filled the Massachusetts papers, thus making the symbolism in the parade even more fitting. While the original symbolism rhetorically bantered about was written mostly by elites, the public co-opted elite messages once again and turned them into a celebration of their perceptions of themselves as influencers in this debate. They also recognized themselves in the larger national debate as drawn by thirteen horses. After the farmers and their naval friends, "almost every order of mechanicks, with their proper tools were in the procession." In a flourish of contrast and representing the nationalist terms of the parade, it ended with "a boat representing the old Confederation, very leaky and irreparable … drawn on a Sledge."[325] Organized by the men in the parade, this event not only honored the hardworking men of Boston and its

[324] "Notice to the Tradesmen," *Massachusetts Gazette*, 8 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1616–17.
[325] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1618–28.

environs, but celebrated them as those who had chosen a new national government for themselves and their children.

Not only was the parade significant because of who participate in it, but it also called forth a tremendous amount of public reaction. In reporting on the parade, the press highlighted public approval of the affair. "This day the Farmers from this Town Joyned [sic] the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston in an exhibition expressive of their approbation, of the adoption of the federal System." [326] Benjamin Lincoln writing to George Washington noted, "I heard … a Lady the last evening who saw the whole that the description in the paper would no more compare with the original than the light of the faintest star would with that of the Sun fortunately." The elite even recognized the success of this event. In approbation of the maturity of the public, one author declared, "for us the whole ended without the least disorder and the town during the whole evening was, so far as I could observe perfectly quiet." Henry Jackson wrote, "at Eleven O'C[lock] the grandest procession took place from Faneuil Hall that you ever saw, or ever was seen in this Country,—since its first settlement—it is not in the power of Tongue, or Pen, to describe the sublimity & Grandeur of the Column." This excited crowd not only contained Boston inhabitants, but according to records, "the croud of people from the Country was immence." The parade itself lasted for five hours and afterwards, a gathering of 3,000 people celebrated with wine and cheese.[327] Through such organization, the inhabitants of Boston utilized the spectacle to push politics away from being a private elite-dominated affair, and into the public sphere, further defining the

[326] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 February; *DHRC*, VII, [Massachusetts, 4]: 1618–28.
[327] Ibid., 1618–28.

nationalistic practices being formed and defined as "American."

As mentioned earlier, toasts were an integral part of the celebratory process. Military regiments across Massachusetts came out in true form with cannon salutes to further the celebrations. Toasts and cannon salutes often came in numbers of thirteen, celebrating the thirteen states that were to become one united nation.[328] In toasts and military salutes, the citizens of Massachusetts revealed their national consciousness. While the activities of the Massachusetts public were celebrated, even more venerated were the symbols of the new United States. The significance of the number thirteen, the frequent reference to George Washington, and the appeals to the legacy of the Revolutionary War all pushed the public toward a more nationalistic political legacy and away from a state or regionally focused political legacy.

The press also engaged in enshrining new national symbols. One such symbol was that of pillars. As each state ratified the Constitution the press would celebrate by claiming another pillar had been raised in the grand new edifice of the United States. Massachusetts rejoiced at being the sixth state to ratify and thus acted as the sixth pillar producing the grand architectural marvel that would make up the United States.[329] Once again, this public celebration orchestrated by the middling sort found its emerging identity not just in local political expressions, but also in national as well. Through such public events, the middling classes not only celebrated their involvement, but reminded political elites that they were a force to be reckoned with in the newly emerging political world. While toasting and military displays at times were distinct events, other towns

[328] *Hampshire Chronicle*, 13 February; *DHRC*, VI, [Massachusetts, 3]: 1636.
[329] *Independent Chronicle*, 7 February; *DHRC*, VI, [Massachusetts, 3]: 1606.

enshrined these national rituals by combining the two in significant ways. The crowd steadfastly remained in attendance as the audience showed by their presence both their support and their necessary approbation of political events. The public existed in a dualistic position as both organizer and audience, as observer and judge. As they did so, they established new nationalist practices that broadened participatory practices.

Conclusion

Many have argued that the rhetoric expressed in print and public communications regarding public rights in political decisions existed as mere formality; a spectacle created to control the public. Yet, through editorials, journals, letters, public meetings, and the convention itself, the public turned perceptions and rhetoric to their advantage, and negotiated the meaning of the spectacle and assumed a role far beyond that of mere observers. Historian Richard Beeman summarized the changing nature of Massachusetts politics, noting that "as the ethnic and religious homogeneity of Massachusetts society gradually dissipated, as the nucleated New England village stretched out over space, and as the rhetoric of 'popular rights,' used so often against royal officials to undermine the power of the traditional ruling elites" expanded, Massachusetts' polity changed. While "not wholly disconnected from each other," the trajectory had moved in the opposite direction. The ratification convention proved to be the needed catalyst to mobilize an already growing public consciousness into all-out action.[330]

[330] Richard Beeman, *The Varieties of Experience*, 277. Ronald Formisano also traces the changes in political behavior across the state in *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790–1840s* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Understanding town meetings to be the first battlefield for arguments for and against ratification, Federalists and Antifederalists across classes connected these traditionally local meetings into a statewide spectacle. Through the mediation of the press as it represented public perceptions, political elites realized that their public spectacle had moved beyond their control. By playing on elite representations and perceptions, the middling classes moved politics toward much more publicly negotiated events filled with increasingly "American" nationalistic practices.

This case study suggests that participatory politics existed as more than a mere elite-dominated phenomena. The middling classes increasingly voiced their concerns and understood this expression as a "right." The press also existed as a key element in the development of political participation as editorialists and readers alike created "texts" that shaped both local and national public opinion and attitude toward politics. While this study looks at the presentation of arguments and reception of these arguments as public spectacles negotiating political relationships, the significance of such a study is much wider than Massachusetts in the 1780s. Understanding the media and its impact upon drawing the elites and the public into political activity provides insights into the developing politicization of the people of the new United States. Such a study contributes to the growing historiography analyzing the nature of the public sphere and its impact upon politics. Understanding the nature of the media used to influence political involvement and its impact also speaks to modern day debates over the role of news media in the political process and even to the development of democracy.

CHAPTER 4: Great Expectations: New York's Political Leaders, Its Press, and the Public during the State Ratification Convention

New York citizens engaged in the ratification process similarly to each state before and after it. The state received news from Philadelphia of the Federal Convention's completion of the drafted document. Its citizens waited with intense anticipation as the document made its way from the Pennsylvania State House to the New York legislature, and then to the public. Heated debates burst into the public sphere through print and public debates in the State Assembly. The public responded to the calling of the state convention by sending delegates to Poughkeepsie, following the convention through reports via letters and the press, and waited on the final ratification vote. With the course of affairs following a clear pattern and understanding that the outcome was comparable to that of preceding states, what—if anything—marked New York's interaction with the Federal Constitution as unique or noteworthy? How did its public respond to the document differently than in Pennsylvania or Delaware?

Determining who participated in the New York ratification debate and decision process involves determining just who comprised New York's "public" at this time. Historian Saul Cornell has asserted that understanding New York citizens requires understanding the role of the middling class. "The role of the 'middling sort' in early American politics [specifically in New York] has been neglected in recent

scholarship."[331] This middling sort became the final arbiters in the ratification debate of New York. The middling class polity that arose came, in great part, due to the efforts of the Antifederalists in championing the middling man and in presenting a new definition of politics that placed them at the center. In New York, "rather than identifying virtue with leisured affluence," (another name for the elite) Cornell argued, "New York antifederalists proudly asserted that the protection of the rights and liberties of the people 'depended on the middle sort of people'." These middling sort—yeomanry, husbandmen and mechanics—were seen as being less tempted by power and prestige, as living simpler, more disciplined lives, and thus were able to "set bounds to their passions and appetites."[332] Interestingly, as New York's middling sort gained prominence and as their decision to be active in society increased, so did the influence of their main mouthpiece, the press.

The elevation of the middling class arose in great part due to the rhetoric that began empowering the middling sorts to assume the role of authority they had always been said to have held. New York's 1777 special convention had created a state constitution that aided in the rise of the middling activity in politics. The property qualifications for voting and office holding (in the lower house) permitted 60 percent of adult white males to participate. As historian Jackson Turner Main noted "Since balloting now became secret, the assembly was reasonably representative of public opinion,

[331] "Politics of the Middling Sort," by Saul Cornell, Paul A. Gilje and William Pencak, eds., *New York in the Age of the Constitution 1775–1800* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 152).
[332] Ibid., 163, 164.

except, of course, for those with little or no property."[333] Forces thus joined together to empower the middling class to greater political participation at a time when the confederation erupted into serious discussion over what its political future would look like.

New York represents a worthy case study for the insight its rising middling class and the emerging newspaper industry offered on the expectations the public and the political leaders had for political representation in 1787 and 1788. New York state's ratification convention highlighted key attitudes that leaders and the public held about the nature of the nation's citizens and the role the press should play in shaping the politics of those citizens.

The Newspapers of New York

New York was a large state with three important cities—New York City, Albany, and Poughkeepsie— and New York's newspapers reflected the sectional, cultural, and political differences existing within the state. In the year between the publication of the Federal Constitution and its ratification in New York, twelve newspapers and a monthly magazine were published across the state.[334] New York City, understandably, boasted the largest numbers of newspapers, as seven papers and one magazine were publishedacross the city environs.[335] It was the first city in the state to print the complete Constitution

[333] Jackson Turner Main, *Political Parties before the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 122–123. Main also noted that "during the 1780s the lower house contained members of all New York's economic, social, and cultural groups except for those of less than average wealth and status." (123)
[334] In comparison, Pennsylvania boasted fifteen newspapers and two magazines, ten of which were printed in Philadelphia. *DHRC,* II, [Pennsylvania], 37.
[335] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: lxi.

once it arrived in September 1787.[336] And, not surprisingly it also housed some of the most ardent supporters of the Federalist position. The *Daily Advertiser*, the *New-York Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, and the *New-York Journal, and Daily Patriotic Register* constituted the daily newspapers printed in the city. The city of Albany also had its own papers, some of which were started during the ratification period in order to counteract the large number of Federalist-supporting papers. Poughkeepsie, the smallest of the three main cities, housed the state legislature and thus its newspapers provided the state with the official record of the state legislative activity, including the legislative activity of the ratification convention. The semi-weekly and monthly papers came from the state capitol, Albany, which boasted two newspapers. Hudson and Poughkeepsie each housed one paper apiece. Lansingburgh housed one final newspaper; losing it at one point to Albany, only to have it return.[337]

New York City's newspaper editors took great pride in their papers. Francis Childs, with the assistance of Benjamin Franklin, founded the first daily newspaper in the city, the *Daily Advertiser*, in March of 1785. A staunchly Federalist newspaper, the *Advertiser* published countless Federalist pieces, including articles one through fifty-five of the Federalist papers written by "Publius." Childs attended the ratification debates in Poughkeepsie at "considerable expense," as he described it, in order to record first-hand the arguments put forth for and against the Constitution. Eyewitness reporting and the prestige awarded those printers who were recording materials first-hand continued to raise the importance of the press as it acted as the eyes and ears of the people. While

[336] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 42.
[337] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: lvi.

Childs represented a Federalist-leaning paper, Thomas Greenleaf represented an Antifederalist paper, the *New-York Journal*. The ardor of passion for the Antifederalist cause emanating from Greenleaf's paper rivaled the renowned Antifederalist paper in Philadelphia, *The Independent Gazetteer*.[338] The *New-York Morning Post*, on the other hand, published both Antifederalist and Federalist materials, occasionally showing bias toward the former. It was a paper that utilized materials from outside the state, in order to fill its pages, and rarely printed an original piece itself.

The first printing frenzy occurred with the announcement of the passage of the Federal Constitution from the Constitutional Convention. Once the Constitution left the State House in Philadelphia, printers all over New York state reacted quickly. From the 21st of September through the 4th of October, nine newspapers across the state published the complete text of the Constitution. By the close of the year, another Albany paper had printed the document and other printers had produced independent pamphlets and broadsides.[339] Twenty-five broadsides appeared providing the complete text of or related text to the Constitution. During the months of March and April alone (in 1788) printers produced a dozen handbills arguing either for or against the merits of the Constitution.[340]

Pennsylvania contributed significant and substantial original printed materials to the constitutional debates. When New York entered the debates they provided the first real competition in the cross-state printing wars. While the New York papers fell short of

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[338] The Philadelphia printer, Eleaser Oswald, at first included both Federalist and Antifederalist pieces in the *Gazeteer*. However, in November 1787 the paper took a clear Antifederalist position and only printed Antifederalist-supporting pieces. His newspaper contained more original items than any other Philadelphia newspaper, many of which were reprinted throughout the United States. *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: lxi.
[339] "The Debate over the Constitution in New York, 21 July 1787–31 January 1788: Introduction: Public Commentaries on the Constitution"; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 3.
[340] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: lxvii.

printing a similar number of original squibs and articles compared to Pennsylvania, this did not keep them from reprinting the voluminous works circulating from their southern neighbor. [341] Eventually, with the publication of what became known as *The Federalist Papers*, the state produced materials that became standard pieces in the newspapers of other states. John Jay, the author of several of the early Federalist papers, proved this when his address to the people of New York became a staple among the classic works printed during the ratification debates.

Printers fell over themselves to attract support by seeking to provide the most time-sensitive and important information for their readership. While the public clearly expected such materials from the press, financial commitments from newspaper consumers rarely remained reliable. Frequently, even those who had agreed to pay a subscription price (as opposed to those who listened to others read the newspaper in the tavern or borrowed a friend's copy) were often delinquent on their payments. Thomas Greenleaf's Antifederalist leaning *New York Advertiser* experienced the financial squeeze so familiar to those in his profession. Arguing with his readership that he had gone to "great expense" in his printing shop to provide the best news, he requested that "those gentlemen who profess to be liberal supports of 'THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS,' will afford him a proportion of their advertisements, for which they will be entitled to his unfeigned thanks." Sending his appeal to both Federalist and Antifederalist alike, he

[341] "The Debate over the Constitution in New York, 21 July 1787–31 January 1788: Introduction: Public Commentaries on the Constitution"; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 3.

clearly exemplified the economic necessity of garnering interest and respect from both sides of the political spectrum.[342]

While the presses may have eviscerated their opponents politically, they realized that to be successful as a newspaper, a press needed to attract a loyal base, and had to appeal to the competitor. Such an appeal often came under the guise, as Greenleaf noted, of defending the "FREEDOM OF THE PRESS." The freedom of the press and the right to information through the press remained a clearly vocalized right. One editorialist wrote that "The free citizens of this continent will never consent to have a constitution crammed down their throats. They have an undoubted right to examine before they accede, and to deny if they do not approve."[343] Political participation in the public sphere expanded to not only encompass a right to be informed of political activities, but also a right to refuse proposed political changes. Another editorialist writing in the *Albany Gazette* also appealed to the liberty of the press. In answer to the rhetorical question, "how shall the 'veil of ignorance … be cast off,'" he answered forcefully, "THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS." Not only did the press inform the public, it facilitated the correct functioning of a free people. "Yes sir, the inestimable privilege of the press—without which, no people can be really free—are the only effectual and proper means. By these, we communicate and inform each other, in a very extensive manner, so that we cannot be deceived."[344] In the Age of Reason, the expression of ideas and the education of a public through the press proved an integral and expected aspect of civic life.

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[342] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: lix.
[343] "Anti-Defamationist," *New York Journal*, 20 September 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 30.
[344] "Fabius," *Albany Gazette*, 7 February 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 755.

Although not as realized as some would have preferred, the freedom of the press remained a focal point in the Constitutional debate. In fact, the appeal of the press crossed language barriers, as two presses in Albany printed the Constitution in both Dutch and German.[345] Both the medium for public debate and yet part of the debate itself, the press in New York galvanized the citizenry to take this political debate into the streets in a much more public way than had been done in previous political battles.

Printers realized the power their presses held among the citizenry. They also understood this power to be double-edged sword. Printers, and those who supplied them with text, understood that their papers—more clearly the ideas expressed in these papers—could and would influence people's minds. Antifederalist Peter Tappen wrote to Governor George Clinton of his work in the press, "I am fearful that the many Publication in favour [of the Constitution] will Injure as non[e] publish against [it]. I shall use my Influence as far as I can and hope I have some here."[346] However, while the press could wield positive influence over men's minds, it could also produce just as significant negative reactions. While not a frequent pattern in New York, at times factions became violent in their protestations. John Randolph wrote to St. George Tucker of an attack on Thomas Greenleaf's Antifederalist printer by a group of Federalists. "On Saturday the 27th [26th] Inst. news arrived of the Constitution's being adopted a party of the Federalists as they call themselves went to the house of Mr. Greenleaf printer of the patriotic register and after having broken his windows and thrown away his Types (much

[345] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 42.
[346] Peter Tappen to George Clinton, Poughkeepsie, 29 September 1787. Copy, Bancroft Transcripts, Clinton Papers, NN. Tappen (1748–1792). *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 62.

to their discredit[)] went to the Governor's where they gave three hisses and beat the rogue's march around the house they proceeded to the houses of the Foederals (as they call them) and gave three cheers."[347] Knowledge of the power they wielded kept many printers and editors on their toes throughout the ratification process.

James Madison summarized the tensions between the press' influence on the citizenry and the citizenry's demands upon the press; noting that the plethora of publications that emerged as a result of the ratification convention. In a letter to to his friend, Edmund Randolph, he wrote, "Newspapers in the middle & Northern States begin to teem with controversial publications." Further, he suggested that many of the accusations against ratifying the Constitution stemmed from "the omission of the provisions contended for in favor of the Press, & Juries &c." As with other states, the fear of losing the freedom of the press drove many of the hyperbolic articles that filled Antifederalist papers. Madison continued, "Judging from the News papers one w[oul]d. suppose that the adversaries were the most numerous & the most in earnest. But there is no other evidence that it is the fact." Clearly, the press had a way of altering reality, and depending upon which side one supported, this proved positive or negative.[348]

Statewide interest in reading and interacting with printed media remained high during the ratification period. Readers boasted of their familiarity with the press. "I have a son, who is a lad of tolerable capacity, and great shrewdness. This boy, who is about 12 years old, reads the newspapers to me, every morning; I have taught this young shaver to

[347] John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, 30 July 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1626.
[348] James Madison to Edmund Randolph, New York, 21 October 1787; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 121.

turn all the frothy publications he meets with, into plain English."[349] Not only did the public devour printed material, they did so with a critical eye. The interest in reading this material was so high that printers expected requests from the public for large printing orders. One advertisement which ran in the *Independent Journal* offered: "Just published, on a large Type and good Paper (Price only Six Pence) and to be had at Printing-Office, No. 41, Hanover-Square, the Articles of the Confederation—those who wish to purchase by the hundred or thousand, will have them on a very reasonable terms."[350] The Constitution became the first document to incite a "print war." Politics, previously the domain of men of letters, through the mediation of print now filtered down to the middling class and engaged them in the political process to a much greater extent.

The press became such a central component of the ratification debate that it functioned as the main communication tool in the debate over public support. Writing to a friend, Ebenezer Hazard noted, "the Foederal Constitution is but little talked of here, but the Presses attack & defend it with Spirit."[351] Interest in printed materials remained high. And so one publisher gathered and bound the articles from "Publius" (the *Federalist Papers*) and sold them as small pamphlets and booklets. "The Federalist was so popular that about five weeks after the appearance of the first number a new York committee decided to print the essays in a book edition."[352] The amount of printed material that traversed the state roads of New York—whether from home to home or tavern to tavern—revealed the centrality of print to the burgeoning political world.

