



# THE FEDERALIST PAPERS

A MODERN TRANSLATION  
IN PARALLEL TEXT

**TEACHER EDITION**

TRANSLATED BY  
**Genevieve Gilbert-Rolfe**

## Contains

- Essay Numbers:  
1, 10, 39, 51, 53, 70, 78
- Teacher Introduction
- Guided Reading Questions
- Research Questions
- Discussion Questions
- Debate Topics
- Internet Assignments
- Glossary



**SOCIAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL SERVICE**

©2001 DAC Educational Publications

Published by:

Social Studies School Service

10200 Jefferson Blvd

P.O. Box 802

Culver City, CA 90232

Phone: (800) 359-0961

[www.socialstudies.com](http://www.socialstudies.com)

Cover Design: Mark F. Gutierrez

Book design: A.R. Harter

ISBN# 978-1-930731-01-1

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# Foreword

## *The Federalist Papers: A Translation*

With the exception of the Constitution itself, there are no more significant documents in America’s political history than *The Federalist Papers*. *The Federalist Papers* are important because they provide the most authoritative interpretation and commentary on the Constitution, the leading law of our land. The Constitution is brief. It establishes the broad principles of governance in the United States but it does not give reasons for its various provisions nor explain why they are important. *The Federalist Papers*, written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, explicate the meaning of the Constitution. Politicians, Supreme Court justices, and citizens alike look to *The Federalist Papers* in order better to understand the Constitution and to apply it more accurately to contemporary political questions. In recent years, *The Federalist Papers* have been important for helping to resolve such vexing questions as what the Constitution means by “high crimes and misdemeanors” for the purpose of impeaching a President and how to resolve the tension between Congress’ power to declare war with the President’s power as commander-in-chief

The first plan of national government in the United States was not the Constitution, however, but a plan called the Articles of Confederation. Ratified in 1781, the Articles guided the new American nation after its War of Independence with Great Britain. The Articles of Confederation vested political power in the hands of state governments because many Americans believed that a too powerful national government would threaten their liberty. Under the Articles, the national government could neither tax nor regulate interstate or foreign commerce, and the Articles could only be amended with the unanimous agreement of the Congress and the assent of all the state legislatures, a virtually impossible task.

Political and social problems mounted in America and it became clear to many that the national government under the Articles of Confederation had neither the economic nor the military power to function effectively. On February 2, 1787 the Continental Congress resolved that: “on the second Monday in May a Convention of delegates who shall have been appointed by the several States be held in Philadelphia for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.”

Convinced that a simple revision of the Articles was insufficient for the problems at hand, the delegates drafted a new Constitution setting up a stronger national government for the states. Before it could take effect, however, a minimum of nine state conventions had to ratify the Constitution and the process of selling it to the people began. The newspapers of the day became the battleground for a remarkable series of articles supporting and opposing ratification of the Constitution.

The proponents of ratification, calling themselves Federalists, published eighty-five articles in New York newspapers beginning in October of 1787 under the title *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States*. The purpose of *The Federalist Papers* was to convince the voting public that the Constitution could strengthen the power of the national government without threatening the liberties of the colonists or the political sovereignty of the states.

*The Federalist Papers* make clear that the Constitution accomplishes this delicate balancing act through a system of federalism, checks and balances, separation of powers, political pluralism, and representative government. The genius of the new political system is that although the national government is given power sufficient to insure social and political order, the structure of the government makes “an unjust combination of a majority of the whole, very improbable (*Federalist* #51).” According to the authors, Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, the Constitution demands compromise among the various branches of government.

Because of the fragmentation of political power, private interests would have to be surrendered in order that coalitions could be built. This process, in their view, would preserve the basic rights of American citizens.

In this modern language translation of *The Federalist Papers*, Genevieve Gilbert-Rolfe has made a significant contribution to the study of the Constitution for high school and college students. Her translation makes these core American documents accessible to students in a way that they have never been before. The quality of the paraphrasing is consistently very high; she retains the essential arguments of *The Federalist Papers* in this book but does so in a way that students will find much easier to understand.

Contemporary events have contributed to political apathy and cynicism among a large percentage of the American population. Reading *The Federalist Papers* is no panacea for the current malaise, but it can provide a healthy reminder to students that the structure and principles upon which a government is based greatly affect the political outcomes that we can expect from it.

J. Christopher Soper  
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# Translator's Note

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After several years of shepherding high school seniors through readings of the *Federalist* #10, or #51 or even #39, and losing many of them along the way, I finally decided that the dated language of the *Papers* was getting in the way. I began these translations with *Federalist* #39, one of the most important of the essays and also one of the most difficult to understand. Aided with a modern language version, my students finally succeeded in understanding Madison's arguments. Some read only the modern version; some read the original referring to the modern language column only when it was necessary; and some intrepid scholars insisted on reading only the original. Having the choice allowed them to learn in a way most suitable to themselves. The usefulness of making these translations was apparent to me from the success of my students.

The *Papers* I selected to translate include those most often assigned in introductory courses on U.S. Government or U.S. History. They cover the most important principles and institutions of our government. They are as follows:

- *Federalist* #1: This essay provides historical background and introduces the entire series.
- *Federalist* #10: This *Paper* focuses primarily on the problem of special interest groups.
- *Federalist* #39: This is an in-depth discussion of the nature of federalism.
- *Federalist* #51: This *Paper* discusses separation of powers and checks and balances.
- *Federalist* #53: This essay argues for longer Congressional terms and for a powerful and therefore effective federal government.



# Introduction to *Federalist #1*

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*Federalist #1* introduced to the public the whole series of eighty-five essays now known as *The Federalist Papers*. These essays were published between October 27, 1787 and August 16, 1788 in various newspapers in New York City. The announced purpose of the papers was to convince the people of New York state to support the Constitution that had been drafted in Philadelphia in 1787. This new plan of union would completely replace the Articles of Confederation which had been in official use since 1781. The Articles had created a confederacy, a loose association of sovereign states. The central government which had one branch—the Continental Congress—lacked sufficient power to run the country effectively. The new nation had been unable to maintain an adequate defense against foreign invasion or interference. It could not enforce its regulations, nor had it been able to establish a stable economy following the end of the Revolution.

The new Constitution proposed at the Philadelphia convention of 1787 created a strong central government which would, for the first time, truly unify the thirteen separate states into a single nation. The new plan of government proposed something unique in the history of political unions, a united country within which semi-autonomous states would be guaranteed authority over their own territories. This combination of what today we would call unitary and confederate governments became known as “federalism” and it has served as a model for many nations seeking to combine the benefits of local preference with the strength of centralized power.

# The *Federalist* #1

## General Introduction for the Independent Journal

October 27, 1787

The *Federalist* #1 is an introduction to the whole series of eighty-five essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay which we now call *The Federalist Papers*. Hamilton addresses this essay to the people of New York state because it, like the other Federalist Papers, was written to persuade New Yorkers to support the new Constitution. New York was a large, populous state strategically located midway between two of the other most important states, Massachusetts and Virginia. If New York had not voted to join the United States, the new country would have been split in half. The opposition to the Constitution in New York, led by governor George Clinton, was strong and well organized. The authors of the Federalist Papers had to argue forcefully and persuasively. These essays were originally published in several New York City newspapers. Shortly thereafter they were printed as a collection. From their first appearance in print until today they have been studied and discussed in schools, universities, courts of law and foreign countries, as the best available analysis of federalist, representative democracies such as ours.

### Terms to know before you read the essay:

- confederacy
- Articles of Confederation
- tyrant
- republican government
- demagogue
- federal (adj)