

JAMES MADISON 1751-1836

“Resolved, . . . the United States of America . . . constituted a general government . . . whensoever [it] assumes undelegated powers, its acts are . . . void, and of no force.”

At a Glance

In a lifetime of many accomplishments, perhaps James Madison's most important one occurred from 1787 to 1789, when he played a leading role in formulating the Constitution. He convinced his contemporaries that a strong representative government could be prevented from abusing the rights of the people through a system of checks and balances.

James Madison contributed much of lasting importance to the fledgling United States. His career began in the early 1770s, immediately after he completed his education. In his first active political role, Madison marked himself as a Patriot, opposing the Parliamentary policies that eventually caused the colonies to declare independence.

At the Virginia Convention to draft a constitution for the newly independent state, the young Madison emerged as a notable defender of individual rights. Adding the words “liberty of conscience for all” to the religious freedom clause, he took a position far in advance of most of his contemporaries. In 1780 Madison announced his Federalist leanings when, elected to the Continental Congress, he allied himself with those who wanted a stronger national government than that proposed in the Articles of Confederation.

The Constitutional Convention of 1787 displayed some of Madison's most outstanding accomplishments. He formulated the “Virginia Plan”

and created a government powerful enough to function effectively, yet still limited from becoming tyrannical by its three-part division—each part having a check on the other two. He authored many compromises that won acceptance of his plan. Finally, Madison maintained careful, complete notes of the Convention's proceedings, thus preserving for posterity the only full record of the Convention.

With Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, Madison wrote the Federalist Papers supporting ratification of the Constitution. Once the new government was established, Madison, elected to the House of Representatives, worked to remedy a chief defect of the Constitution: lack of a Bill of Rights.

Madison's contributions continued throughout the eighteenth century's last decade and well into the first half of the nineteenth century. He helped establish the Democratic-Republican party to oppose the policies of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. He wrote the Virginia Resolutions, decrying the Alien and Sedition Acts, which he deemed a threat to civil liberties. He served as secretary of state to President Thomas Jefferson, then followed Jefferson as president. Madison's terms of office were dominated by foreign affairs, particularly the War of 1812. The war ended with no loss of territory and a heightened sense of American nationalism.

In retirement, Madison attended the 1829 convention to draft a new Virginia constitution, then served in an administrative post at the University of Virginia. With his death in 1836, America lost the last of the republic's Founders.

Reviewing the Biography *Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.*

- 1. Remembering the Details** What was Madison's important contribution at the Constitutional Convention of 1787?
- 2. Understanding Information** How did Madison's actions at the Continental Congress of 1780 point to his actions at the Constitutional Convention?

Thinking Critically

- 3. Making Inferences** Why might many see Madison's contributions at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as his most important?

PATRICK HENRY 1736-1799

“... Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!”

At a Glance

From 1765 to 1775, Patrick Henry's criticisms of British policies galvanized the colonists to support the American Revolution. Throughout his public career, Henry championed the interests of ordinary Americans and fought against abuses of individual rights. He opposed tyranny by government, whether the government of Great Britain or of the new American government proposed by the Constitution.

In an age that revered oratory and its power to excite the human spirit, Patrick Henry had few rivals—and probably no peers—as a speaker. His powerful speeches in a 1763 trial so overwhelmed the jury that he was carried in triumph from the courtroom.

Henry was at his strongest when he used his gift for public speaking to defend the liberty of ordinary people against the abuses of government. He entered politics, was elected to the House of Burgesses in 1765, and quickly became enmeshed in the Stamp Act crisis. An ardent advocate of colonial rights, he presented the Virginia legislature with seven anti-British resolutions. In a speech defending his resolves, Henry seemed to threaten King George III, prompting cries of “Treason!” from his less-radical colleagues. Henry allegedly replied: “If this be treason, make the most of it.”

For the next 10 years Henry led the Virginians in protesting parliamentary policies. He urged his fellow legislators to defy Virginia's royal governor,

and when the governor dissolved the House of Burgesses in 1774, Henry presided over the convention that met in its place.

In March 1775, when war between the colonies and Great Britain seemed inescapable, Henry made his most famous speech—“Give me liberty, or give me death!”—calling on Virginia to arm itself for the coming conflict. During the War of Independence, Henry served as Virginia's first state governor. He continued as governor after the war for two additional terms, then served as a representative in the Virginia Assembly.

Unlike those who saw the weaknesses in the nation's first government, Patrick Henry supported the Articles of Confederation. An Anti-Federalist, Henry refused to be a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, fearing that the values of a simple republic would be threatened by the establishment of a powerful central government. He maintained his Anti-Federalist position at the Virginia Convention for constitutional ratification. Opposing James Madison, he charged that the new government could prove more of a threat to individual liberty than George III had been. He pointed with alarm to the absence of guarantees of specific rights in the Constitution. Henry reconciled himself to ratification, but continued to demand amendments guaranteeing individual rights, a campaign which succeeded with the adoption of the Bill of Rights.

During the 1790s, Henry aligned himself with the Washington administration. He won a seat in Virginia's state senate in 1799, but died before his term began.

Reviewing the Biography *Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.*

- 1. Remembering the Details** Under what circumstances were Patrick Henry's oratorical skills used to the fullest?
- 2. Understanding Information** How did Henry's Anti-Federalist beliefs influence his career?

Thinking Critically

- 3. Drawing Conclusions** How was Patrick Henry's talent for oratory particularly suited to his times?