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[349] "Inspector I," *New York Journal*, 20 September 1787; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 32.
[350] In this advertisement the term "Articles" referred to the Constitution. *DHRC,* [New York, 1]: 44.
[351] Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, New York, 17 November 1787 (excerpt); *DHRC,* [New York, 1]: 267.
[352] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 563.

Printers acted as more than mere typesetters, and some took to the road to spread their ideas. "I am this instant informed that Mr. Oswald (the Printer of our City) is posting as a Courier from south [Philadelphia?] to north."[353] Such active propagandizing led some to complain about the activism with which printers conducted their business. "That restless firebrand the Printer of Your City is running about as if drive[n] by the Devil seemingly determined to do all the mischief he can." This activism clashed with older, more traditional ideas of disassociated political participation. Previous expectation of involvement extended merely to the elite. The deep divisions across the state over the Constitution required the expansion of scope to include the public, and once the press began to present materials for their perusal, expectations radically changed for participatory political involvement. Refusing to accept the expanded role the public assumed, the elite viewed such "firebranding" as requiring legal limitation. Henry Chapman noted, "indeed in my Opinion he [the printer] is an actual Incendiary and ought to be the object of legal restraint."[354] Clearly, not all believed the actions of the press were intended to promote the good of the state or nation.

New York's newspapers provided the public with an overwhelming amount of critical political information as well as persuasive rhetoric for and against ratification. While the press had played critical roles in previous state ratification debates, New Yorkers utilized the press to strategize and connect across the states in a much more intentional manner. Pennsylvania may have created the template from which other states took their text, but New York papers provided much of the actual rhetoric.

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[353] William Jackson to John Langdon, Philadelphia, 18 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1203.
[354] Henry Chapman to Stephen Collins, New York, 20 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1205.

Addressing the Press

As printers became more tied to the political process, another unique practice developed among New York's printers and their reading public; the pattern of direct address to the printer. Editorialists and readers alike developed a newfound confidence in calling publishers and their papers to account for missing articles, biased presentations, or what they understood to be a misuse of the freedom of the press.[355] A "Citizen of New York" writing to the *New York Daily Advertiser* addressed the editor directly, calling him by his surname, "Mr. Childs."[356] An editorialist calling himself "Q" wrote directly to the Antifederalist printer, Mr. Greenleaf, requesting that he include a wider radius of information from more of the state. "Mr. Greenleaf, Do oblige your readers with an account of the anti-federal Ticket for the city and country of New-York.—Surely you cann[o]t be partial to counties, as well as to parties."[357] An editorialist writing in the *Poughkeepsie Country Journal* addressed the printer as, "To the PRINTER of the POUGHKEEPSIE ADVERTISER, A Customer."[358] Such addresses occurred frequently enough across various papers to reveal a unique accountability relationship in New York between the printers and their readers.

Sometimes editorialists wrote merely to congratulate the printer on his work. An editorialist calling himself, "Examiner I," wrote in the *New York Journal*, on the 11th of December 1787. Addressing, "Mr. Greenleaf," he wrote to defend the impartiality of the

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[355] Interestingly, while addressing the printer by name became an established precedent, the names of the editorialists remained anonymous.
[356] "Citizen of New-York," *New York Daily Advertiser*, 20 September 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 54.
[357] "Q," *New York Journal*, 6 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1528.
[358] *Poughkeepsie Country Journal*, 3 October 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 72–3.

printer and to attack those who had spoken against him. "Some of your enemies have been so uncandid as to traduce you with the appellation of a partial Printer; a stigma to the injustice of which I shall always stand ready to bear testimony, from the attention you have generally paid to the pieces I have sent you against the party whose cause you are supposed warmly to espouse." While it's hard to know the identity of this editorialist, and in this case, what he believed politically, his comments make clear the close attention readers paid to the various newspapers and the positions they espoused.[359]

Editorialists also wrote to critique articles or to warn the printer of failing to uphold the standards of the liberty of the press. A group of individuals writing under the name "Twenty Seven Subscribers," addressed Mr. Greenleaf, and stated concern over his choice of materials in his paper. "Mr. Greenleaf," they wrote, "a number of squeamish ladies, around their breakfast table, last Monday, determined not to read your paper any more—To day a number of gentlemen (who subscribe for your paper merely for the variety and to have an opportunity of seeing the arguments as fully as possible on both sides) have expressed as much disgust at you for cramming us with the voluminous PUBLIUS, as for the disturbing our appetites with your EXAMINER." As with the previous author, this group of disgruntled subscribers clearly also knew the other printers in New York City well enough to comment on their publication. "We take M'Lean to read Publius in the best edition, and he gives us two at a time; and Childs for the daily news and advertisements, but they are curtailed, and we are disappointed for the purpose of serving up the same Publius at our expense; Loudoun we take for his morality and

[359] "Examiner I," *New York Journal*, 11 December 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 389.

evangelic sentiments, but here again we are imposed on, by being made to pay for the very same Publius, who has become nauseous, by having been served up to us no less than in two other papers on the same day." As educated readers of many papers, they levied Greenleaf to provide a greater variety of materials for their reading pleasure. "Pray Mr. Greenleaf adhere to the principles, and professions you set out on, and let us have the wished for variety, or return the money, which you have on subscription."[360] In their minds, allowing "Publius" to be reprinted so many times across so many papers meant the exclusion of other key pieces of news the people deserved to know and read about. The citizens of New York came to expect print to dominate the public sphere, but they also expected the press to exercise restraint.

Another editorialist, "Fabius," addressed the printer of the *Albany Gazette* reminding him of his responsibility. "To you, Mr. Printer, in this business, … we are mutually bound, by the dictates of impartiality and truth. If there are two parties, it is true you must serve both—and all that is now required of you, is to do it without fear—Do your office, as I mean to do mine, with vigor and assiduity."[361] As with the "Twenty-Seven Subscribers," readers placed pressure on printers to provide a diversity of materials in an honest manner. Readers expected to see their views reflected in the press. While the idea of legitimate dissent may not have been fully accepted, the very demand for diversity continued to expand the public's expectations of the press as a marketplace for contending ideas. A customer calling himself, "A Friend to Decency and Candor," assumed that because the printer, Mr. Childs, produced an "impartial" paper, that he

[360] "Twenty-seven Subscribers," *New York Journal*, 1 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 558.
[361] "Fabius," *Albany Gazette*, 7 February 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 755.

would publish his ("A Friend's") article. He wrote, "Mr. Childs, As you have frequently declared that your paper should be free and impartial, permit me to request that you will be pleased to give the following a place in your next paper."[362] The proclaimed liberty of the press and the growing numbers of individuals relying on it to engage in the ratification debate meant that readers expected more from their printers. The reliance on the press for information clearly indicates just how central the press was becoming to the developing political world.

While personal addresses to the printers often proved a way to attract the attention of the printer and hold him to a higher publishing standard, at times this method of address became a tool for creating more support for a particular position. So, one editorialists noted, "Messrs. Printers, By inserting the following in your useful Centinel you will only disoblige the selfish, sly, underhanded antifederalists, while you oblige every honest and worthy character among your readers."[363] In the war for words and for the support of the public, each side sought to use every means possible to claim the majority position. Such public addresses signified the familiarity the public had with the press. The confidence of the public in writing directly to the printers in such a public fashion proved to be a significant advance in participatory politics.

Many times the public's familiarity with the press placed printers in a difficult position. In Albany, one reader demanded to know the name of an editorialist appearing in his paper. A father writing to his son noted the potential for violence that had arisen

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[362] "A Friend to Candor and Decency," *New York Daily Advertiser*, 1 July 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1831.
[363] *Lansingburgh Northern Centinel*, 1 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 561.

from the press. “Most violent parties prevail here federal and a[n]federal,” he wrote. After an article appeared in an Albany paper against the Major John Lansing, Jr., an Antifederalist, the Mayor approached the printer requesting the name of the editorialists. The printer requested time to provide the answer. As recounted “the printer then went to the author who told him least he should not remember the name he would give it in writing. [T]hen the Mayor came to the author who told the Mayor he avowed the Piece and would give him any Satisfaction he would chuse.”[364] Politics remained personal in this era. Yet, at the same time, newspapers provided a supposedly “safe” arena where individuals could write anonymously. As the public became more involved in reading and writing for publication, the line between anonymity and responsibility for one’s words became a minefield printers had to traverse.

As a result of the public's high expectations for printers, not only did printers publish these requests, they frequently responded to them. Many printers chose to engage in editorializing themselves and in doing so, defended their reason for choosing to print certain articles. They also frequently explained the apparent absence of materials at times. For example, the editor of the *New York Journal* printed an elongated defense of his impartiality, noting that he had “heard many ill-natured, and injudicious observations, on what the observers are pleased to stile HIS PARTIALITY.” Such an accusation—while common in this era—was also akin to throwing down the gauntlet. Retaining a reputation as impartial remained a clear goal for many engaged in this profession. He continued, “as a public printer, [the editor] cannot refrain from remarking, that their suspicions are

[364] Lewis Morris, Sr., to Lewis Morris, Jr., Poughkeepsie, 7 March 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 851.

groundless." Understanding the importance of the freedom of the press, he assured his readers "that servile fetters for the FREE PRESSES of this country would be the inevitable consequences, were printers easily terrified into a rejection of free and decent discussion upon public topics." Proud of his impartiality, he continued, "the Editor professes to print an IMPARTIAL paper, and again declares, that, setting aside his private political sentiments, he will ever AS A PRINTER, giving to every performance, that may be written with decency, free access to his Journal."[365] As newspapers gained centrality in the ratification debates, the professionalization and reputation of the printer grew.

The editor of the *New York Journal* explained to his subscribers what he understood the role of the printer to be. "THIS DAY completes two quarters of the Daily Patriotic Register—On this occasion the Editor begs leave to express his gratitude for the general support of this paper." The printer went on to express his gratitude by reminding his readers of the rights they deserved from the press. As a printer dedicated to upholding "republican freedom" he promised that "he shall persevere in this undertaking; and if acting in the capacity of 'an advocate for the freedom of the Press' will give satisfaction, he will strive to do it." By appealing to the freedom of the press, he hoped to garner further support from his subscribers. He continued, "as a Printer, the Editor professes to communicate facts, and to detect falsehoods." The economic reality of sustaining a press meant the printer needed to appeal to matters of importance to the public. "It is needless to mention, since the quantity of daily matter evinces the fact, that this paper is the most

[365] *New York Journal*, 4 October 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 72–3.

expensive one in the union; this is owing to the small proportion of advertisements it contains. The Editor, therefore, hopes, that those gentlemen who profess to be liberal supporters of 'The Freedom of the Press,' will afford him a proportion of their advertisements, for which they will be entitled to his unfeigned thanks."[366] The increasing reliance on the press meant that accountability between printer and the public grew.

Overwhelmed by a plethora of constitutional materials to print, the editor of the *New York Journal* published an apology and a larger newspaper to make up for the materials that he had been heretofore unable to present to the demanding public. "The Editor, having been obliged to moti a number of PIECES, &c. last week—and from a further consideration, of the expediency, in a free and independent country, of transmitting to the public cool and well written discussions on both sides of a subject that is closely connected with that freedom and independence—has judged it his duty, this week, to present his generous patrons, and the public, with a JOURNAL EXTRAORDINARY."[367] Not only was he conscious of the public requiring materials from his paper, but he sought to widen his support by making appeals to both sides. Further, by following in the tradition of many other printers, he was quick to remind his readers of the "freedom and independence" of the press. Another paper recorded the same concerns, when the editor wrote, "This essay among with several others and some advertisements, were ready for publication on 1 November, but they were 'unavoidably postponed, for want of room.'"[368] Continuing this theme, the editor of the *New York Journal* pressed his

[366] *New York Journal*, 19 May 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 1105.
[367] *New York Journal*, 18 October 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 102.
[368] *New York Journal*, 8 November 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 195.

readers for patience in adding this note to his paper, "The Author of Cato will doubtless excuse the Editor for having neglected to acknowledge his sixth number, four days since, if he reflects upon the multiplicity of business at this office.'" The public continued to place pressure upon these editors as they eagerly consumed published materials from the press.

Another printer described the difficulty of printing the plethora of materials available. "It is proposed to republish by a weekly supplement, annexed to this paper, the remaining numbers of Publius."[369] Another dialogue between a publisher and his clients expressed the reliance and reading expectation the public had with the press. Wrote one editorialist "A Citizen," "Mr. Stoddard [the editor of the *Hudson Weekly Gazette*], Your acknowledgement of the receipt of the Citizens, and your apology for omitting it, were very satisfactory." The Citizen was referring to the fact that Mr. Stoddard (of the *Hudson Weekly Gazette*) after receiving the above note announced, "The Citizen, recommending the continuation of Publius, is omitted; as we are obliged to discontinue that publication to make room for the debates of the Assembly, which we expect to begin in our next."[370] Because of the large amount of materials, the printers were faced with an unprecedented problem in determining not only what to print, but to what extent, and when.

While communication existed between printers and their public, it also existed between the printers themselves.[371] In Albany, for example, a Federalist printer wrote

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[369] "Country Federalist," *Poughkeepsie Country Journal*, 9 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 581.
[370] "A Citizen," *Hudson Weekly Gazette*, 24 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 652.
[371] Kaminski comments on printer relations, "Despite Greenleaf's conciliatory attitude, his relations with his fellow printers was sometimes tense. For example, Greenleaf and the printers of the New York *Morning Post and New York Packet* exchanged scurrilous satirical articles after the *Morning Post* printed a spurious

attacking the local Antifederalist press. "[D]uring the time they were framing this Constitution the Printers of the Northern Centinel conceived it a duty incumbent on them to prepare the minds of their readers for its reception." Upset at the attitude Antifederalist printers took toward the Constitution, the Federalist printer refused to cooperate with the Antifederalist press in any way. "Their partnership this day dissolves." In an effort to champion the Federalist cause and to unite Federalist printers, he wrote, "the press in future will [be] conducted by those who cannot but anticipate the happiness that will flow to Americans from the adoption of the Federal Constitution." Printers remained central players in the transfer of information. Each vowed to represent the most accurate and impartial presentation of the truth. In closing, this particular printer reminded not only his fellow Federalist printers, but also his reading public that "but as a division thereby is caused among the people, to be IMPARTIAL shall be their steady aim."[372] As the freedom of the press and the demand for the public involvement in politics grew, so did the interactions between the press, its public, and the printers themselves.

The Public in the Minds of the Federalists and Antifederalists

The articles appearing in New York's press revealed the open distrust with which the Federalists viewed the public. The method with which they addressed the public and with which they spoke to each other about the public, belied the fact that they saw the public as puppets easily manipulated by rhetoric. This prejudice focused the attention of

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advertisement on 7 January 1788, satirizing Greenleaf as a "a Gay, volatile ANTI-FEDERAL PRINTER." John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds.; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: lix.

[372] *Albany Federal Herald*, 31 March 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 884.

the Federalists even more specifically upon the use of that rhetoric. "Rusticus" wrote, "The greatest part of the publications allude to, are artfully calculated to prepare the minds of the people, implicitly to receive any form of government that may be offered them."[373] The Federalists planned to use the press to influence what they deemed as a very impressionable public. They did not expect that that same public would also utilize the press for their own purposes.

Prevailing ignorance, argued Federalists, was responsible for the Antifederal sentiment that existed among the public. Wrote one Federalist to another, "our prevailing State Politics are too narrow and antifederal, which must be principally ascribed to want of Information in the Mass of the People, who are perhaps more unlettered than those of any State on this Side of Maryland." The ignorance that Federalists attributed to the public revealed the elite mindset that most political leaders held and the clear challenge to this position that the press brought to bear on traditional social and political relations. The first charge often brought against the middling or lower classes derived from an assumed lack of familiarity with classical literature, as "The first Settlers were chiefly from Holland, and from various Causes not attached to Literature." This charge came in spite of the high literacy rate found in New England, and the profound attachment many had to reading as a result of being raised in the print-centric Christian religious culture. Aside from their assumed lack of literacy, Federalists charged that the poor tenants of New York's manor system could not possibly have the literacy or intelligence to grasp the seriousness of the situation at hand. "Add to this, large tracts of our best cultivated Lands,

[373] "Rusticus," *New York Journal*, 13 September 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 25.

were held by a few Individuals in extensive Manors, occupied by needy, dependent and illiterate Tenants." Even though these large manors had begun to be divided, Nathaniel Hazard warned that these lands remained "possessed by Whig Citizens."[374] Robert Livingston expressed the same sentiments in a personal letter commenting on the public's attitude toward the Constitution. "[The Constitution] has met with many antagonists but the great bulk of the people & [——] particularly those who have most experience & information are warmly attached to it[.]"[375] This low view of the public determined not only how the Federalists treated the public, but also how they wrote to and about them. According to Nathaniel Hazard and Robert Livingston, the mark of a truly educated public would come through their Federalist-leanings and support for the passage of the Federal Constitution.

Apart from spreading these ideas of the public through personal letters, Federalists wrote of their attitudes toward the public in the press. Federalists believed that in the war of words, Antifederalists preyed upon the illiteracy of the people to gain support. "Messrs. Printers. No man can behold the insidious efforts of the anti-federal party; without disgust and indignation. They are straining every nerve; conjuring up imaginary phantoms, to delude those people, who have neither sense or discretion, to distinguish between the happiness they will experience if the new federal system should

[374] Nathaniel Hazard to Mathew Carey, New York, 16 February 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 783.
[375] Robert R. Livingston to Marquis de la Luzerne, Clermont, 7 May 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 1087.

be adopted."[376] Though seeking to humiliate the Antifederalists through such objections, in reality, such reasoning revealed their demeaning attitude toward the public.[377]

For the elite community—both Federalists and Antifederalists, alike—reputation relied upon intelligence and integrity. One editorialist, who called himself "An Admirer of Anti-Federal Men," commented on the conduct and reputation of leading politicians. "The conduct of several leading men, among us, has, of late, given the friends of liberty much uneasiness." He observed the important connection between integrity and leadership in proving one's reputation as a reliable leader for the nation. As a reminder to the reading public of existing men who possessed such reputations, he wrote, "A confidence in those illustrious characters, which form the grand convention, now sitting, will have the most salutary effect." First he reminded the public of its General who had led the nation to independence, George Washington. "A Washington," he assured his readers, "surely, will never stoop to tarnish the luster of his former actions, by having an agency in any thing capable of reflecting dishonor on himself or his countrymen." And further, reminding his readers of the famed statesmen who had won France's support in the battle for Independence, he spoke of Benjamin Franklin. "[T]he philosophical FRANKLIN would not be guilty of embarking in any undertaking, which appeared futile and unnecessary. Rest assured, therefore, that those worthies, in conjunction with many others, have the good of America at heart." In a world where reputation signified undying loyalty, the fact that Washington and Franklin had already proved themselves to be strong

[376] "W.M," *Albany Journal*, 10 March 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1366.
[377] Albany Federal Committee: An Impartial Address, c. 20 April 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1388.

leaders and men of integrity, meant—to the Federalists—that they should be followed in this period of indecision.[378]

Other editorialists continued to remind the public of their need to trust wiser, elite leaders. "An Old Soldier," affirmed distrust in the public when he wrote "Confidence in our rulers will make us a great and happy people; a want of it will be our ruin. Our magistrates are not elected for life—we can change them when they act inconsistent with our welfare; but let us weigh and examine well their conduct before we dismiss them, least we repent our change, on proving those who are untried."[379] While nodding to the right to elect and dismiss political leaders, much more weight was given to the "conduct" and integrity of these men than to the public's wisdom. A personal letter between two friends discussing the constitution reflected this attitude. "The People of Character and Propoerty are universally for the Constitution of the Convention."[380] Unfortunately, for those who chose the Antifederalist position this intimated that they lacked education, character, and any other elite social status.

