

Constitution Day: Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists: Primary Source Documents

Adapted from the Stanford History Education Group's "Federalists and Anti-Federalists" Lesson Plan <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/federalists-and-anti-federalists>

Document A: Federalist Position (Modified)

Alexander Hamilton, June 21, 1788

The Anti-Federalists seem to think that a pure democracy would be the perfect government. Experience has shown that this idea is false. The ancient democracies of Greece were characterized by tyranny and run by mobs.

The Anti-Federalists also argue that a large representation is necessary to understand the interests of the people. This is not true. Why can't someone understand fifty people as well as he understands twenty people?

The new constitution does not make a rich man more eligible for an elected office than a poor person. I also think it's dangerous to assume that men become more wicked as they gain wealth and education. Look at all the people in a community, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant. Which group has higher moral standards? Both groups engage in immoral or wicked behavior. But it would seem to me that the behavior of the wealthy is less wicked and sinful.

Document B: Anti-Federalist Position (Modified)

Melancton Smith, June 21, 1788

Representatives should be a true picture of the people. They should understand their circumstances and their troubles. Therefore, the number of representatives should be so large that both rich and poor people will choose to be representatives.

If the number of representatives is small, the position will be too competitive. Ordinary people will not attempt to run for office. A middle-class yeoman (farmer) will never be chosen. So, the government will fall into the hands of the few and the rich. This will be a government of oppression.

The rich consider themselves above the common people, entitled to more respect. They believe they have the right to get anything they want.

Citations:

Alexander Hamilton, Speech, June 21, 1788.

<http://presspubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s38.html>

Melancton Smith, Speech, June 21, 1788.

http://teachers.sduhsd.k12.ca.us/tpsocialsciences/american_govt/antipapers/msmith.htm