George Washington and American Constitutionalism

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The process of founding the American Constitution neither began nor ended in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787. Important elements of our constitutional tradition, such as a commitment to the rule of law, a concern for liberty, and even the centrality of constitutional instruments themselves, were firmly in place before the call for a convention went out. Other important constitutional understandings, some deriving from custom and others implemented by formal amendment, emerged well after the federal Constitution was written and approved. Judicial review, executive dominance in matters of war and peace, an expansive federal responsibility for the economic well-being of the nation, and a commitment to political equality are all elements of our modern Constitution that transcend the text of the Constitution as first ratified.

Most significantly, an ethic of constitutionalism was already deeply ingrained in American political culture before the Philadelphia Convention. One can point to the fact that all of the newly independent states established constitutional regimes as evidence that this ethic had put down permanent roots. No state could rightfully lay claim to popular legitimacy until it had constituted itself through a written compact of some kind. Thus, we ought not become overwhelmed by the mystique of 1787—the myth that the Founding Fathers somehow “created” the American constitutional tradition.

Yet while there seems little doubt that the tapestry depicting any American postrevolutionary political culture would have been deeply colored by a commitment to constitutionalism, there is equally little doubt that the particular hues of the yarn and the distinct patterns of the weave might have been different had there been no federal Constitution. A fascinating intellectual parlor game can be constructed from a consideration of the “what ifs” of history. What if the South had won
the Civil War? What if Hitler's invasion of Britain had been successful? What if the British had met the constitutional demands of the American colonists? What if Alexander Hamilton (or John Hancock or John Adams) had been the first president? All of these "what if" propositions would make for interesting historical fiction. But for the serious scholar, these scenarios are ultimately unsatisfying. Real events are difficult enough to interpret without introducing nonevents into the calculus. Yet while we cannot know what our constitutional tradition would have looked like if the events of 1787–88 had not transpired, it requires no preposterous leap of imagination to suggest that it would have been different. In that sense, we ought not understate the significance of the Constitution of 1787.

George Washington's contributions to the writing of the Constitution are difficult to assess. Isolating the contributions of any single individual to a corporate project like the Constitutional Convention is always problematic. But Washington's imprint is there nonetheless. It can be found in Washington's encouragement of James Madison's plans for the convention that culminated in the submission of the Virginia Plan. It can be found in the symbolic significance of Washington's very attendance at Philadelphia, lending the enterprise a political legitimacy that it might otherwise have lacked. It can be found in his un­stinting partisanship on behalf of the federalist cause—support that many of his contemporaries believed was critical to the success of the ratification struggle. And finally, it can be found in Washington's willingness to accept the presidency, a step that placed a final imprimatur on the new Constitution, encouraging even its opponents to give the new arrangements critical breathing space.

To Philadelphia or Not to Philadelphia

Washington received with great enthusiasm the call for a convention to consider amendments to the Articles of Confederation. After all, he had since 1780 counted himself among those who wanted a stronger national government; he had called for amendments to the Articles of Confederation in his Circular Letter to the States in the summer of 1783. The proposed convention now offered "an occasion so interesting to the wellbeing of the Confederacy" that Washington was initially
tempted to suspend his retirement from public life in order to attend. When Virginia quickly extended an offer to Washington to head that state’s delegation to Philadelphia, the stage was set for his triumphal reentry into public life as the savior of the republic.

Nevertheless, he hesitated. For almost six months Washington played the reluctant bridegroom. He informed his correspondents that he supported the call for a convention and had great hopes for its work but that his own participation could not be relied upon. Still, he refused to give an outright no. Letters arrived almost daily from his friends in every part of the union imploring him to come to Philadelphia. Never saying no, never saying yes, Washington maintained his options until the last minute. Only when he left Mount Vernon on May 9, 1787, did his suitors know that Washington’s commitment was final.