An editorialist calling himself "D—" wrote in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, about how much confidence people had in the integrity and leadership of their leaders, and specifically in John Jay. Referring to a conversation "D—" had with "a gentleman of some consideration, who loves his country, and is warmly attached to the New Government," he repeated how the advice of a venerable leader influenced this man's

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[378] "An Admirer of Anti-Federal Men," *New York Daily Advertiser,* 26 July 1787; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 15.
[379] "An Old Soldier," *Lansingburgh, Northern Centinel,* 10 September 1787; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 15.
[380] Elias Boudinot to William Bradford, Jr., Elizabethtown, N.J., 28 September 1787, RC, Wallace Papers, Phi; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 61.

political support. “This honest American candidly acknowledged, that he would distrust and abandon the good opinion he had formed of the Federal System, if it was reprobated in such terms by Mr. Jay; whom he considered as a gentleman learned in the science of legislation, and much conversant with modern politics.” Not only did this man trust Jay’s political acumen, but being a man of “integrity, who aimed at the real happiness, aggrandizement and glory of his country” he equated integrity with political wisdom with his integrity.[381]

Elite attitudes did influence the public’s attitude toward the Constitution. However, the public—contrary to the Federalist’s assumptions—used their minds in gathering information and making informed and independent decisions. The editor of the *Poughkeepsie Country Journal* editorialized “It is to be presumed that every candid and patriotic citizen within the circulation of this Paper will give them [Federalist pamphlets] a faithful perusal.” Not only was it assumed that the citizens of New York would read with interest and in order to form an opinion, but that they saw this as their duty. “They certainly merit it from every person whose wishes are for the welfare of his country, and whose intelligent and liberal mind is not enslaved by preconceived opinions, but is willing to embrace those conclusions which result from the evidence of truth.” The editor gave more weight to the role of reason in forming the public. He wrote further, “I am still with my hopes, that the principles and experimental authorities on which their reasoning is supported, will bear conviction to the public mind; … however our eyes may be dazzled by show, or our ears deceived by sound, however prejudice may warp our will, or

[381] “D—” *New York Daily Advertiser*, 12 December 1787; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 403.

interest darken our understanding, the simple voice of reason and of nature, will say they are right."[382] The age of reason affected the attitudes expressed toward politics and the public. Such a focus on reason also explains the reliance on words and print in the ratification debate.

A personal letter between friends revealed both the plethora of materials being printed and the persuasion that these printed pieces were believed to have. "Since I wrote you Last we have had an inundation of Pamphlets both for and against the Proposed Constitution[.]" The influence of the press may be hard to quantify. However, even contemporaries believed it had a significant impact. "[W]hat effect they will have upon the People it is hard to say but I believe if those of the Latest kind you sent me had been generally dispersed through the County two or three weeks sooner they would have convinced the greater part of the People of the impropriety of adopting the New Constitution previous to its being amended."[383] The ratification debates existed primarily in the newspapers and broadsides, which placed the press at the center of this debate.

Writing to George Washington, James Madison expressed concern over the materials filling the press. "The Newspapers here have contained sundry publications animadverting on the proposed Constitution & it is known that the Government party are hostile to it." The materials filling the press originated from both sides and created a race that was too close to call. "There are on the other side so many able & weighty advocates, and the conduct of the Eastern States of favorable, will add so much force to their arguments, that there is at least as much ground for hope as for apprehension." Madison

[382] "Country Federalist," *Poughkeepsie Country Journal*, 9 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 581.
[383] John Smith to David Gelston, Mastic, c.18–25 April 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1539.

described the newspapers in his location in New York as "teem[ing] with vehement & virulent calumniations of the proposed Govt."[384] Federalists monitored the press closely, believing that the public would be easily duped by crafty words of the enemy.

Antifederalists took a decidedly different attitude toward the public. They believed the public held the wellspring of wisdom in a republic and looked to them as being able to decide for themselves the best course for the future. "Beware of those who wish to influence your passions, and to make you dues to their resentments and little interests," one Antifederalist warned. Believing that public wisdom would lead New York to think and act wisely, this editorialist encouraged his readers to "Attach yourselves to measures, not to men." He warned further, "you ought to recollect, that the wisest and best of men may err, and their errors, if adopted, may be fatal to the community." Demarcating the difference between the Federalist and Antifederalist attitudes toward public wisdom, he concluded, "in principles of politics, as well as in religious faith, every man ought to think for himself. "[385] Neither Federalist nor Antifederalist argued over the importance of the press. However, their attitudes toward what role it should secure and how it would affect the public varied greatly.

The Strategies of the Federalists and the Antifederalists

Federalist and Antifederalist attitudes toward New York citizens had an impact on the style and types of strategizing each faction utilized. While other states revealed levels

[384] James Madison to George Washington, New York, 14 and 18 October 1787 (excerpt); *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 85.
[385] "Cato I," *New York Journal*, 27 September 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 60.

of political forethought and strategy, New York represented a new level of organization, especially among the Antifederalists. Their fears of returning to an elite aristocratic style of government fueled inter-state activity previously unmatched by other states.

Within their own circles, Federalists battled a sense of urgency and confronted the necessity of ratcheting up their already organized base. Federalist James Hughes wrote to his friend of the difficult (and somewhat unexpected) situation in which his party found themselves. "I believe there has not been a Time since the Revolution in which, the Well Born, who are the Leaders of that Party, have felt and appeared so uninfluential, as they feel and appear at this Time and Place." Of further concern, the Federalists' witnessed a surprising "Unanimity and Harmony right among the Antifes." He noted that the "Promptitude with which they assembled—their Concurrence in Sentiment and their Determination to bend their Force to the same Point," created concern among the Federalists. Normally, Federalist strategies focused on a divide and conquer methodology. However, as Hughes wrote his friend, the unanimity of the Antifederalists "shut out the Shadow of Hope, in the Federalists, of creating Divisions."[386] While Antifederalists typically were a splintered group, unable to agree on a unified course of action, in New York, their unified front challenged Federalist strategies.[387]

The Federalists strategized to accost the public with statements of unified support for the Constitution. Regardless of the truth of the statement, they constantly assured the public that the majority stood in support of the new form of government, and that those

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[386] James M. Hughes to John Lamb, Poughkeepsi, 18 June 1788; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 1202.
[387] See Jackson Turner Main's *The Antifederalists* and Saul Cornell's *The Other Founders* for further information on the diverse nature of the Antifederalists.

who opposed it represented a small, and clearly untrustworthy, group. This strategy spanned across states. The *Pennsylvania Herald* first printed an article promising ratification support among the people of New York (this article was then reprinted in the *New York Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*). "We are informed that the constitution proposed by the late federal convention promises to be highly popular with the citizens in New York and that the distinguished person from whom an opposition was predicted, has expressed himself in terms favorably to the plan." Aside from asserting the pro-ratification status of the state, the Federalists filled the press with further unanimity of sentiment toward the document. "Perhaps there never was a subject indeed, upon which men were more unanimous, for even those who cavil at the system itself, are impressed with the necessity of adopting it."[388] Believing the public to be easily duped, why would they not seek to convince all that the matter was already settled?

Federalists in Albany published assurances of unity in the *Albany Federal Herald*. "We can assure the public, that the inhabitants of the respectable district of Scatakoke are truly Federal… After the Federal Constitution was read [in an open meeting], and observations made … a division was c[a]ll'd for, when there appeared a majority of 27 in favor of its adoption, and but 5 against it."[389] Thomas Tudor Tucker wrote to his brother of the prevailing sentiments of unity across the states. "My ever dear Brother, ... Except Rhode Island there is no State but this that seems at all doubtful of accepting the

[388] *Pennsylvania Herald*, 25 September 1787, Reprinted in the *New York Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 28 September, and by 16 October in twenty-five newspapers outside New York; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 53–4.
[389] *Albany Federal Herald*, 17 March 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 862.

Constitution, & I even am inclined to think it will pass here."[390] Regardless of the reality of unified support, the Federalists worked hard to make any in opposition feel like the minority.

The Federalists of New York also strategized to send numerous pamphlets to disseminate pro-Constitution propaganda. The Albany Anti-Federal Committee wrote to a group of leaders in Stephentown. "Gentlemen, We herewith send you some Publications which you will please to use and distribute among the People—Pray attend at the Poll constantly until it is closed to see that all Matters are properly conducted."[391] Another group of Federalists wrote their friends, "Gentlemen, You will receive under cover directed to _____ a Number of Pamphlets entitled the Columbian Patriot, which we request you to cause to be distributed amongst the Inhabitants of your Country." Always keeping their fingers on the pulse of the public attitude toward the Constitution, they continued, "appearances in this place and on Long Island, are more favorable to the cause of Liberty than they have been." [392] Federalist Abraham Lansing wrote to a friend regarding the status of other states. "Rhode Island have rejected the system … And accounts from Virginia & North Carolina give reason to expect that they will reject it."[393] Noting the rising organization of the Antifederalists, they were concerned that the opposition was "more numerous than we expected." As such, they

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[390] Thomas Tudor Tucker to St. George Tucker, New York, 2 May 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1521.
[391] Albany Anti-Federal Committee to Benjamin Egbertsen, Jonathan Niles, and others of Stephentown, Albany, 28 April 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1407.
[392] New York Federal Republican Committee Circular Letter, New York, 6 April 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 895.
[393] Abraham G. Lansing to Abraham Yates, Jr., Albany, 22 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1207–08).

exhorted their fellow Federalists to put forward their "most strenuous efforts … to bring this business to a favourable termination."[394]

Political leaders also organized to print the names of individuals they encouraged the public to elect to the state ratification convention. A writer calling himself, "Civis," called "the Free Citizens of the County of ALBANY," to action. He followed his plea for action with a list of proposed candidates.[395] In the *Albany Federal Herald*, another editorialist addressed "the Free Electors of the City and County of Albany." He requested that the voters understand that "it is at all times highly necessary that public offices should be filled by men of unblemished virtue," and as such they printed a list of candidates for election.[396] Albany Federalists also wrote each other requesting that they work to encourage the public to support the lists they had compiled for election. Writing to Federalist James Duane, the Albany Federalist Committee requested, "Knowing your sincere attachment to the federal side of the question in the present political controversy, we take the freedom to request your influence among the Inhabitants of Duanesburgh in favor of the Gentlemen named in the two lists we now have the honor to enclose you, for members to Convention and Assembly, for this County."[397] Since the voting allowance for the state ratification convention was much laxer than normal, the stakes in the election became much higher and the necessity of soliciting wider public support became much more important.

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[394] Interestingly, while unified public support for the Constitution appeared in print, in private, the reality of ratification seemed much more uncertain.
[395] "Civis," *Albany Journal*, 23 February 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 3]: 1362.
[396] *Albany Federal Herald*, 25 February 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 3]: 1362.
[397] Albany Federal Committee to James Duane, Albany, 12 March 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 3]: 1367.

Antifederalists in New York represented some of the most organized of all of the states. Across the state they gathered to strategize about ways to influence the election of ratification convention delegates. William North wrote to a friend and described Antifederalist activities. "Last night the Antifedsts met here & Appointed a Committee to manage the election for Convention." The level of organization attracted a good deal of attention and consternation. "They use every art, & strain every nerve to gain their points—& if the Federalists do not exert themselves … they will be beaten."[398] Leonard Gansevoort wrote to a family member describing the strategy of the Antifederalists in Albany. "The Antifederalists in this place have had a Meeting last Night and have appointed a Committee to repair to the several Districts to consult with them upon proper Persons to represent this County in Convention, and to sow the seed of opposition & dissention."[399] Antifederalist leaders worked hard to circulate articles amongst themselves and to help facilitate the publishing of these articles in local newspapers. Abraham Lansing wrote to Abraham Yates confirming that, "the papers containing the publications have been received and are partly distributed among our Friends." More importantly, he was willing "to have them republished." Of particular importance was the publication of articles under "the Nose of the Convention at Poghkepsie," as Lansing described it.[400] Under the direction of an Antifederalist Governor, the state experienced a tremendous surge of cooperation between what was normally a splintered group.

Much like the Federalists, the Antifederalists sought to fill the papers with

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[398] William North to Henry Knox, Albany, 13 February 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 765.
[399] Leonard Gansevoort to Peter Gansevoort, Albany, 13 February 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1358.
[400] Abraham G. Lansing to Abraham Yates, Jr., Albany, 22 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1207–08.

suggestions of the men the public should elect to the convention: "Sir, The time fast approaches when it must be determined by the representatives of the people whether the new proposed government shall be adopted or not... you will be pleased to consult with the inhabitants of your District on the subject and send two or three gentlemen of the best information to meet us and others from the different Districts of this county at the house of William Hilton Tavern keeper on the Thirteenth day of March next for the purpose of fixing seven gentlemen to be held up as delegates for this county and to support the nomination."[401]

While the existing presses had their hands full with publishing articles, talk swirled about new presses being established to help with the propaganda battles between the two parties. Antifederalist Abraham Lansing wrote to his friend about Antifederal discussions of establishing new presses:

> The Lansingburgh printers it seems are is satisfied with their Situation—they have proposals up in the City for printing a paper under the Title of the Federal Herald—if their success is not greater than I wish them they will return to their original Insignificance—Webster and his Brother have also opened proposals and are already printing twice in each week.—It is the sincere wish of our Friends that some Person would set himself down here and disconcert these White Livers by publishing an impartial paper—I believe if it was attempted it would be attended with good consequences—could Smith prevail on Greanleaf to send one of his Journeymen to set up a printing office here I believe he would meet with Encouragement.[402]

In the battle for public attention, establishing presses in key locations became a key part of each party's strategy.

In Albany, the Antifederalists gathered together to create a strategizing

[401] Albany Anti-Federal Committee Circular Letter, Albany, 27 February 1788; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 1363.
[402] Abraham G. Lansing to Abraham Yates, Jr. Albany, 31 January 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 678–9.

committee. Called the "Albany Anti-Federal Committee," they wrote to Melancton Smith explaining their situation. The first difficulty they faced was the partiality of the press, "We daily experience Inconveniencies from the partiality of the printers in this part of the State whose papers are constantly filled with pieces in Favor of the new Constitution and whenever ay are inserted against it, which is always done with Reluctance, they are accompanied with others to counteract their Effects." Desiring to correct the one-sided reporting taking place, they wrote of establishing a new press. Specifically, they requested help with gathering 200 subscriptions to pay for the establishment of the press. "We conceive it therefore of the Utmost Importance to have an impartial printer in this City and will exert ourselves as much as possible to promote his interest—We are at present wiling to stipulate for 200 Subscribers, and doubt not but that this with the Aid of our Friends in the other Counties of the State will be sufficient Inducement for the Establishment of a press here." As well as requesting subscribers, they also asked that Smith help them find a printer to send to Albany. "We flatter ourselves that our Friends in New York will likewise open a subscription for the purpose and entreat you to adopt immediate Measures to procure a printer and to send him up without Delay with his press. We are also disposed if necessary to Advance him a sum of Money on Account, immediately on his Arrival." So organized and devoted were these Antifederalists to establishing paper that they even already had the name selected; "we propose the Title of the paper to be the Albany Register."[403]

[403] The Albany Anti-Federal Committee to Melancton Smith, Albany, 1 March 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 834.

In Montgomery County, Antifederalists gathered to make a public statement against the Constitution and to encourage more support for their cause. Once again printers were called into action as the voice of the people, responsible for spreading important knowledge. "The printer of the *Patriotic Register* is requested to make known, that … a large concourse of the most respectable inhabitants of the counties of Ulster and Orange assembled, in order to ascertain the general sentiment respecting the new proposed constitution." By describing a "large concourse of the *most respectable inhabitants,*" the authors sought to convey the importance of the event they reported upon. Continuing in their description, they noted "when, having proceeded in form, and discovered a unanimous disapprobation of the system, the constitution was fixed [u]pon a pole and carried to the centre of the bridge, and there, amid the incessant shouts of near six hundred people, committed to flames."[404] Antifederalists engaged in public spectacles calling attention to their disapproval of the Constitution. However, what is even more significant was the use of the press to distribute knowledge of the physical act. The press stood as the key mediator in spreading information and organizing citizens of similar disposition.

Antifederalists sought to use every method of strategy that they could to halt the advance of the Constitution through the state. As such, they put forward a bill in the Assembly that proposed an Oath of Allegiance, which surreptitiously made voting for the Constitution illegal.[405] Although the bill failed, it revealed the depth of diligence the

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[404] "Letter Box," *New York Journal*, 23 February 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 802.
[405] Philip Schuyler to Stephen van Renssalaer, Poughkeepsie, 27 January 1788; *DHRC,* XX, [New York, 2]: 609–10.

Antifederalists went to in seeking to counter Federalist propaganda.

Less one thinks that these newspaper debates and activities were merely the acts of the Federalist or Antifederalist elite, newspaper articles revealed considerable middling class engagement in the political debate. Frequent reports of meetings of city and country craftsmen appeared across various presses. On the 22nd and 26th days of April, 1788, the newspapers reported that there was held "a Meeting of the Master Carpenters of the city of New-York … at the house of William Ketchum." More information was given about the Master Carpenter meeting as the newspaper recorded that "a sufficient cause to disapprove of the political principles of Mr. Stephen Ward" was found. [406] A group of German-speaking citizens also met on the 26th of April where the paper recorded that there was "a very numerous meeting of Germans, inhabitants of the city of New-York, held at Capt. Leonard's."[407]

New York's Federalists and Antifederalists faced each other with a determination and organization heretofore unseen. Both understood the battle as equally defining the past (what the Revolutionary War had won) as well as directing the future (what type of a nation would they become). While each called upon pre-established methods of strategizing and public engagement, the ratification debates introduced the press as a key central player in disseminating the message of both sides. In the process, the middling class exploited the uncertainty that elites in both parties felt, and presented their voices as equal participants in the public sphere.

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[406] Carpenters' Meeting, 22 and 26 April, 1788; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 1504.
[407] Meeting of New York City, German, 26 April 1788; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 1504.

New York's Interstate Connections

New York Federalists and Antifederalist factions were much more aware of other states' activities than many of the previous states. Each side utilized the attitudes and activities in other states as part of their strategy to gain support for their position.

Articles from Pennsylvania filled many pages of the press in New York. Madison wrote to Washington about the influence of Pennsylvania's press. "The Newspapers here begin to teem with vehement & virulent calumniations of the proposed Govt. As they are chiefly borrowed from the Pennsylvania papers, you see them of course."[408] New York reprinted James Wilson's influential speech from October 6th before a Philadelphia Public Meeting. This speech—seen by many as the magnum opus of the pro-ratification cause—became an important staple in Federalist literature. Federalists in New York also blamed Pennsylvania Antifederalists for the influx of Antifederalist materials flooding into New York.[409] Comparing the numbers, the Federalists in New York reprinted twenty-six pro-ratification articles, while the Antifederalists reprinted forty-five.[410]

Correspondence between New York citizens again indicates the awareness that many had of the Constitutional debates occurring up and down the Eastern seaboard. "[W]e were made Joyful by last evenings Post on the news of Connecticut having adopted the new Constitution." While Connecticut offered hope, Massachusetts proved a more worrisome case. "[A] dampness is thrown on our spirits by information that the Convention of Massachusetts are much divided, should that state reject it we are ruined,

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[408] James Madison to George Washington, New York, 14 and 18 October 1787 (excerpt); RC, Washington Papers, DLC, Printed CC: 159 (longer excerpt); and Rutland, Madison, X, 194–95); *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 85.
[409] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC,* XIX, [New York, 1]: 84.
[410] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 733.

on them depends every thing, every Federal Man in this City looks up to your State for our political salvation." Following the activities of each state, New York citizens calculated what would be necessary for ratification in New York. "[F]or say they if Massachusetts Connecticut and New Hampshire accept it, tolerably unanimous, this State dare not refuse, but on the Contrary should they reject, the antifederal Junta here will increase and come forward."[411] Always strategizing, supporters on both sides kept a close finger on the pulse of ratification in order to situate themselves most advantageously among the confederation of states.

Massachusetts held particular influence over the rest of the states, particularly New York. Writing to Henry Knox he noted, "The decision of Massachusetts is perhaps the most important event that ever took place in America, as upon her in all probability depended the fate of the Constitution."[412] James Madison wrote of the impact that Massachusetts's ratification debate could have on New York. "The operation of such an event [i.e., rejection of the Constitution by the Massachusetts Convention] on this State may easily be foreseen. ... The decision of Massachusetts either way will involve the result in this State."[413] The *New York Journal* printed an article reporting on information from Boston; "By private accounts from Boston, we learn, that almost all the staunch republicans of Massachusetts, those begetters and supporters of the late revolution, who are lovers of the community at large, and defenders of their freedom and independence, consequently detesters of every tyrannical junta, and their abettors, are decidedly opposed

[411] Samuel Blachley Webb to Joseph Barrell, New York, 13 January 1788; *DHRC*, XX, [New York, 2]: 608.
[412] Letter to Henry Knox, 13 March, RCS:Va., 491; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 753.
[413]James Madison to George Washington, New York, 20 January 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 696.

to the proposed Constitution in its present form; among these are, that father of patriots SAMUEL ADAMS, and a number of the other members of the every memorable COMMITTEE of CORRESPONDENTS, of 1774, '5 and 6."[414]

Upon Massachusetts's ratification of the Constitution, New York citizen John Howard wrote to his friend, "Dear Friend… I cannot suppress the satisfaction I feel on the conduct of the Massachusetts-convention. I am charmed with the behavior of the minority, and am even constrained to love gentlemen of anticonstitutional principals. Their conduct was manly and generous, and will ever resound to the honor of that state."[415] Such public printing of other state activities revealed the attention being paid to the wider confederation's attitudes.

Friends communicated across state lines as well, and shared printed articles with each other. Their correspondence revealed how informed many of the New York public was regarding other states' activities. Robert Livingston wrote a friend commenting on the current state of affairs, "seven States Georgia[,] Maryland[,] Delaware[,] P.[,] NJ C.:[,] & Mast: have acceded to it—Rhode Island is the only one that has as yet rejected it... the popular demagogues being fearful that it may lessen their importance are warmly opposed to it."[416] Benjamin Chew wrote to a fellow family member, "I congratulate you on South Carolina's adopting the new Constitution. Should Virginia, whose Convention are now sitting concur in the Measure, we may expect to see the new created Animal in Motion in the Course of the Present Year."[417] Another fellow New York citizen wrote

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[414] *New York Journal*, 7 January 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 577.
[415] John Howard to George Thatcher, Smithtown, 27 February 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 818.
[416] Robert R. Livingston to Marquis de la Luzerne, Clermont, 7 May 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1087.
[417] Benjamin Chew to Samuel Chew, Philadelphia, 5 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1130.

about South Carolina, "So. Carolina has adopted the new Constitution, 149 for—73 against it. Russel must put up the 8th. Pillar. We have a great Majority of Antifeds, in our Convention, but don't despair yet.—All well."[418] In both public and private correspondence, New York citizens revealed their growing national consciousness.

Apart from commentary regarding specific states, friends and family members also shared newspaper articles and key pieces relating to the ongoing debates. Joseph Barrell wrote his friend, Samuel Blachley Webb, about one of John Jay's articles. "The Pamphlet wrote by Mr Jay is excellent. I sent it immediately to the press and a part of it was published in the Centinel of Wednesday last as a choice Morsel."[419] Another New York citizen, Henry Van Schaack, sent a friend printed articles for his reading pleasure and disbursement. "I sent you a few days ago some Volumes of Debates in our Convention which I hope have got to your hands safe. The printers have sent me some more of them some of which I wish were distributed in your County before the meeting of the Convention of your State." Indicating just how important personal distribution was, he continued, "If any Gentlemen among you wish to have them I can send 6 over to my Brother David."[420] Family members shared information, all realizing that the outcome of the convention would affect both personal and public life. "Dear Brother, Since my last to you I am favoured with yours of the 10th Instant Accompanying the News paper of the 8 Instant which did not come to hand until the 17th. And last Night I was favoured with yours of Yesterdays date Inclosing the 2 News papers of the 15th & 18th. … I feel myself

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[418] Ebeneezer Hazaard to Jeremy Belknap, New York, 5 June 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1130.
[419] Joseph Barrell to Samuel Blachley Webb, Boston, 4 May 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1086.
[420] Henry Van Schaack to Stephen Van Rensselaer, Pittsfield, Mass., 5 June 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1131.

much Obliged to you for your kind Attention in Communicating the State of Publick Affairs & those which Relate to our family's."[421] The sharing of newspaper articles across the state revealed the intensity of interest and the centrality of the press to the debate.

Correspondence about the New York ratification convention crossed the ocean as John Brown Cutting sent newspaper articles to London where Thomas Jefferson was serving. "The enclosed paper contains some few articles of intelligence which perhaps may not have reached you by any other channel. When the last vessels quitted New York about the 8th of July the convention of that State still continued to debate upon the great question of rejection of adopting the national constitution and it is with concern I perceive that the probabilities against an immediate adoption of the same seem so much to preponderate."[422]

Correspondence across the Atlantic focused on sharing information between interested parties. Correspondence between leaders within various states aimed at creating a strategy for ratification. Rufus King wrote to Alexander Hamilton of the need to communicate between New York and New Hampshire. "I have made arrangements to forward by express the result of the convention of New Hampshire to Springfield in this State, from which place Genl. Knox has engaged a conveyance to you at Poughkeepsie."[423] Hamilton's gratefulness for such communication was clearly evident, as he made further arrangements with John Sullivan of Virginia to receive news at the

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[421] Adrian Bancker to Evert Bancker, Hermitage, Staten Island, 20 July 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1327.
[422] John Brown Cutting to Thomas Jefferson, London, 30 August 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1353.
[423] Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton, Boston, 12 June 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1126.

conclusion of the constitutional convention. Fearing the large Antifederalist majority would sway the public, Hamilton underscored, "it is therefore of the utmost importance that all external circumstances should be made use of to influence their conduct." One major influence on the Assembly would undoubtedly be the decision of other state conventions. "This will suggest to you the great advantage of a speedy decision in your State... With this view, permit me to request that the instant you have taken a decisive vote I favor of the Constitution, you send an express to me at Poughkeepsie. Let him take the shortest route to that place, change horses on the road, and use all possible diligence. I shall with pleasure defray all expenses and give a liberal reward to the person."[424]

Hamilton remained a key player in disseminating and receiving information from various states. In an effort to help win over Virginia's public to support ratification he wrote to James Madison of the pro-ratification events occurring in New Hampshire. "A day or two ago General Schuyler at my request sent forward to you an express with an account of the adoption of the Constitution by New Hampshire." He continued, writing, "We eagerly wait for further intelligence from you, as our only chance of success depends on you. There are some slight symptoms of relaxation in some of the leaders; which authorizes a gleam of hope, if you do well; but certainly I think not otherwise."[425] As Hamilton requested, once New Hampshire and Virginia had ratified the Constitution, news was sent speedily to the New York sitting assembly. "Colonel Henley who went express from this City on Wednesday last with the adoption of New Hampshire met the

[424] Alexander Hamilton to John Sullivan, New York, 6 June 1788; *DHRC,* [New York, 2]: 1126.
[425] Alexander Hamilton to James Madison, Poughkeepsie, 27 June 1788; *DHRC,* XXI, [New York, 3]: 1213.

express from Richmond at Alexandria on Saturday the 28th—He stayed there that day & dined in company with the General [George Washington] & returned here about three hours ago."[426] Communication between state leaders proved an important element in the strategy of New York's Federalists.

Hamilton and others hoped other pro-ratification states would influence New York's convention. They spoke of this freely in their private correspondence. John Jay wrote to George Washington, and commented on the affect other states had on New York. "The Influence of Massachusetts on the one Hand, and of Virginia, on the other, renders their Conduct on the present occasion, very interesting…. Connecticut has acceded, and the Gazettes tell us that Georgia has done the same." Echoing the theme of the important role that strategy held in the preparation for the convention, he continued, "Its Reputation [the Constitution] & Success will I think greatly depend on the manner in which it may at first be organized and administered—but on this head we have no Reason to despond."[427] Jay stayed in close contact with Washington, sending him pamphlets and broadsides from New York that would help inform Washington of the press battles occurring in the state. "The Constitution still continues to cause great party Zeal and Ferment, and the opposition is yet so formidable that the Issue appears problematical. I enclose the latest publication of any Consequence that we have on the Subject."[428]

Virginia and New York held their ratification conventions simultaneously and so Hamilton and Madison, in particular, remained in close contact. Working together to pen

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[426] Henry Knox to Jeremiah Wadsworth, New York, 2 July 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1214.
[427] John Jay to George Washington, New York, 3 February 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 746.
[428] John Jay to George Washington, New York, 20 April 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 963.

the Federalist papers they also frequently reminded each other of the importance of sharing ratification convention intelligence. Hamilton wrote, "We think here that the situation of your state [Virginia] is critical—Let me know what you now think of it—I believe you meet nearly at the time we do."[429] Furthering his point, he noted, "It will be of vast importance that an exact communication should be kept up between us at that period; and the moment any decisive question it taken, if favorable, I request you to dispatch an express to me with pointed orders to make all possible diligence, by changing horses." So determined was Hamilton to know the latest intelligence that he offered to pay for all transportation expenses, dictating that "All expenses shall be thankfully and liberally paid." Hamilton further commented on their publication, *The Federalist*; "I expected your commands respecting the first vol of the Foederalist—I sent 40 of the common copies & twelve of the finer ones addressed to the care of Governor Randolph. The Printer announces the second vol in a day or two, when an equal number of the two kinds shall also be forwarded." [430] Hamilton was not the only Federalist to desire exact and immediate intelligence. The New York Federalist, William Duer, wrote Madison, imploring, "the Conduct of your Convention will influence in a very great Degree ours; if you adjourn without dong any thing, we shall do the same—but if you do not, there is still some Prospect that we may adopt with proposed Amendments."[431] Sharing articles and keeping each other abreast of the public mind, Hamilton and Madison represented the high level of strategizing that occurred across the states.

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[429] New York and Virginia both held their ratification conventions at the same time.
[430] Alexander Hamilton to James Madison, New York, 19 May 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1103.
[431] William Duer to James Madison, New York, 23 June 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1210.

Antifederalist governors also communicated to strategize and encourage each other in pulling their states' into unified opposition to the Constitution. "The System of Government proposed by the federal Convention is an Object of such vast Importance to the Happiness of America that it appears to me essential that the People of the different States cultivate and cherish the most friendly Sentiments toward each other especially during their Deliberations on that interesting Subject." Governor George Clinton wrote to Virginia Governor John Randolph, and described the activities in New York; "The Convention of this State are to meet at Poughkeepsie on the 17th. of June to take the proposed System into Consideration." Aware of the strategizing taking place on both sides, he assured Governor Randolph that, "I am persuaded they [New York] will with great Cordiality hold a Communication with any Sister State on the important Subject and especially with on so respectable in Point of Importance, Ability, and Patriotism as Virginia." Both sides worked tirelessly to secure a unified front between those on the same side of the fence. "I have no Doubt," Clinton wrote, "but that our Convention will possess the same Sentiments." Noting that Virginia would begin its session before New York, he encouraged Randolph to strategize well as their state would provide leadership for New York and others. "As the Session of your Convention will take Place before that of this State they will I presume commence the Measures for holding such Communications as shall be deemed necessary."[432] Clinton's efforts to encourage unity and to remind Virginia, in particular, of its influence, revealed again, the tremendous efforts made to secure their victory.

[432] Governor George Clinton to Governor Edmund Randolph, New York, 8 May 1788; *DHRC,* [New York, 2]: 1090.

Other Antifederalist leaders corresponded to encourage greater unity and to affect the outcome of public support. The New York Federal Republican Committee—an Antifederalist Committee—wrote to Richard Henry Lee "To accomplish this desirable Event it is of Importance that those States who have not yet acceded to the Plan should open a Correspondence, and maintain a Communication." The goal of this close communication was to produce a unified front and to insist upon a counter proposal to the Constitution. "[T]hey [the Antifederalists] should understand one another on the Subject and unite in the Amendments they propose." As Antifederalists began to feel that a total defeat of the Constitution would prove unlikely, they shifted their strategy to focus on the addition of amendments. Therefore, of utmost importance as the convention continued was the crafting of an agreed upon set of Amendments to propose in order to join the Federalists in ratifying the Constitution. "We request," the Committee members wrote, "your Opinion on the Matter and that you would state such Amendments as you judge necessary to be made." Further, the committee realized that the initiative needed to be larger than just one or two states. "We think it would conduce very much to promote Union and prevent Discord and an Hostile Disposition among the States, if a Correspondence could be brought about between the Conventions of your State, New Hampshire, and this, who we presume will be in the Session at the same time." Maintaining communication as the three states held their ratification conventions, they believed they would have a greater possibility for influencing the public. "We shall write to New Hampshire and propose it and wish your Convention may be inclined to agree to it—We have every Reason to believe it will be agreeably to ours." Not only were they

looking to connect New York, Virginia, and New Hampshire, but in their postscript they looked south to other states. "We shall write to North & South Carolina, on the general Subject of this Letter, but as their Conventions will not be in Session at the time that yours [is]."[433]

A later notice from the same committee revealed the continuation of strategizing after the election of convention delegates: "We addressed you on the _____ since which a return has been made of our Elections for Delegates to the convention—It appears from the returns that there is a majority of at least two to one who are against adopting the Constitution in its present form… We give you this information, to induce you to take measure to bring about a communication between your Convention and ours on the subject of amendments—There cannot be a doubt but that the necessary alterations can be affected and all the apprehensions of danger from the new government removed, if your State and ours could unite in sentiment respecting the amendments, and act in concert in measures to bring them about."[434]

Newspapers and personal communication flew back and forth across the ocean and from state to state as Federalists and Antifederalists sought to strategize and win support for their cause. Print stood at the center of this momentous debate and unified and divided the public. A totally unexpected issue that arose from such a dramatic rise in the passage of information from citizen to citizen was the tax this placed upon New York's postal system. As individuals reminded themselves of the freedoms they deserved

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[433] New York Federal Republican Committee to Richard Henry Lee, New York, 18 May 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1099.
[434] From the New York Federal Republican Committee, New York, 6 June 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 1133.

through the press, the unreliability of the postal service caused many to rise up in arms over the perceived infringement of their liberties over the inability of the postal service to keep up with delivering the mail.

The Postal System and the Newspapers

On top of all the other issues creating suspicion and anxiety among Federalists and Antifederalists alike, the postal service's uneven delivery services fostered further tensions. "I take this earliest opportunity of answering your letter of the 2nd. April last, it was delivered to me two or three days ago in a tattered situation—scarcely legible. It has been suppressed I suppose by some zealous Federalist, who has feared that it came from his Excellency, the Governor, & must not be given me till after the Election."[435] Editorialists wrote newspapers editorials calling on the General Postmaster to address the issue. An editorialist writing in the *New York Journal* complained, "Southern Mail yesterday brought no papers!—It is greatly to be wished, that some reform might take place with respect to the public mails, as by the great negligence, within a few weeks, the means of intelligence, from every quarter, is almost entirely cut off."[436] An editorialist calling himself "Centinel" was republished in Greenleaf's press accusing the post officers of "hav[ing] prostituted their of—ces to forward the most nefarious design of enslaving their countrymen, by thus cutting off all communication by the usual vehicle between the patriots of America."[437] After a printed defense by the Postmaster General in Thomas

[435] Henry K. Van Renssalaer to Nicholas Fish, Greenbush, 28 May 1788; *DHRC*, XXI, [New York, 3]: 1416.
[436] *New York Journal*, 15 November 1787; *DHRC*, XIX, [New York, 1]: 251.
[437] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 582–3.

Greenleaf's paper, one editorialist responded, claiming that "what you deem 'a succinct state of facts,' will be considered as low subterfuges and mean evasions; and that your conduct in suppressing the free circulation of newspapers deserves the severest reprehension." Such a response revealed the level of expectation the public had for the freedom of the press and their anger at its perceived denial.

Printers from Virginia to New England also added their voices to the complaints, noting they had not received papers from Philadelphia, New York City, and other key locations. Of particular importance, the new Postmaster General, Ebenezer Hazaard, stopped the old practice of allowing postage-free exchange of newspapers between printers. Not only did this cost the printers a fee they previously did not pay, but they also then had to find post riders who would agree to carry their papers. Unfortunately for the printers, some post riders refused to carry the extra weight, and occasionally, unscrupulous riders would discard the papers midcourse or sell them. Thomas Greenleaf complained excessively of the unfairness of this arrangement. In Albany, another printer recorded, "The Printer is unable to account for the failure of the New-York papers—for several stages past he has received from only two of the Printers in that city, and by last evening's stage, none except the Daily Advertiser, from Mr. Childs."[438] A Boston paper cried foul arguing that "that since the commencement of the present year" they had not received papers through the postal service. The expectations developing among the public of remaining informed of political developments meant that such a lack seriously injured the reliability of the printers. "[T]he public are exceedingly anxious, at the present all-

[438] *Albany Gazette*, 7 February 1788; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 585.

important period, to be acquainted with the progress of political affairs." So concerned were the printers that they called for a Congressional investigation. "[I]t is hoped, that Congress, or the post master general, will look into, and remedy, as it must be of the first importance, that the channels of information should be kept as free as possible."[439] The level of concern over not receiving newspapers revealed the reliance the public had developed on the press and on inter-state communication. The public was not operating within a vacuum; they expected to keep track of what was happening and to read what was being published elsewhere. The failure of the postal service in this regard added yet another tension to the growing intensity of the ratification debate.

Conclusion

The press played a significant role in informing New York's middling class of the political issues at stake. As it did so, written text became increasingly important for defining the beliefs of those supporting and fighting ratification. Historian Saul Cornell argued that "The leading opponents of the Constitution in New York were heirs to a revolution that had elevated members of the middling classes to positions of considerable power. Eager to preserve their recent victory, these bourgeois radicals drew inspiration from their own vision of middle-class hegemony."[440] This elevation occurred at a time when political definitions became especially susceptible to change. Taking hold of this political uncertainty, New York's middling class pushed the state toward a greater

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[439] *New York Journal*, 25 February 1788, from a Boston paper of Feb. 18. "(FACTS!!)"; *DHRC*, [New York, 2]: 585.
[440] "Politics of the Middling Sort," Saul Cornell, Paul A. Gilje and William Pencak, eds., New *York in the Age of the Constitution 1775–1800*, 155.

reliance on the press and the diversity of viewpoint this reliance brought with it.

New York's ratification debate revealed the centrality of the press to the ratification debates. How much the press influenced the convention delegates to vote one way or another will always remain debatable. However, the growth of dependence that New York citizens—specifically the growing middling class—had upon the press clearly grew exponentially. As Federalists worried over Antifederalist strategies and as Antifederalists fought Federalist dominance in New York City, each side inadvertently enshrined the press as the mediator of politics. The increasing spread of political information established public expectations for political participation. New York—more than the previous states—focused its ratification debate in the realm of print. The significant dependence on print established a new precedent for a right to know among the public. Printers, eager to engage in such an important issue, set themselves up as the mediators of the debate. The communication the press facilitated between New Yorkers in various parts of the state as well as between New York and other states, established expanding boundaries for expectations of political involvement.

CHAPTER 5: "Debt & Dignity": Virginia's Ratification Convention[441]

Historian Gordon Wood, in his well-known work, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* argued that America's political elites had no intention of creating the democratic government that arose from the Revolution;[442] they simply planned to carry on the governing structures and practices of Britain without Britain's interference.[443] Few anticipated that the rhetoric they wielded to achieve independence from England would create another independence movement from traditional elite-led societal control. In this chapter, I expand upon Wood's thesis, and argue that Virginia's ratification convention further defined the rhetoric of the Revolution by expanding the role of the public in Virginia politics. The maturity gained through years of independent governing provided Americans with a more solid framework for putting the haphazardly circulated ideas of the Revolution into more tangible, exactable form. This chapter analyzes the cultural clashes—occurring primarily in print—that began to reshape politics in Virginia.

At this stage in the ratification process, eight states had approved the Constitution. To become the supreme law of the land, the Constitution required nine state ratifications.

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[441] The two words were identified by St. Jean de Crevecoeur as Virginian's concern during the ratification debates.
[442] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993).
[443] In fact, historian John Philip Reid argued that the colonists were more loyal to British political practices than actual British politicians in the 1780s. *A Constitutional History of the American Revolution.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

All eyes focused on Virginia, waiting to see in which direction it would steer the national debate. Historian Lance Banning captured the importance of the situation. "[T]he meeting brought together nearly every man of major influence in the country's largest state for a dramatic recapitulation of the larger national debate."[444] The gathering of the state's elite leaders at the ratification convention proved the reality of the power Virginia's privileged held in political matters of the state. However, what made this convention so difficult, as Madison had noted, was the fact that the elite themselves remained divided over the direction the state should take. Virginia stood at the crossroads not only of a major internal decision—who would dominate in the state—but also of a national one.

Unexpectedly, the stage upon which Virginia's elites traditionally acted their parts shifted during the ratification debates. Internal division created a greater reliance upon and participation by the public. This very reliance undermined traditional notions of deference and a reserved "non-publicizing" political style. To the dismay of the elite, publication form and rhetorical style began to dominate over personal reputation and societal deference. The growing importance of oratorical brilliance and persuasion troubled the elite, because they realized that the war over ratification (and hence political power) had shifted to a new battlefield, that of print. The breadth of geographic area that ideas needed to pass through, let alone the amount of minds it was meant to sway was a much larger challenge than a physical war may have presented. Virginia's growing reliance on print meant that ideas began to challenge individuals. As important as each of the elite individuals was to the ratification debate, their prominence rested upon shifting

[444] Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 237.

communication structures. As the method of communication assumed as much importance as the person, substantive issues began to surface and demand the attention of all.

As in other states, Virginia's newspapers remained a central organ for transmitting information about the Constitution. The growing number of private letters leaked through the press marked what an important player the press had become in state politics. As the elite struggled to retain control of political information through private correspondence, the mail system grew in its importance. Citizens relied heavily upon the postal system as a means of transporting articles across the state or from state to state. As the public became more engaged in the ratification question, private correspondence became material for public printing.

James Wilson's well-known Federalist address in Philadelphia represented the cross-continental journey one article could easily take.[445] While this article moved northward and appeared in New York and Massachusetts, it also landed in George Washington's hands. He quickly realized its potential and sent it to a friend and asked him to have it reprinted. "As the contained Advertiser contains a speech of Mr. Wilson's (as able, candid, & honest a member as any in Convention) … I send it to you.—The re-publication (if you can get it done) will be of service at this juncture."[446] Washington sent the article for re-publication in part to counter the many negative statements George

[445] James Wilson was a prominent Pennsylvania Federalist. His speech, presented during the beginning of the Pennsylvania ratification debates, became one of the dominant speeches surrounding the larger debate over ratification.
[446] John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Volume 8: Ratification by the States: Virginia, Volume 1* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2001), 69.

Mason had been making at the time against the Constitution. Wilson's speech—a onetime event—came to symbolize the influence the press held as it disseminated time and again the thoughts of those engaged in the debates.

Among the elites, the predominant means of communication throughout the state remained personal letters, letters of the type that characterized the elite belle-lettrist societies of an earlier era.[447] The belle-lettrist societies of the colonial period had established extra-state organizations that connected elites by similar interest. These groups established social rules for proper manners in communication and other forms of political and social engagement. As historian David Shields summarized it, among other things these elite organizations "idealized the values of friendliness, liberty, gentility, mannerliness, wit, and politeness." The values celebrated by these organizations "served as philosophical warrants for the conduct of these private societies in the ideological contests that agitated Anglo-American culture."[448] The high society that became defined through such letters assumed certain rules of proper political discourse, and these rules defined what information would be appropriate for public discussion or for private. In the minds of the elite, private correspondence retained an authenticity and reliability that the mass-produced information of the press could never replicate.

The elite used the press, but as a source to spread their ideas, not to encourage debate. Thus the printing of the Constitution across Virginia in six newspapers, (twice as

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[447] For further reading on this belle-lettrist society, see, David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
[448] David Shields, *Civil Tongues*, xxviii.

a broadside and again as a pamphlet), represented for them an appropriate use of the press.[449] However, in allowing the press to reprint some of their thoughts, they did not anticipate the Pandora's Box it would become. Virginia's political dynasty missed the early warning signs that the press held the ability to level the playing field over control of political information. Over time, a clear distrust of the press became increasingly present in letters sent from political leader to political leader. Discussions over authentic material concerned them. Lightly veiled criticism arose suggesting the press lacked the clear authenticity that came from private (elite) correspondence. As a result, the newspapers adapted and took on a different role in Virginia. More than in previous states discussed in this study, the ratification debates encouraged newspapers to become publishing houses for personal letters. Often not submitted by the original authors, various political actors across the state leaked private letters written by important men to the press as a way of impressing people with the thoughts of the respected. Thus, when they read their private correspondence in public newspapers, the elite cried foul. The press crossed the line of personal respect by printing private matters publicly. In doing so it highlighted the conflict developing between the middling sorts' definitions of political participation and the elites' response in trying to control political information sharing.[450]

Virginia Politics

Founded in 1607 at Jamestown, the Virginia colony represented the oldest of the

[449] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 4.
[450] Konstatin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2009).

original thirteen states. It also boasted the largest population, in part because its growing population doubled every twenty-five years. In 1790, Virginia contained approximately 350,000 more citizens than the second most populated state, Massachusetts.[451] In 1788, when the Virginia ratification convention met, Virginia owned one-fifth of the total land owned by the thirteen states.[452] Virginia's land and its people's wealth highlighted its influence among the thirteen states.

In addition to its superior numbers, Virginia also housed a deeply entrenched hierarchical society. Twenty-one elite families dominated state politics. These families inter-married, relied upon one another to gain and sell land and slaves, and most importantly, kept the politics of running the state in each other's hands. Even after the Revolution, these founding elite remained in power and framed the state constitution to favor their oligarchic control. Local politics remained the central artery that kept the state political system functioning.[453] Historian Lance Banning noted, "[A]ll Virginia politicals were particularists in the sense that their perspectives, hopes, and fears were shaped by calculations and concerns arising from their regional position."[454] Localism dominated and as a result allowed Virginia's political elites to remain closely attuned and in control of the state's political power.

At the heart of this political system sat the County Court. Representing the most

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[451] Alan V. Briceland, "Virginia: The Cement of the Union," Patrick Conley and John P. Kaminski, eds., *The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Madison: Madison House, 1988), 201.
[452] Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 234.
[453] Richard Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1788–1801* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), xii.
[454] Lance Banning, "Virginia: Sectionalism and the General Good," Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 262.

powerful political entity in each locality, the court exercised executive, legislative, and judicial functions. Further, the justice of the peace governing the court served for life. This man served at the appointment of the governor (often on recommendation of local court officials) and assumedly came from the elite circles of its region. The sheriff of the court also represented another influential position. Continuing the tradition of internal control over political figures, the sheriff was nominated by the court and approved by the governor. Often the longest serving member of the court, he wielded control over everything from when the court met to dictating polling hours during an election.[455] Writing a friend, St. Jean de Crevecoeur indicated the power local sheriffs held in controlling polling hours, even extending them across multiple days. He described how the polls in the city of Alexandria remained open for three days in order to convince General Washington to put himself forward as a candidate. "The Election of the Town of Alexandria had been kept open for three days, in order to give the partisans of the new Constitution, & General Washington's friends, the time to be able to make him agree to be elected as one of the members of the State Convention but ever restrained by his modesty, he steadfastly refused to do it."[456] Such was the power of the local sheriff.[457]

The elites believed their service in state leadership roles were a necessity for the state to function properly. A newspaper editorialist well summarized the attitudes of the

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[455] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: xxv.
[456] St. Jean de Crevecoeur to Comte de la Luzerne, New York, 16 May; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 585.
[457] While elites held official positions of leadership, the strong localism that dominated state politics did not mean they could act with impunity. Citizens of the state seemed to trust those in power. Yet, evidence also appears that the same elite-supporting citizens also felt empowered to raise their voices in local elections. At the election for delegates in Amherst, 600 freeholders were reported to have attended. As noted by the local press, even "those who were prevented from voting, loudly and openly declared themselves in favor of the Gentlemen elected." *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 12 March; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 570.

elite when he wrote, "It is not every man, who is capable of discharging the duties of a member of the Assembly." While one may argue all elite thought of themselves as privileged, in Virginia, this attitude had a unique Virginia-centric approach. Not only did their qualifications derive from the local status, but they remained supported by them. Commenting on the requirements necessary for evaluating the Constitution and its proposed new government, he first noted the difficulty of governing "an extensive government." In order to further make his point, he compared political governance to every-day agricultural matters. When it came to hiring someone to provide advice for planting tobacco, he asked, would a plantation owner hire a "stranger to that business?"[458] He applied the assumed answer to the political realm. Why would you elect someone who lacked political governing experience? Elites operated on a world-order that automatically recognized their qualifications by rank. As Richard Beeman explains:

> The political leaders of the Old Dominion were accustomed to operating within a frame of reference that was peculiarly Virginian; their response to the policies of the new government was shaped by the interests and aspirations of their own localities and not by any broad conception of the national interest.[459]

Traditional deference to elites dominated Virginia's political spectrum. Expectations of the elite, in particular, followed this tradition. Even as other states, such as Pennsylvania, confronted growing unrest among the middling sort, Virginia elites remained insulated and protected in their own local communities.

Like Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York, Virginia was one of the last influential elite-led states to tackle the question of ratification. Unlike the switch and bate

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[458] "A Planter," *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 13 February; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 565–66.
[459] Richard Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1788–1801* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), xiii.

game the Pennsylvania Federalists played on their public, Virginia's elites knew their citizens had plenty of time to both digest the Constitution and to hear about its pros and cons. Thus, personal influence and appeals to local priorities became the focused strategies of the Federalists. Motivated by a failing economy and by a local mentality, Virginia's public remained much less excited by grandiose promises that Federalists had used to win over crowds in other states. Likewise, the fears that Antifederalists highlighted to motivate against ratification equally remained of smaller import. Virginia's ratification debates resided within the framework of Virginia local politics and local concerns. Elite Federalists felt the weight of swaying public opinion as no leaders had previously in the history of the state. While the middling sort had remained engaged in state politics, the ratification, the increased publication of materials in the press, and the growing stresses everyone felt financially, pulled together elite and non-elite into a conversation neither had previously experienced. Virginia joined the swelling tide of states inheriting the widening social collapse occurring between the elite and middling classes.

Communication across the State and Beyond

Virginia printed ten weekly newspapers over the year that the state debated the Constitution.[460] Newspaper presses resided in most of the major cities, Richmond,

[460] Unfortunately, "any issues of these newspapers are no longer extant, causing considerable uncertainty about how much and what actually appeared in them. Almost complete files exist for the *Virginia Independent Chronicle and Winchester Virginia Gazette*. The least complete files are for the *Richmond Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle* and *Petersburg Virginia Gazette*, which have only five and seven extant issues, respectively." John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds.; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 4.

Alexandria, and Winchester, to name a few.[461] While Virginia's press did not have the distinction of setting the template for the debates like Pennsylvania's presses had done, or of providing the compelling content that New York boasted, it clearly printed noteworthy materials for its citizens. From across the Atlantic in Paris, Thomas Jefferson requested his friend send him the "two 'best' Virginia Newspapers."[462] As with many of the other states, the Federalists had deeper pockets and easier access to the press than the Antifederalists. While most of the original materials printed in the state supported the Federalist cause, most reprinting of articles from elsewhere also followed that pattern. Interestingly, none of the major Antifederalist articles have been located as being reprinted in any Virginia presses.[463]

In geographic areas that did not have easy access to a broader newspaper circulation, friends often sent articles back and forth requesting aid in finding a local printer. Writing to James Madison, Joseph Jones relayed the pleasure his friend took in reading the articles sent by Madison. "I then informed him [a mutual friend] I had received some papers from you… and did not doubt he wo[ul]d. be pleased with the

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[461] Kaminski and Saladino note, "There are however, significant gaps in some of the ten newspapers, each of which printed nine regular issues in April and May. Only fifty-three of the ninety regular issues are extant. Complete runs exist for the *Richmond Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, *Richmond Virginia Independent Chronicle*, *Winchester Virginia Centinel*, *Winchester Virginia Gazette*, and *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*. The *Virginia Independent Chronicle* also published at least four extraordinary issues. The *Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal* has seven extant issues; the *Alexandria Virginia Journal*, one; the *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, one supplement; the *Petersburg Virginia Gazette*, none; and the *Richmond Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle*, none." "The Debate over the Constitution in Virginia, 1 April–31 May 1788, Introduction," John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds.; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 632.

[462] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 22.

[463] "The Debate over the Constitution in Virginia, 1 April–31 May 1788, Introduction," John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds.; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 634. Saul Cornell spends a good amount of time discussing the newspaper bias in favor of Federalist articles. He notes, "Although modern accounts have tended to dismiss Anti-Federalist complaints as either paranoia or propaganda, the surviving evidence about publication tends to support the indictment [of the Anti-Federalists]." *The Other Founders*, 122.

perusal of them." Jones expressed a common appreciation for accessing printed materials, particularly those penned by such influential leaders as Madison. He also described familiar efforts to have the materials Madison had sent printed in his local area. Jones expressed confidence in his friend and concluded his letter noting, "I… have no doubt he will endeavor to have them printed."[464] This short interaction between Jones and Madison summarized the interest many had in transmitting and reprinting ratification materials. The press quickly assumed a key role in the ratification debates as leaders and public alike relied on the medium to transmit ideas. A large state with much land, the sharing of articles proved increasingly common as a method for spreading the ratification debates.

Amongst themselves, the elite of Virginia conducted publicity mailings of their own. James Madison sent George Washington the first seven articles of *The Federalist*. Providing some history on the intention of the series, Madison noted, "They relate entirely to the importance of the Union… it will present to the public a full discussion of the merits of the proposed Constitution in all its relations." Though not physically in the state at the time, Madison understood and anticipated the concerns that many Virginians would bring against the Constitution. He wrote Washington of the concerns he had for the state and expressed hope that *The Federalist* articles would help quell fears. Madison also sent the same articles to a friend in Richmond and requested that he have them printed by local printers there. Interestingly, he sought to keep his personal activity quiet. He specifically requested of his friend that he find "confidential correspondents" who would be willing to reprint his *Federalist* articles. Seeking to work behind the scenes,

[464] Joseph Jones to James Madison, Richmond, 29 October; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 129.

personal letters between elites flew across the state. As elites shared ideas and strategies amongst themselves and articles and pamphlets with the public, they little realized the torrent of public interaction they would soon be facing.

Washington was another active key figure in the personal dissemination of printed materials. Writing to John Jay, he requested, "Could you, conveniently, furnish me with another of these pamphlets I would thank you, having sent the last to a friend of mine."[465] Importantly in this conversation and others, men such as Madison and Washington revealed a bias for disseminating materials through their own trusted channels of communication. While they understood the value of publication through the press—clearly it could reach a much larger readership than private letters or personal conversations—they still sought control over the information published by sending their materials through their own person trusted networks.

When the convention assembled, elites continued to rely heavily upon the mail system to disseminate strategic information. James McHenry wrote his friend, "To-nights post has brought me intelligence from your convention which induces me to send you the enclosed authentic information respecting the present state of the opposition to the constitution in Pennsylvania." McHenry further confirmed the authority of his intelligence as coming from the chief of Justice. He also noted that he held the authentic certificate from the clerk of the General Assembly in Pennsylvania.[466] Having established that his sources were trusted, he then encouraged his friend to make the "authentic information" public. As expressed by McHenry, elites believed the materials that came

[465] George Washington to John Jay, Mount Vernon, 15 May; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 803.
[466] James McHenry to James Madison Baltimore, 17 June; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1634.

through personal networks held more veracity than the information that came from anonymous sources in the press. Thus, elites distinguished between information they privately handled amongst themselves as authentic and that which was spread through more public means as not. Even Thomas Jefferson—a more established supporter of the press—held a clear bias for the accuracy of private letters over printed materials.

Historian Andrew S. Trees noted that elite preference for personal networking arose out of a belief that private letters displayed a transparency and authenticity of self that public expressions lacked. The notions of disinterest in politics caused the elites to disdain public stumping. It also explained why the elites worked through anonymous means of support and why they preferred private letters.[467] Trees continued, "Familiar letters were supposed to offer an unshuttered window into the writer's heart, providing, many commentators believed, 'the best pictures of their personal character.'"[468] Character was paramount in a society dominated by elite, and thus, private letters were an essential part to maintaining that. Their vested interest in continuing their power through the establishment of their character via private channels invested them heavily in personal letter writing. It also equally biased them against the press. Such an attitude toward the press revealed the growing democratization of that entity and the growing distrust the

[467] Another attitude apparent in the correspondences is that most elites chose to follow the eighteenth century rule of remaining politely removed from political events relating to themselves personally. Thus, Madison notes of the publications he had requested be printed, "I will not conceal from you that I am likely to have such a degree of connection with the publication here, as to afford a restrain of delicacy from interesting myself directly in the republication elsewhere. You will recognize one of the pens concerned in the task." James Madison to George Washington, New York, 18 November; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 167.

[468] Andrew S. Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 16.

elite had for this new level of participatory politics.[469] "Authority," for the elites, represented the veracity and reliability of their information.

Picking up on this elite language of authenticity, the press fought back in equal force. The *Massachusetts Centinel* described events in Virginia by prefacing their articles with the byline, "AUTHENTICK INFORMATION." Utilizing this same language, the press promoted their information as reliable as private correspondence. They also used other methods for establishing the authenticity of their information. They highlighted when they were quoting from an important letter; "Extract of a letter, dated New York, Thursday evening, June 12, 1788." They often highlighted the caliber of the individuals from whom the materials came. "Letters have been received this day from several gentlemen of distinction at Richmond." Further, they provided very specific information: the newspaper reported that the convention had agreed to debate the Constitution paragraph by paragraph; the article further described how Governor Randolph had come forward and thrown his support behind the Constitution; and the press recorded the careful articulation of Governor Randolph's words along with the factual reporting of the events in the convention. Such an attention to detail provided their means of fighting back against elite prejudice and acclamations of controlling the "authentic information." In a society dominated by print, those who controlled this "authentic information" held the power.

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[469] There is a whole subset of historical monographs written about the development of the belle lettrist world and its influence on the political culture of the early Republic. For further information see, Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 1992); Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and David S. Shields' *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

If the elites, as they claimed, held the truly authentic information, then their private letters were seen as extremely valuable and grew in value and importance for containing coveted information. Thus, as personal letters flew back and forth and clippings of newspapers articles were shared and republished, the issue of publishing private letters publicly became of concern. George Mason found that objections he had shared with a friend privately had ended up in the press. “These objections of mine were first printed very incorrectly,” he wrote, “without my Approbation, or Privity.” The fact that his thoughts had been expressed without his approval in such a public venue, led him to feel the need to correct the record with his friends. Writing Thomas Jefferson in Paris, he noted, “[such a disclosure] laid me under some kind of Necessity of publishing them afterwards, myself.”[470] The practice of the leaking of private thoughts of elite political figures became a much larger issue as it began to affect more and more men.

Personal exchanges were perceived as being best understood because of the pre-existence of a relationship between the two parties. Such a relationship promised to provide context and good will as each interpreted the other's words. Allowing one’s thoughts to be published in the public domain seemed, to the elite, a dangerous foray devoid of context and, most importantly, respect. Thus, moving beyond the private to the public turned this carefully controlled and understood world on its head.

Sometimes friends showed deference and requested permission to publish their thoughts publicly. Governor Randolph’s position on the Constitution had at first been perceived as negative. While this view eventually changed, at the beginning of the debate

[470] George Mason to Thomas Jefferson, Gunston Hall, 26 May; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 882–3.

many of his friends petitioned the governor requesting that they be allowed to publish a letter of his stating his objections to the Constitution. Governor Randolph replied, "Your favor… requesting permission to publish my letter on the new Constitution, gives me an opportunity of making known my sentiments, which, perhaps I ought not to decline." After discussing why he had withheld his thoughts to this point, he agreed to allow his thoughts to be published. However, he added the qualification that they only reveal his "objections to the Constitution in general terms."[471] In this situation, the respect Randolph's friends showed produced positive results for all involved.

While Governor Randolph's friends requested his permission to publish his private sentiments, a letter George Washington had written to Charles Carter landed squarely in the press without his prior approval. On the 1st of January the *Maryland Journal* printed the "Extract of a Letter, of a late Date, from the illustrious President of the late Federal Convention, to his Friend in Fredericksburg, Virginia—extracted from Mr. Green's Virginia Herald." Clearly relishing the opportunity to use the influential General's name in support of the Constitution, the paper printed his private thoughts on the matter of ratification.[472] The esteemed manner with which the public held the General meant that any statement of support—let alone a strong one—in favor of the Constitution would deal a great blow to the opposition. Washington's repeated appeal to a pragmatic

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[471] Gov. Edmund Randolph to Meriwether Smith, Charles M. Thruston, John H. Briggs, and Mann Page, Jr., Richmond, 10 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 229.

[472] Excerpts from the letter are as follows: "My decided Opinion of the Matter," Washington wrote, "is, that there is no Alternative between the Adoption of it and Anarchy.... All the Opposition to it that I have yet seen, is, I must confess, addressed more to the Passions than to the Reason; and clear I am, if another Federal Convention is attempted, that the Sentiments of the Members will be more discordant or less accommodating than the last. ... General Government is now suspended by a Thread, I might go further, and say it is really at an End, and what will be the Consequences of a fruitless Attempt to amend the one which is offered, before it is tried, or of the Delay from the Attempt, does not in my Judgment need to the Gift of Prophecy to predict." *Maryland Journal*, 1 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 277.

approach would also no doubt please the leaders of Virginia who had cited this very argument as one of their rallying cries.[473] The editors of the *Virginia Herald* rejoiced at having come across such intelligence. While ultimately helping Washington's larger cause for ratification, the publication of such private sentiments in such a public forum presented the elites with yet another challenge to their control over political (and now private) information.

Much has been written of the very carefully controlled public persona that Washington had constructed. Few have noted this incident and the insight such a public leak offers into understanding the construction and defense of this persona during this period. This leaked letter reveals the struggle that existed in Virginia's political elite community at this time. The divide between the thoughts expressed amongst the educated men of a belle letters society and those they deigned to share with the public outright quickly became irrelevant as the growing press printed both greedily. The growing importance of the press and its hunger to publish such promising morsels challenged the previously assumed privacy and control the elite had over public dissemination of political information.

Washington's letter to his friend, Carter, revealed the uneasiness he had approaching this expanding world of publication, "I find that an extract of my letter to you, is running through all the news papers; and published in that of Baltimore with the

[473] "I am not a blind admirer (for I saw the Imperfections) of the Constitution I aided in the Birth of, before it was handed to the Public; but I am fully persuaded it is the best that can be obtained at this Time, that it is free from many of the Imperfections with which it is charged, and that it or Disunion is before us to choose from. If the first is our Election, when the Defects of it are experienced, a Constitutional Door is opened for Amendments, and may be adopted in a peaceable Manner, without Tumult or Disorder." *Maryland Journal*, 1 January; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 1]: 277.

addition of my name." Washington not only registered alarm at the spread of his private thoughts, but remained even more concerned that his name had been cited alongside the article. In an age that still relied heavily upon pseudonyms this act seemed especially revealing and clearly unsettling to Washington. On the other hand, printers discovered that revealing an author's name was much better for publicity and for selling newspapers.

Washington's reaction toward his private sentiments becoming public reveals much about the attitudes of the elite at this time. His misgivings exposed the fact that he indeed expressed himself differently in private than he did in public. The careful public image he is so well known for indeed was a conscious effort on his part. The public viewing of private thoughts thus caused him great concern. He expressed that while he did not necessarily have problems with his support for the Constitution being known, he feared the public's response to his "undigested" private thoughts. "I must nevertheless confess, that it gives me pain to see the hasty, and indigested production of a private letter, handed to the public." Once again, Washington raised the distinction between the trust granted in private communication that could not be sustained in public:

> Could I have supposed that the contents of a private letter (marked with evident haste) would have composed a news paper paragraph, I certainly should have taken some pains to dress the Sentiments …in less exceptionable language, and would have assigned some reasons in support of my opinion, and the charges against others.

Washington's desire to use "less exceptionable language" suggested his distrust of the public mood and reactionary environment. Expressing himself as a concerned patriarch, he clearly did not trust the public to handle what he deemed to be emotionally charged

expression. A trust in reason and dispassionate argument fueled his desire to control that which was presented to the perceived irrational and easily manipulated public.

Washington revealed more about his expectations for private versus public expression in his correspondence with Carter about the leak. Expressing his displeasure at the situation, he noted that he believed Carter's intentions were noble. While seeking to think the best of his friend, he also chided him for the breach in trust. Rather than respond to the rumors circulating in the press, he expressed his desire to drop the issue and have it (hopefully) be quickly forgotten. "I have no inclination, and still less abilities for scribbling."[474] Referring to newspapers as "scribbling" provides an uncharacteristic insight into Washington's thoughts of the press. His remarks about having to "dress" his sentiments "in less exceptionable language" also revealed his view of the press as a carefully controlled stage meant to influence (one might even say manipulate) the public. He clearly believed that such "raw" and "unbridled" sentiments (as expressed in his private letter) could do irreparable harm to the support of the Constitution. Washington's unrest revealed his attitude toward the press and the public and painted a high relief contrast between the way the elites viewed the press and the role it was carving out for itself in lashing on so quickly to such "undigested" and thus more inflammatory rhetoric. Washington's characteristic restraint, let down in the public eye delighted the press, but angered the man behind the mask.

Washington's second letter to Carter revealed that Carter himself had not intended for the letter to be made public. Thus Washington found himself a second time having to

[474] George Washington to Charles Carter, Mount Vernon, 12 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 278.

retract “undigested sentiments” as he wrote his friend apologizing for blaming him for the indiscrete printing. Indicating his newfound disregard for the mail system, he wondered at who may have seen their latest correspondence as it made its way through the postal service. Once again, he apologized for “hasty and indigested sentiments” within his correspondence. Quick to recover a more publicly acceptable tone he noted his comments were not meant to construe any alarm at the Constitution. Willing to discuss his support for the Constitution, he wanted to be able to control how and where his public sentiments were directed. He again noted his concern for dressing his communication in appropriate prose and especially that it was accompanied with legitimate reasoning.[475] This time Washington seemed wiser to the potential for his letters to be rerouted and restored his carefully constructed prose. Not only did he apologize to his friend, but in the process he wrote of his support for the pro-ratification cause with which he had become invested.

Charles Carter spent a good deal of effort seeking to clear himself of the publishing fiasco of which he found himself at the center. To clear his name Carter sent Washington a letter detailing the steps of the mishap. Washington responded thanking him for the communication and repeated his conclusion that Carter had not released any materials purposefully. Even in Washington’s absolution of Carter of any wrongdoing, Washington noted the spread of his letter “which is now to be traced through all the news

[475] George Washington to Charles Carter, Mount Vernon, 20 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 278.

Papers."[476] The burgeoning newspaper industry was feeding on the topic of the day, and for better or for worse, forced the elites to begin to play by its rules.

Writing to another friend about the incident, Washington again repeated this phrase of wishing he would have had the opportunity to "dress" his rhetoric in acceptable prose. He expressed concern that his manner of expressing his ideas would not do the Constitution justice and would not serve the purpose of ratification.[477] Washington's distrust of the press only continued to grow as he disparagingly referred to the papers as "that Channel." A month later, Washington was still writing of the incident to others, expressing his slightly veiled outrage at the spread of his personal thoughts across states' newspapers. Citing many of the arguments he had listed earlier to Carter, Washington remained clearly upset over the issue. Writing to James Madison, he again noted his surprise at the "extensive circulation I find that extract has had."[478] Washington's refusal

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[476] George Washington to Charles Carter, Mount Vernon, 22 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 279.

[477] George Washington to Benjamin Lincoln, Mount Vernon, 31 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 279. His full account is worth reading: "You have undoubtedly seen my sentiments upon the Constitution in an extract of a letter written by me to a Gentleman in Fredericksburg, which I find has circulated pretty generally through the Papers, —I had not the most distant idea of its ever appearing before the public, for altho' I have not the least wish or desire to conceal my sentiments upon the subject from any person living, yet, as the letter containing the paragraph alluded to was written upon several other matters quite foreign to this, & intended only for that Gentleman's own inspection, I did not attend to the manner of expressing my ideas, or dress them in the language I should have done, if I had had the smallest suspicious of their ever coming to the public eye—through that Channel."

[478] George Washington to James Madison, Mount Vernon, 5 February; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia,1]: 279. Again, the full letter is worth reading: "At the time you suggested for my consideration, the expediency of a communication of my sentiments on the proposed Constitution, to any correspondent I might have in Massachusetts, it did not occur to me that Gnl Lincoln & myself have frequently interchanged letters—much less did I expect that a hasty, and indigested extract of one which I had written—intermixed with a variety of other matter to Colo. Chas. Carter, in answer to a letter I had received from him respecting Wolf dogs—Wolves—Sheep—experiments in Farming &ca &ca &ca.—was then in the press, and would bring these sentiments to public view by means of the extensive circulation I find that extract has had.—Although I never have concealed, and am perfectly regardless who becomes acquainted with my sentiments on the proposed Constitution, yet nevertheless, as no care had been taken to dress the ideas, nor any reasons assigned in support of my opinion, I felt myself hurt by the publication; and informed my friend the Colonel of it.—In answer, he has fully exculpated himself from the intention, but his zeal in the cause prompted him to distribute copies, under a prohibition (which was disregarded) that they should not go to the press. —As you have seen the rude, or crude extract (as you may please to term it), I will add no more on the Subject."

to publish a follow-up in the press indicated his level of distrust of the emerging institution. The private letter ended up being reprinted in four Boston newspapers from January 23rd through the 28th.[479]

Washington's attitude toward the press may be teased out of another private correspondence he sent. In the context of writing about what he perceived to be the sentiments of the state toward the Constitution, he noted, "The opponents of the Constitution are indefatigable in fabricating and circulating papers, reports, &c. to its prejudice."[480] Whether he had any respect for the press prior to the release of his private sentiments is unclear. Once the press had revealed its hunger and willingness to print private sentiments—and with clear attribution—Washington's attitude shifted decidedly against the tool that was part of an unpoliced organ willing to publish materialsregardless of personal sentiments.

Washington was not the only one to tire of and dismiss the press. George Anderson, from Cumberland County, wrote to a friend complaining of the lack of interesting materials in the press. He described the newspapers in his area as "barren" and devoid of "a sentence worth your attention." He described the voluminous materials in the press as "lengthy and various disputes between the Federalist and Anti federalist," and further exclaimed of the fatigue which he felt at the endless debate. He suggested the public must have tired of the ongoing debates even in such far off places as Kentucky.[481]

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[479] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 281.
[480] George Washington to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., Mount Vernon, 5 February; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 345.
[481] George Anderson to Richard Clough Anderson, Newington, Cumberland County, 30 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 579.

The elite and their devoted followers clearly distrusted this public and seemingly "raw" and "unsophisticated" means of transmitting information. Much more familiar with the rules and practices of personal correspondence, not to mention the control it allowed as pamphlets and letters passed among friends in a carefully constructed format, the press appeared way too haphazard.

More frequently than not, however, letters appearing in the press remained anonymous in attribution. Many assume (and rightly) that pseudonyms represented a means of avoiding libel charges in this era. However, historian Saul Cornell has noted the strategic usage of pseudonyms as well. "The participants in the public debate over ratification, printers as well as authors, were extremely self-conscious about the rhetorical identities they constructed when adopting pseudonyms." Cornell noted that New York Antifederalist printer, Thomas Greenleaf proudly boasted that his paper would always provide "spacious ground for the reencounter of a CATO and a CAESER—for a REPUBLICAN and ANONIMOUS—for a SIDNEY."[482] In Virginia, the *Virginia Herald* published a popular report from one of the convention attendees. However, the editor of the *Herald* noted that the author "desire[d] anonymity in the publication."[483] The reasons for choosing a pseudonym or anonymity were many. The pressing question after the Washington matter was whether anonymity would be honored or exploited in the press's expanded search for authority and authenticity.

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[482] Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 37.
[483] *Virginia Herald*, 12 June, "Extract of a letter from Richmond, dated June 9"; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1615.

While the press represented a new battleground for some, others embraced and utilized it to call the community together to discuss matters related to the new Constitution. Those in Winchester printed up an announcement calling the citizens of the area to gather to discuss the Constitution. The expressed goal of the meeting was to allow "those who are opposed to the plan [to]… declare their objections, and give the friends of it an opportunity of obviating them." Clearly believing they were reaching a large audience, they implored their readers to attend: "Americans attend! the fate of an empire may depend on the vote of the day!"[484]

In the backcountry, newspapers were sometimes not as plentiful, and so printed pamphlets were utilized to spread information. William Graham wrote a friend noting the lack of newspaper circulation. In lieu of this, he requested that he be sent pamphlets of the Constitution from his friend's local printer. Local leaders often relied upon their own funding to put these pamphlets into circulation. He assured his friend that he had others engaged in the process who would help pay for the printing of one to two-thousand copies. In this particular case, the organizers were Antifederalists. They agreed that the point of their pamphlet publications would be "To prove it [the Constitution] as arbitrary—To prove it will be very expensive and lastly that it is inadequate to the End proposed."[485] Even when newspapers were lacking, activitists turned to the press to help them spread their message. On either side of the printed argument, materials remained at the forefront of communicating the Constitutional debate.

Newspaper publishers thought of themselves as integral to the proper functioning

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[484] *Winchester Virginia Gazette*, 18 January; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 588.
[485] William Graham to Zachariah Johnston, Rockbridge, 3 November; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 143.

of democracy in the state. Sometimes this meant expressing frustration at the lack of materials available to a particular printer. The *Petersburg Virginia Gazette* printed the following announcement expressing frustration at the lack of materials they had secured from the Northern States. Calling himself "Mentor," this editorialist complained at "the great difficulty of procuring intelligence from the northern and eastern states, respecting their debates and proceedings on that grand question."[486] A newly minted newspaper in Winchester began their editorial announcements proclaiming the great role that the press played in political freedom of the state. He hinted at the rise of those who sought to discredit his credibility. "Although the secret views of ungrateful party, may aim an undeserved destruction at the first attempt to establish that safe-guard to the liberties of an independent people, a free Press in the borough of Winchester." Affirming his dedication to the freedom of the press he assured his new readers that "he is unalterably determined to persevere in his professional character, a[n] unbiased, impartial Printed, and depend on the rectitude of his intensions, and future productions, for the issue."[487] For better or for worse, the press had positioned itself as an integral player in the debate over ratification. While the Federalists seemed to have the most innate suspicion for the institution, they also came to utilize it increasingly to win over public support.

Reputation

While every state boasted its pedigree of elite politicians, Virginia housed a particularly influential lot among the influential. Mount Vernon housed the General

[486] "Mentor," *Petersburg Virginia Gazette*, 3 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 699.
[487] "Matthias Bargis' Editorial Announcement," 7 March; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 468.

praised for boldly and wisely leading the Continental Army to victory over the British. The 'Father of the Constitution,' James Madison, along with George Mason and Edmund Randolph also resided in the commonwealth. Lance Banning noted that "Perhaps no other state—at this time or any other time—could have assembled such a cast."[488] A key aspect to understanding Virginia's ratification involves understanding who the participants involved were. While other states had significant elite control over the ratification process, Virginia's history in particular set the elite up for expectations of control over the political process. Virginia was a state where the citizenry were reared in patterns of following political leaders on political matters.[489]

With the advent of the ratification debate across the states, elites found their authority much more quickly challenged than they expected. The notions of deference to elite leadership suddenly became unpredictable, especially as the elite themselves disagreed over the proper way forward. The instability each felt required they garner even greater support from their public. However, finding themselves in a difficult catch-twenty-two, the very public they needed to defer to their authority had decidedly become more vocal and antagonistic themselves. As elites split into competing divisions, they realized the campaign to find public support would require a strategic sleight of hand in order to gain popular support, while at the same time maintaining their position of deference and authority.

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[488] Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty*, 234.
[489] For a very thorough overview of Virginia's elites in the eighteenth century, see Emory G. Evans, *A 'Topping People': The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680–1790* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

A Virginia landholder, William Short, wrote a friend describing the three groups that had emerged around the Constitution; federalists, antifederalists, and those one might call the pragmatists, (who supported the Constitution with amendments). Interestingly, Short noted that he thought, "It is the middle body wh[i]ch. will probably decide the questions, & they will probably be determined by the wise & prudent example of Massachusetts, to confirm the constitution & recommend the amendments, instead of making the amendments a condition of their acceptance." In following the state's patterns of aligning by person (as opposed to cause), Short continued his description of those leading each of the three groups. "This middle body is headed by [George] Mason & E[dmund]. Randolph both members of the Convention." Among the ardent Antifederalists, Patrick Henry stood out as the most eloquent leader. Short described his rhetorical prowess as "incalculable." Short identified the Federalist leaders, as "Messrs Wythe, Pendleton, Madison, Innes.—they will be speakers." Continuing, he described "Mr. Blair of Wmsburg, Monroe, Marshal, G. Nicholas are members also & strongly federal—here is a great weight of abilities, of talents & virtue."[490] Short's descriptions highlighted what remained important to Virginians, that their leaders possessed a "great weight of abilities." Short's analysis of those involved, undergirded the commonwealth's natural bias toward elite leadership.

The power of the Virginia elite was known elsewhere in the country as well. Their reputations preceded them and their response to the Constitution became fodder for those in other states. A writer in Philadelphia made note of the surprising discord among the

[490] William Short to Thomas Lee Shippen Paris, 31 May; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 895.

state's elites. Most importantly, he noted, "they avoid all argument, and depend principally upon the magic of Names."[491] Name-dropping became a serious art in the state that relied upon personality and position to run their political system. Among the names most frequently mentioned in press and private correspondence, George Washington, George Mason, Patrick Henry, Edmund Randolph, and James Madison ranked pre-eminent.

Madison understood how often Virginia's politics returned to the opinions and views of the elite. Writing to Randolph he affirmed, "The great body of those who are both for & against it, must follow the judgment of others not their own." Madison believed so strongly in the power of name recognition in garnering followers that he mockingly suggested that if the same Constitution had been written "by an obscure individual, instead of the body possessing public respect & confidence" it would have "commanded little attention from most of those who now admire its wisdom." Writing to Randolph—who himself sat on the fence regarding ratification—Madison argued that the lack of support by such influential men as himself had hurt and divided the state. "Had yourself, Colo. Mason, Colo. R.H.L. Mr. Henry & a few others, seen the Constitution in the same light with those who subscribed it, I have no doubt that Virginia would have been as zealous & unanimous as she is now divided on the subject." Madison understood the level of dependence the public had upon elite opinion and leadership. As such, he clearly felt betrayed by his fellow leaders in their reticence (or outright hostility) for the Constitution. "I infer from these considerations that if a Government be ever adopted in

[491] *Philadelphia Freeman's Journal*, 30 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 331. (Italics mine.)

America, it must result from fortunate coincidence of leading opinions, and a general confidence of the people in those who may recommend it."[492] Regardless of the position of the elite for or against ratification, Madison understood the statewide pattern and realized the impact it would have on the direction of the debates.

George Washington was the most prominent member of Virginia's political elite. His service as General of the Continental Army and his strong and resolute leadership through the Revolution ensured his respected status throughout Virginia and beyond. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* celebrated his influence at the Constitutional Convention. "Even though Washington spoke in debate only once [at the Federal Constitutional Convention], his presence was critical to the success of the Convention since it gave that body a stature that it could not have attained otherwise." Philadelphia doctor and political leader, Benjamin Rush wrote of Washington's service at the Convention "Who can read or hear, that the immortal WASHINGTON has again quitted his beloved retirement, and obeyed the voice of God and his country, by accepting the chair of this illustrious body of patriots and heroes, and doubt of the safety and blessings of the government we are to receive from their hands?"[493]

George Mason and Patrick Henry represented the formidable Virginia Antifederalist junta. Their reasons for expressing such strong resistance to the Federal Constitution rested in their local impulses and loyalty to Virginia than in their affiliations with the ideological arguments that others touted. Writing to Madison about Mason and

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[492] James Madison to Edmund Randolph, New York, 10 January; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 289–291.
[493] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 30 May, CC:29; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: xxxix. Rush wrote under the name "Harrington."

Henry, Henry Lee described their opposition as two-pronged. Henry was "opposed to any system, was it even sent from heaven which tends to confirm the union of the states." He suggested that Mason "dislike[d] the proposed government, wish[ed] it amended, but if … not practicable, would adopt it sooner than jeopardize the union."[494] Many federalists feared Henry for his brilliant rhetorical skills. Lee bemoaned the influence he held in the current state assembly. "It is with real Grief I inform you that by a late vote of the assembly of Virga. on a collateral question, they have manifested hostility to the new constitution." Indicating the power Henry's rhetoric garnered, Lee noted that "Henry whose art is Equal to his talents for declamation, conducted this business & gained a majority on the vote of sixteen."[495]

Edmund Randolph's attitude toward the Constitution formed the topic of many a private letter and public article. Debates over whether he supported or opposed the Constitution continued through the course of the ratification debates. His hometown expressed support for him; proud of the sacrifice they had made in allowing him to attend the Federal Convention of the Constitution. Their pride in his roots was reflected in their public descriptions of him—"his Excellency EDMUND RANDOLPH, Esq.; our worthy CHIEF MAGISTRATE." The public hailed their leader in a hallowed state and congratulated themselves on the blessings they experienced as a result of being led by such an able leader. "[W]e cannot, without Exultation, reflect on the profitable Sacrifice, which we have made of it this some time past."

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[494] Henry Lee to James Madison, c. 20 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 248.
[495] Henry Lee to James Madison, Stratford, Westmoreland County, 7 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 223.

Randolph's reservations regarding the Constitution had kept him from signing the document in Philadelphia. When he returned to Virginia he kept his feelings regarding the Constitution quiet and thus much confusion existed regarding what side he supported. Many understood the weight that Randolph's views would lend to either side and thus a group of individuals petitioned him requesting he make his sentiments publicly known. Indicating the attention the public held in this issue, they wrote, "[M]any of the people of this Commonwealth have wished to know what objections could induce you to refuse your signature to a measure so flattering to many principal characters in America." They reminded him of how helpful his personal observations on the Constitution had been and requested (almost begged) that he make these observations public.[496] Randolph eventually agreed to allow his sentiments to become public. His qualified support for the Constitution (i.e. he supported ratification with the promise of amendments) indeed proved significant in helping sway support in favor of ratification.

Randolph's efforts in the Ratification Convention proved significan, and his reputation as a noble leader aided him greatly toward this end. Toward the end of the convention Randolph delivered a speech in favor of the Constitution. Randolph's speech remained significant, as many had eagerly waited to see which cause the Governor would throw his support behind. His main reasoning reflected much of the pragmatic language that had begun to disseminate throughout the press in Virginia. As the reported noted, Randolph argued, "That a contrary conduct would dissever the Union, and rather than

[496] Meriwether Smith, Charles M. Thurston, John H. Briggs, and Mann Page, Jr. to Governor Edmund Randolph, Richmond, 2 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 194.

consent to any thing that would have such a tendency, he would suffer his right hand to be cut off."[497]

Even though not physically present in the state for much of the early debate over the Constitution, James Madison was one of the key figures to appear prominently in the literature discussed and circulated among the elite and the public. Thomas Jefferson described Madison's importance in a private letter of his own. "Madison will be it's main pillar: but tho an immensely powerful one, it is questionable whether he can bear the weight of such a host."[498] The author of many of *The Federalist* essays (first published in New York City), Madison's works spread across Virginia and provided many elites with unified arguments in favor of ratification. Madison arrived in Virginia on the eve of his town's election of convention delegates. On March 24th, he was elected (along with another Federalist) to the state ratifying Convention. His friends and family sighed with relief as they all believed his presence crucial for the passage of the Constitution in the state.

Virginians felt a special responsibility for forwarding the establishment of a free society through the example of their political leaders. They boasted of their leadership in the press. One author writing in the *Virginia Chronicle* noted, "What VIRGINIAN's breast glows not with the Expectation of the Boon, he is bearing toward us, when he considers, that its first Shoot sprung from this State." As this author noted, Virginians believed the Constitution represented the minds of Virginia's worthy men who "give Dignity to human Nature." Their work to establish a free and independent government

[497] *Massachusetts Centinel*, 18 June; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1648.
[498] Thomas Jefferson to William Carmichael, Paris, 15 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 241.

secured for Virginians a respect for these men. The efforts of these elites (according to the Federalist supporters) had created a "Tree of Life, whose Fruit will enthrone this western Empire high among the Nations, and raise the firmest and fairest Temple to LIBERTY, that has every yet dignified this Globe."[499] Such boasting remained common among the politically minded of the state. Virginia represents a state in the throes of transformation from a state led by an unquestioned political elite to one energetically debated by a growing middling class. The concern and unrest expressed over the ratification debate revealed just how seriously challenging the political climate was.

Debt

Debt was a tremendous issue for Virginians, elite and non-elite, federalist and anti-federalist. The meeting of the Virginia state legislature in October of 1787 exemplified just how serious the issue had become. Petition after petition swept across the floor from various corners of the state requesting the issuance of paper money and debtor relief. George Mason responded to the requests by setting forth resolutions condemning paper money as "'ruinous to Trade and Commerce.'" Another member of the legislature referred to Mason's speech as the "'funeral Sermon of Paper Money.'"[500] Gordon Wood referred to the urgent calls for paper money as "the calls of American business." As internal commerce became increasingly significant, the calls for paper

[499] *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 26 September; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 19.
[500] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: xxviii.

money and the election of individuals promising increases in such heightened.[501] Paper money generally helped out the debtors, often those in the middling classes. Thus, as stronger calls for paper money arose and as political men began to campaign on promises of passing paper money resolutions, the elites felt their carefully orchestrated control over the economy (and politics) challenged.[502]

The greatest reason for the debate over paper money arose from the significant indebtedness of the state. The Revolutionary War coupled with heightened luxury commoditization left many in deep financial holes. As Wood noted, "Too many people had too many heightened expectations and were into the market and consumption of luxuries too deeply to make any easy adjustments to peace." Aside from spending beyond the limits of their income, Virginia's plantation owners also tended to jump at the latest loans offered instead of focusing on paying as they acquired goods. Plantation owner and established Virginia elite, Robert Carter, explained that "Too many among us, when a good market offers for their tobacco, will lay it out in stores and leave their old debts unpaid."[503] As extravagant lifestyles collided with a receding economy, loans began drying up. The expectations that Virginia planters had for ample British loans collided with British concerns over Virginia's abilities to pay back the loans they already owed. Over time Virginians developed an assumption, even expectation, of receiving loans. As Emory noted, "They came to believe that it was their right to draw on merchants for

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[501] Gordon S. Wood, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," Richard Beeman and Stephen Botein, eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 80.
[502] Jackson Turner Main's *The Antifederalists* and Woody Holdton's *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, provide further insight into the economic battles that framed the ratification debates.
[503] Robert Carter to William Dawkins, July 15, 1720, Wright, Carter Letters, 28; quoted in, Emory G. Evans, *A "Topping People,"* 104.

credit no matter what the balance was in their accounts."[504] Such issues did not just concern elite planters either. The middling sort—merchants, farmers, and traders—all felt the economic downturn and looked to their local government to help resolve the challenge.[505] Thus, Virginia's elites received panicked petitions from their constituents; at the same time they themselves faced a similar financial shortfall. To make matters worse, when aspiring young political candidates rose up promising the printing of more paper money and forgiveness of debt, the public followed willingly, thus shunning the traditional elite.[506]

International credit became severally limited in the late 1780s as a result of the burden of debt Virginians had acquired. Furthermore, the weakness of the Articles of Confederation had made enforcing debt repayment—especially to foreign creditors—virtually impossible. The sudden restriction of credit created yet more reason for the citizens of the commonwealth to gain a stronger public voice of complaint against their leaders. Virginians laid the blame of this crisis at the feet of the Congress. They described the activity of the Congress as imbecile and complained that they could nor would do anything to help relieve the current financial crises. "The Present Situation of America is: Our Credit Sunk with foreign nation, No Power in Congress to comply with their

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[504] Evans, *A "Topping People,"* 117.

[505] Woods makes an interesting point that "the collapse of internal markets and the drying up of paper money meant diminished incomes, over-debt-laden farmers and traders. ... The stay laws and other debtor-relief legislation and the printing of paper money were not the demands of a backward -looking uncommercial people. They were demands of people who had enjoyed buying, selling, and consuming and desired to do more of it." Wood, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," in *Beyond Confederation*, 78.

[506] Woody Holton argues that in fact it was the leniency of state legislatures (and not the public rebellions) that led the elite, such as Hamilton and Madison to write the Constitution. He writes, "Insurgents exerted substantial tax and debt relief from reluctant state legislatures, and overturning this legislation became on the principal reasons the Constitution was written." *Unruly Americans*, 158.

Contracts, The States Refusing or neglecting to comply with the Requisitions of that Body."[507] Voices on both side of the fence expressed their disdain at the current economic situation of the state and looked around for any offers of a palatable solution.

The Constitution became the focus of much of the political conversation about Virginia's economic state. Would it help the state or hinder its economic recovery? Many argued that the Constitution offered the needed stability to return Virginia to its previous prosperity. "If there are any of the citizens of your state who expect to see manufactures established in Virginia, it will appear of great consequence to them that you should be a part of new confederacy." Writers varied between promising good things if the Constitution became law to foreboding doom if the state refused to ratify it. "An American" writing to the Virginia Convention, appealed to the economic interest of the state by suggesting that "the shock to public and private credit both at home and abroad, that will consequent on the rejection of the proposed government, will be most violent and dreadful." By dreadful, he promised that "Every [economic] scheme of prudence and enterprise among our own citizens, every plan of adventure [or capital] and establishment here … will be checked and subverted."[508]

Personal finances influenced public debates over ratification. Olney Windsor, in a letter to his wife, noted the effect of the current economic system on their personal finances. "The unsettled State of Gover[n]ment and Commerce has much perplexed the people engaged in business, in all the Union." But rather than remaining a more

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[507] Samuel McDowell to William Fleming, Mercer County, Ky., 20 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 254.

[508] "An American," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 28 May, "To the Honorable the Members of the Convention of Virginia"; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 889–890.

philosophical problem that had not touched the individual, Windsor reported his large (and personal) stake in the financial matter. "I have had, what I call, a large share—if we do not get a fixed and stable Government, perhaps worst is to come—but I will not anticipate evil."[509] Clearly, this was not the news anyone would want to receive, yet, it represented an increasing problem that plagued elite and middling citizen across the state.

The Constitution's promise to enforce repayment of debts (in order to establish good credit) hurt some. However, it also promised stability to others, especially the elite. Charles Lee wrote to George Washington wondering what the state of personal finances would become should the Constitution be passed. He expressed that a great deal of uncertainty existed across the state as individuals sought to position themselves to benefit from future political actions of the state. "What results will be of retaining your public securities, is a thing of great uncertainty upon which opinions are very different."

Charles Lee agreed with many who saw the only means of righting the economic ship as being through the new Constitution. He believed that if the Federal government was not established then the state governments would wipe out private debt. Apart from the peaceful establishment of a new government, he warned that "public debts and even private debts will in my opinion be extinguished by acts of several Legislatures of the several states." [510] Many of the political elite represented debt financiers. If the state legislature forgave a large amount of public or private debt many elite would find their financial situation greatly altered for the worse. The fear of legislative activism scared many elites into the ratification camp. Another elite author, Collin McGregor, mentioned

[509] Olney Windsor to Mrs. Olney Windsor, Alexandria, 19, 17 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 734.
[510] Charles Lee to George Washington Richmond, 11 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 734–5.

the same fear to his correspondent. He warned that in barring the passage of the Constitution the state legislature would "not only [have a] disability to pay but a real intention to Annihilate the former Domestick debt."[511]

However, rather than just being an antidote to legislative activity, the Constitution also offered a positive for investors. The Constitution offered to debt holders the promise of appreciating public securities and stability. Charles Lee believed that if the Constitution were adopted and then confidence in the government would create more investment and would help securities appreciate.[512] Collin McGregor described the negative side of this coin. "[S]hould Virga. not adopt, I fear there will be confusion in this Country and Securities will of course fall."[513] Such an act McGregor noted would result in the establishment of new burden as the value of public securities would be further diminished.[514] Other correspondence uncovered these same calculated speculations occurred between many individuals. Such personal speculation filled conversations and overflowed into correspondence and public communication.

A letter written after the ratification of the Constitution by St. George Tucker revealed that often regardless of what side of the economic debate one was on, finances were affected by the new Constitution. The Constitution indeed brought great economic change to the State and beyond (New York in this case). Writing to his sons (and heirs) he noted, "You will have heard that the Constitution has been adopted in this State; that Event, my dear Children, affects your interest more nearly than that of most others. [T]he

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[511] Collin McGregor to Neil Jamieson, New York, 2 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 637.
[512] Charles Lee to George Washington Richmond, 11 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 734–5.
[513] Collin McGregor to Neil Jamieson, New York, 2 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 637.
[514] Ibid., 637.

recovery of British debts can no longer be postponed, & there now seems to be a moral certainty that your patrimony will all go to satisfy the unjust debt from your Papa to the Humbury's." The legitimacy of his debt aside, Tucker noted that having to repay war debts would have a devastating consequence on his ability to pass along his wealth to his sons. "The consequence, my dear boys, must be obvious to you—your sole dependence must be on your own personal Abilities & Exertions." Without the traditional means of inheriting one's financial security, Tucker challenged his sons to use their youth wisely so as to lay a good foundation for themselves. "[I]t is happy for you, my sons, that the Event has been so long postponed as to give you an opportunity of laying the foundation: the superstructure must depend upon your assiduity. The present moment is the most precious of your lives; I trust my dear Fellows you will not suffer to pass off without availing yourselves of every opportunity of Improvement."[515] An elite and important political leader, St. George Tucker's devastated financial state mirrored that of many other leaders in Virginia and beyond. In a society where financial well-being was closely associated with social and political leadership status, such a loss was distressing and put the elites on edge as they felt their power slipping from their hands on multiple fronts.

While the elite fretted about the loss of their power, others cast their net wider, inviting a broader audience to realize the economic benefits of ratification. A writer calling himself, "A Freeholder," wrote in the *Virginia Gazette*, detailing the economic benefits that select groups across the state would enjoy should the Constitution be passed. He identified those with vested interests in the economic outcome of the ratification and

[515] St. George Tucker to Theodorick Bland Randolph and John Randolph, Richmond, 29 June; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1720.

listed them as: “Freeholders, Farmers, Planters, Fathers, Husbands, Holders of Public Securities, and even Debtors and Creditors.” Pleading for their attention and support he assured them, “believe me, you are all interested in a speedy establishment of the new constitution.” As the author continued his appeal, he revealed the extent to which all aspects of Virginia’s society were engaged in economic questions. For the freeholders, he promised that their votes for Congressional representatives and the president would greatly increase their importance and political sway, thus allowing them to determine more clearly how economic policy would be set and by whom. Farmers and planters were promised greater geographic range for the selling of their crops, including the ability to sell them duty-free. Inter-state trade would increase as “your brethren of the other states are invited by this means and by having no duties on entries to pay, to come and trade with you.”

Public displays of violence had increased as a result of the economic downturn. Shays’ Rebellion in Massachusetts stood as the all too recent and unsettling demonstration of just how desperate individuals had become in order to secure economic relief. Republican political theory noted that good republican society secured domestic happiness. Thus, for pro-Ratification forces, domestic happiness proved yet another benefit promised to accompany the passage of the Federal Constitution as well. “Fathers and husbands, observer, that by this constitution alone you can hope to enjoy domestic happiness.—this alone can secure to you your republican form of government, and can guard you against foreign and domestic violence.” This author assured his worried audience that the Constitution would provide stability against such uprisings.

With one central political entity controlling credit, the "holders of public securities" were promised increased stability and profit. "[C]ommerce will flourish, industry will increase, public and private credit will be established; which circumstances must bring money amongst us, and enable you to borrow or sell upon good terms—debtors may then certainly have credit for the full value of their estates; or if they should be so low in credit as to be incapable of borrowing they may at least sell upon good terms." Current borrowing had become incredibly difficult, if not virtually impossible. Thus, in referring to the promises of "flowing credit" and an active market he sourly noted "neither of which things can now happen." Creditors had much to gain as the proposed Constitution promised to secure them "against tender acts &c. and will enable your debtors to pay you honorably." Regardless of the political leaning of the essayist, his economic extrapolation of every main stakeholder in the society as benefitting financially from the Constitution revealed the level of insecurity across the state. His conclusion implored, "Let every honest fellow of you then support the new constitution."[516]

While personal credit remained a preoccupation of many private letters and communications, written correspondence also spread about the actual stability of the state's finances. Another author noted that in his county, "There is not so much money in County as will pay the taxes next year—Without the Fedral Govt is adopted we are undone."[517] Patrick Henry understood the state's economic state, but clearly expressed distrust at allowing a Federal institution not familiar with the state's political and social structure to govern their finances. "With respect to concurrent collections of parochial,

[516] "A Freeholder," *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 23 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 753.
[517] Adam Stephen to Horatio Gates, 19 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 244.

county, and State taxes.... The County Courts have power over the county and parish collections, and can constantly redress any injuries or oppressions committed by the collectors. Will this be the case in the Federal Courts?"[518]

As the state debated economic issues, the rhetoric utilized to express their ideas shadowed the integral connection between economics and politics. As historian T.H. Breen argued so well in his work, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, Americans had first utilized commerce and commodities as a means for unification and political discovery in the American Revolution. Through the purchase of mundane daily materials, Americans began to discover their own independence and control over much larger political realities. Breen argued that "Parliament's attempts to raise revenue in the colonies sparked a profound symbolic transformation in which objects of everyday life—the myriad 'Baubles of Britain'—suddenly acquired new shared meanings. Within this political environment private decisions about mundane purchases became matters of public judgment."[519] As the now independent states sought to find a political structure to sustain such independence, the line between politics and economics blurred. The shared meaning of what it meant to be an American developed through the discussions of how credit and debt should be dispersed and monitored.

While financial concerns had appeared in other state constitution debates, Virginians remained the most concerned about the issue. Their private and public documents frequently mentioned it and it became a significant argument used by both

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[518] The Virginia Convention, Thursday, 12 June 1788, Debates, Patrick Henry; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1220.
[519] T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 200.

sides for or against ratification. The economic issue remained significant because—unlike in some economic recessions—this one cut across social spheres, hurting both elite and non-elite alike. Once again the press helped direct the emotional frenzy of the economic situation into political energy. As it spread reports of the economic downturn and as essayists used the opportunity to write for or against ratification, the press created a larger community of individuals united by local causes and invested emotionally, socially, and politically in the outcome, even if it did seem distant in reality.

Sectional Divide

While finances dominated much of the content of the ratification debate in Virginia, another equally important local issue competed for priority status. This issue—like the economic one—remained tied to Virginians' understanding of themselves politically, and their rights and freedoms over land acquisition and control. The acquisition of land had created the tensions that erupted in the French and Indian War and which had sent Britain into such great debt in the 1760s. It had driven the colonists to continue to move further westward and southward and had became a right enshrined in their growing list of "inalienable" rights. Virginians feared losing this right as well as the ability to control the westward trade around which they had built much of their economy. "The expected trade of Virginia with that fertile country between Potowmack and the lakes, together with your Indian trade through the waters of Ohio, would be lost, if your honorable house should finally reject the constitution." Sectional divides and distrust of

how the North would treat southern trade routes and agreements drove the Virginia Federalist call for ratification.[520]

Virginians wrote each other about this pressing issue. John Bannister described the South in contrast to the East and in doing so reflected the feelings of most Virginians. "Singular as it is, the Southern States were republicans whilst the Eastern leaned toward a monarchy."[521] Many Virginia leaders, on both sides of the ratification divide, worried about sectional issues. Federalists and Antifederalists alike expressed concern over which route (ratification or not) would give them a secure vote and voice against the perceivably antagonistic North. One might assume that the major sticking point between North and South revolved around slavery. But as Banning noted regarding Mason's main objections, "The northern attitude toward slavery was not his major worry. Mason was concerned, as grew increasingly apparent, with familiar economic differences between the planting and commercial states, with the position of Virginia, and with the specter of minority control."[522] Virginians feared being outvoted by a strengthening North. And a good deal of the debate over the constitution centered around whether or not Virginia would gain control and have the ability to stand up to the Northeast if the Constitution became the law of the land.

Edmund Randolph raised his concerns regarding the North in quite blunt language. "But the Northern States struggle for money as well as for empire." Randolph

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[520] "An American," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 28 May, "To the Honorable the Members of the Convention of Virginia"; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 889–890.
[521] John Banister, Jr. to Thomas Jefferson, Battersea, 27 September (excerpt); *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 21.
[522] Lance Banning, "Virginia: Sectionalism and the General Good," Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, eds., *Ratifying the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 269.

not only believed Virginia's economic interests to be quite different from those of the rest of the South, but even more importantly, believed the North cared only for continental domination. Under the Articles of Confederation, Randolph argued, "Cannot Congress make such a regulation as they please at present? If the Northern States wish to injure us, why do they not do it now? Whatever greater dangers are there to be dreaded from the new Government, since there is no alteration? If they have a Majority in the one case, they have in the other." He was not convinced the new Constitution provided enough safeguards against Northern domination. "The interest of those States would be as dangerous for us under the old as under the new Government, which leaves this business where it stands."[523] George Washington also reported on this distrust. "This, however, I may say, that the Northern, or upper Counties are generally friendly to the adoption of the Government, the lower are said to be generally unfriendly, the Sentiments of the western parts of the State are not fully known, but no means have been left untried to prejudice them against the System."[524]

Time and time again, the problem of the Mississippi River appeared in private correspondence and public newspapers as a key issue in whether to approve the Constitution or not. An issue that illustrated the sectional distrust surrounding the ratification debates was the treaty agreement being worked out between the States and Spain over the rights of usage for the Mississippi. John Jay and the Spanish representative, Don Diego de Gardoquoi, had been seeking to pen a mutual agreement on navigation rights since 1785. In August 1786, Jay presented Congress with a request to

[523] The Virginia Convention Debates, 17 June 1788, Edmund Randolph; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1359.
[524] George Washington to Benjamin Lincoln, Mount Vernon, 2 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 637.

forbear the question of control over navigation rights of the Mississippi for twenty-five or thirty years. This compromise promised to open up greater commercial opportunities between the States and Spain in the coming years.[525] Such a request angered the Southern states and reinforced their belief that the Northeastern states would walk right over them if given the opportunity. Three months later, the Virginia House of Delegates received an impassioned petition from its Kentucky members that expressed great resistance and alarm at the news about Jay's request. The Kentucky members, in particular, saw Jay's request as an "'unconstitutional' and 'dangerous' action and 'a violation of the foederal compact.'" The navigation of the Mississippi was not only necessary to their economic livelihood, but they believed its navigation to be a "natural right." The Mississippi issue thus became a central point of contention in raising the Southern state's awareness of the importance of representational proportions in the new government.[526]

Kentucky citizens expressed major concerns surrounding the river issue and communicated their outrage strongly. On the front line of this debate, representatives from Virginia's farthest border expressed their outrage as the thought of relinquishing what they saw as part of their God-given rights to the river. Writing from Danville, Kentucky, Harry Innes noted "Should the Commercial Treaty with Spain come before Congress whilst you are there, I hope you will be able to refute the suggestion of Mr. Jay—'That the Western People had nothing yet to export, & therefore the Cession of the Mississippi would be no injury to them'" Angered by such an ignorant assumption, Innes went on to express the views that many on the western front held, "[T]he God of Nature

[525] [Editorial Note]; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: xxix.
[526] Ibid., xxix.

having made that River the only outlet to this Western World, we are entitled to a free navigation thereof upon this principle that it was intended for a Common from the creation, & that no government ought to monopolize it solely."[527] As with many concurrent issues, Kentucky citizens understood navigation as a "right;" which party would control discussion about this "right" became a central concern regarding the Constitution.

As "rights" rhetoric gained momentum, Federalists and Antifederalists sought to answer concerns and quell fears. Another Kentucky citizen wrote, "This day has been wholly occupied in endeavoring to gain over the members from the Kentuckey district, who are alarmed with an idea, that the power of making treaties, which shall be the supreme law of the land, vested as it is in the president and senate, will be exercised, in some fatal moment, to the prejudice of their right to the navigation of the Mississippi."[528]

At the Virginia Convention, Patrick Henry concentrated a good deal of his rhetorical energies on sectional issues as well. "As to the Western Country, notwithstanding our representative in Congress, and notwithstanding any regulation that may be made by Congress, it may be lost. The seven Northern States are determined to give up the Mississippi." Convinced of the North's self-prioritizing interest, Henry warned that the Constitution would only further embolden them. Rehearsing Jay's argument he noted, "It is the interest and inclination of the seven Northern States to relinquish this river. If you enable them to do so, will the mere propriety of consulting the

[527] Harry Innes to John Brown, Danville, KY., 7 December; *DHRC*, VIII, [Virginia, 1]: 221.
[528] *Pennsylvania Packet*, 20 June, "Extract of a letter from a Member of the convention of Virginia, dated June 13"; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1660.

interest of the other six States, refrain them from it?" Henry's appeal to local interests played upon distrust of those beyond the Virginia boundaries.[529]

Regardless of the whether Virginians debated debt or the Mississippi River they remained locally focused, and on resolving their own problems internally. St. Jean de Crevecoeur summarized the struggle the state faced when evaluating the Constitution most profoundly. "[T]hey say that the greatest obstacle to the adoption of the new Constitution in Virginia, are debts & dignity." Ones economic plight often determined the support one offered. "[I]n effect, one can see that those who owe much look to put off the Establish[men]t. of a Govt. that promises to all the most Impartial Justice." As for the elite, de Crevecoeur noted their preoccupation with "dignity." "[A]s for dignity," he wrote, "…there are a great many People who fear to see their personal Importance eclipsed by the brilliance of a truly Federal & Energetic Govt."[530] Debt and dignity, or economics and reputation, dominated Virginia's ratification debates.

Conclusion

Virginia's ratification convention followed the pattern of the preceding conventions. Edmund Randolph suggested that the main issue was not what each clause of the Constitution did or did not protect, but whether Virginia would agree to the Constitution and thus be for a union with the other ratifying eight states or would chose disunion and thus create a decision for the following states to make regarding who they

[529] The Virginia Convention, Thursday, 12 June 1788, Debates, Patrick Henry; *DHRC*, X, [Virginia, 3]: 1220.
[530] St. Jean de Crevecoeur to William Short New York, 1 April; *DHRC*, IX, [Virginia, 2]: 635.

would follow.[531] While New Hampshire and New York held conventions at the same time (and New Hampshire ultimately became the 9th state to ratify), Virginians accustomed style of leadership encouraged the feelings of responsibility for their decision. As the writer had said so eloquently, Virginians were concerned with dignity and debt. Ultimately, their ratification of the Constitution arose because they felt the preservation of the one and atonement of the other to be best satisfied with the establishment of the Federal Government.

Much effort has been made in previous chapters to pull out the voice of the growing middling class and to argue for their burgeoning voice as evidence of an expanding participatory political culture. Virginia certainly boasted its share of rising middling class partisans who gladly took on the role of local political specialist extraordinaire. However, what reveals the transformation of Virginia's political culture from elite-dominated to one more democratized is the squirming and dancing the elites did throughout the ratification convention. George Washington wrote about the nation's character that "We are a young Nation and have a character to establish. It behooves us therefore to set out right for first impressions will be lasting, indeed are all in all."[532] Indeed, the character that was being formed through the ratification debates was not the character that was solely emanating from the established elite. Rather, it was becoming a larger more mixed one of compromise between competing positions. Most importantly, it was becoming a character that was growing in its acceptance of legitimate dissent. It was

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[531] Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty*, 238.
[532] George Washington to John Augustine Washington, 15 June 1783, in *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. Ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931044), XXVII, 13. Cited in, Trees, *Founding Fathers*, xi.

growing in its acceptance of public print as authoritative and expanding character beyond an elite circle of individuals.

Virginia's ratification debates provided the final act for many of its traditional elite families. Financially devastated and politically less and less important, their period of stardom set. Yet, in that very closing as they battled their way through the ratification debates, they helped create the structure upon which a new drama began to unfold. Two of its proponents—James Madison and Thomas Jefferson—stood upon the very same principles of the Federal Constitution to become ardent supporters of the "little man." And with the election of 1800, which witnessed the first peaceful transfer of power from the Federalist party to the Democratic-Republican party, the state of Virginia once again led in the sunset of elite rule. The bow to a more democratically focused government led by individuals who sought to celebrate the common farmer and artisan, suggests that though Virginia's elites relinquished their oligarchic roles during the ratification debates, their influence lasted much longer and toward a much greater end than they could have ever realized.

Conclusion

Every historian is driven by questions. Mine have circled around participatory politics and newspaper development. What role did the average person assume they would play in politics across the United States in 1788? What role did they assume the press performed in society? Was it merely an advertising center for economics with a few prescient sermons and editorial articles thrown in for reading together at the tavern on an evening night? Of particular importance, I have discussed how the process of ratification by the people, in which the press played such a large role, helped usher in a broader, more democratized political process than would have been if only the state legislatures had ratified? In other words, what role did the public and the presses really play in ratification? How did this role affect the definition of American nationalism?

My approach has been to analyze the ratification conventions through the press. Thus, my research has brought together the intersection of the history of print and the history of participatory politics in early America. In seeking to understand the intersection of these two streams and to further tease out answers to my questions I have found, as researchers often do, many more questions than conclusions. However, putting caveats and complexities in their proper place, the historical record has led me to a satisfied conclusion. During the period of the ratification debates the nature of public expectations for political involvement gradually shifted from a deferential removed interest to an active personal activity, and indeed, the press both responded to and fueled

this shift. While working to avoid a determined teleology or presentist approach, I do believe that the unique juncture of a nation-wide debate over one specific political/legal document created a unique condition for the rise of participatory politics.

In addressing the particular questions that have arisen around the role of the press in the convention debates, I have landed in the middle of a vibrant debate over the origins of the press and its true impact on political shifts. Many excellent books have been written on the growth and development of the role of the press through American history.[533] In spite, or maybe because of, such thorough scholarship, debates continue over the exact launching point of the press (was it Gutenberg in the sixteenth century, the British press in the seventeenth century, the American Revolution in eighteenth century?). I argue that American's expectation of the press as a check on government and as a central tool for participatory politics emerged during the Constitutional era.

While the story of the writing of the Federal Constitution has attracted great interest, far fewer historians have been drawn to analyzing the individual state ratification conventions. The Constitution itself helped dictate this focus, after all it empowered the Federal government over individual state governments. Historian Forrest McDonald well summarized an equally valid reason for the paucity of information: "the story is one of labyrinthine complexity."[534] He is right. Do the math. Thirteen states. Due to North Carolina and Rhode Island's resistance, fourteen conventions were actually called. Each state determined the method by which delegates were elected. All combined, one

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[533] See Michael Schudsen, *Discovering The News: A Social History Of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communication* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
[534] Forrest McDonald, "Foreword," in Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, ed., *Ratifying the Constitution*, ix.

thousand seven hundred and fifty men sat in the thirteen state conventions. Furthermore, many states experienced social unrest over these elections and other ratification-related issues. The conventions spanned over three years from 1787 to 1789. When the Constitution became the binding law of the land not every state had ratified. The issues continued to multiply. So why attack such a topic? Historians Michael Gillespie and Michael Lienesch well summarized the significance of such an undertaking:

> The significance of ratification was not lost on Americans of the time. When asked later in his life about the meaning of the United States Constitution, James Madison observed that it could be found not in the deliberations at Philadelphia, where delegates drafted a grand theory of government, but in the debates in the several states, where the theory was explained, interpreted, and test in the real world of practical politics. For us today, ratification provides a starting point for examining the meaning of our Constitutional republic.[535]

In many ways American democracy could be defined as a continual starting point, circling around a set of principles listed in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Studying what these first looked like in the real world of practical politics not only makes the Constitution more believable but also better contextualizes many of the continuing debates in American politics. Understanding the development of politics sheds significant light into why Americans venerate the Constitution and so strongly defend principles such as self-determination and natural rights.

Liberal or conservative, activist or originalist, political debates in modern American all center on the 1789 Federal Constitution. Rather than losing its political appeal over time the document has garnered increasing respect. The document exists in American political, social, and cultural life as magisterial *Magna Carta*, hallowed

[535] Michael Allen Gillespie and Michael Lienesch, ed., *Ratifying the Constitution*, 2.

scripture, and practical how-to manual. The ratification debates that took place in all thirteen states in the late 1780s helped define this reverence as part and parcel of the fabric American nationalism.

The ownership that the public took over debating the Constitution not only helped fashion a tradition of political participation, it also provided other substantive American documents and practices that define politics today. *The Federalist Papers*, as well as collections of Antifederalist speeches and texts, fill bookstores and bookshelves across the country. Biographies of George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other founders likewise frequent the *New York Times* bestseller list. American fascination with its origins never seems to tire. While the Revolutionary War stands as that universal appeal to a nation's right of self-determination, the ratification debates stand as the true establishment of what this self-determination looked like in practice.

In many ways the same questions of access to government by the governed have remain just as salient today as they were during the founding era. In 2010, openness, transparency, and collaboration are the watchwords of the Obama presidential administration. The 2008 election that launched the current administration into the White House centered on the question of government openness and what secrets are necessary for societal protection. Historian Jack Rakove has described American democracy as "an endless present, a polity that occasionally looks forward but rarely looks back (except through mists of nostalgia and myths of origins that little resemble the complexities of the

past).”[536] The debates have not changed. What has changed is how much of an established element the press has become in these debates.

As with all interesting histories, this story has a fascinating protagonist: a young tempestuous nation. It has a formidable antagonist, the threat of chaos and of a return to authoritarian rule. The outcome is the story of how a young nation pressed their voices and changed history as a result. I do not think I need to remind you, though, that the conclusion is still ours to write.

[536] Jack Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution.* New York: Vintage, 1996.

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