Washington was reluctant to go for two reasons. First, the Society of the Cincinnati, a fraternity of Revolutionary War officers, was convening in Philadelphia at about the same time. As president of the society in the previous year he had found himself in the eye of a storm. Critics of the Cincinnati, ever fearful of standing armies and whiffing the aroma of aristocracy, had complained about several aspects of the society. Washington had consulted several of these critics, principally Thomas Jefferson, and had urged the society to make several alterations in its constitution to meet their objections. While he retained a strong attachment to these former officers, the affair had been distasteful and had done much to confirm his decision to remain aloof from public affairs. As a result he had declined the society’s invitation to attend its convention. His initial enthusiasm for the call for a convention to revise the Articles of Confederation waned considerably when he realized what his attendance would mean. He would be snubbing his old friends whose invitation he had declined and, perhaps even more importantly to a man of Washington’s sentiments, he would be raising questions about his personal honor: “Under these circumstances it will readily be perceived that I could not appear at the same time and place . . . without giving offense.” The possibility for genuine insult was certainly there, yet Henry Knox, one of Washington’s most trusted confidants and the formative force behind the Cincinnati, assured him that going to Philadelphia would not lower his esteem in the eyes of the officers. Indeed, they would view it as more evidence of his service to the nation.
Yet Washington still wavered, a reluctance that can be better explained by a second, less noble, reason. What, after all, had been the result of every prior effort at constitutional reform? Had not his own plea for more energetic measures in 1783 been uniformly ignored? Had not the recent Annapolis Convention been so poorly attended (in Washington's view yet another sign of the self-interest and perfidy of the states) that it had dissolved without resolving any of the issues for which it had been convened? Washington was never a great political philosopher, but experience had made him an exceptionally good reader of the political winds. He knew that his reputation was his only real source of political influence, especially outside of Virginia. He also understood that expending his reputation on behalf of failed enterprises could only diminish his ability to affect the course of political events. To paraphrase Richard Neustadt's famous work on the American presidency, nothing predicts future success as well as past successes, and nothing predicts future failure as well as past failures. Washington understood this principle and clearly wanted to distance himself from the Philadelphia effort until he was more confident of its chances for success. The crises of 1786-87 were escalating to an ominous level, but it was still unclear whether the forces representing energy in government, a strong national union, and social stability were yet strong enough to have their way. The "thinking part of the people of this Country" supported the call for a convention. But was that enough? As he put the problem to Knox, one of the reasons against his attendance was "an apprehension that all the States will not appear; and that some of them, being unwillingly drawn into the measure, will send their Delegates so fettered as to embarrass, and perhaps render nugatory the whole proceedings. In either of these circumstances . . . I should not like to be a sharer in this business."

In sum, Washington never doubted the propriety of a convention to consider constitutional reforms. His support for the effort was enthusiastic from the outset. He also understood that his own reputation cast on the side of the reformers would aid the effort immensely. What he seemed unwilling to do was to commit that enormous, but not irreducible, reputation to the cause before he had some sense that his own efforts would be decisive. Biographers debate whether Washington's indecisiveness was morally defensible given the stakes involved. But when he became convinced that the Virginia delegation, at least, was
committed to nothing less than a complete reexamination of the principles of union, he hesitated no more. Once committed, Washington added his considerable influence to the side of those who were prepared to risk the most. And that is no small thing.

Virginia's Plan

On May 29, 1787, after the delegates had spent several days debating matters of procedure and protocol, Edmund Randolph, governor of Virginia, arose to address "the main business" of the convention. He discussed the seriousness of the crisis facing American affairs and indicated some of the specific defects of government under the Articles of Confederation. He then offered fifteen resolutions for consideration, the first of which "Resolved that the Articles of Confederation ought to be so corrected & enlarged as to accomplish the objects proposed by their institution; namely, 'common defence, security of liberty and general welfare.'" The rest of the Virginia Plan, however, was committed to a project far more ambitious than merely correcting and enlarging the Articles. It sought, instead, to subvert the old constitution and substitute an entirely different notion of government—one that to the ears of one of its most perceptive critics, Robert Yates of New York, "meant a strong consolidated union, in which the idea of states should be nearly annihilated."

Three-and-a-half months later a new federal Constitution was submitted to the states for their approval. The finished product bore little resemblance to the Virginia Plan submitted by Randolph. The outline of governmental structure proposed by the plan was still discernible, but many of its most distinguishing features [e.g., nullification of state laws, a national legislature based solely on state population or wealth, provision for a council of revision, an executive accountable to Congress] had vanished. Why then do we continue to pay such homage to the Virginia Plan and to James Madison, whose acclamation as the Father of the Constitution is based in large part on his role as principal author of the plan? How could the plan have been so important to the founding process when so few of its words found their way into the Constitution?

What makes the submission of the Virginia Plan such a pivotal mo-
ment in the Philadelphia Convention and thus in the development of our particular constitutional tradition is vested in a fundamental truth in politics: timing counts. Scholars and politicians have long understood that control of the agenda usually leads to control of the substantive outcomes. The Virginia Plan set the convention on a course in which a new constitution, not mere revision or reform, was the agenda. As this agenda played out, the federal Constitution emerged rather differently in its details from the one envisioned in the Virginia Plan. But the decision to even consider a new constitution was set in motion by the plan. What if the convention had become bogged down in the kind of bickering over specific amendments to the Articles that had plagued Congress for several years? What if Hamilton’s more audacious plan had been introduced first? We don’t know. What we do know is that the agenda-setting Virginia Plan moved the delegates down a path from which they did not waver after Randolph’s presentation—the creation of a new constitution, more nationalist than anything contemplated under the Articles.11

Washington’s own plans and aspirations for the convention—the elusive “intentions” of this framer—cannot be discerned from any one document. His political ideas had always been more concerned with the purposes of government; he had spoken only occasionally about particular procedural or structural aspects of government. Constitutional arrangements were not unimportant to Washington (he was convinced, for example, that the Articles of Confederation were seriously flawed), but instead of specific constitutional reforms he concerned himself more with advocating certain policy ends, such as a strong national defense establishment, payment of the war debt, the promotion of foreign and domestic commercial linkages, western expansion, hard currency, and a general strengthening of the union.

Even when his decision to attend the convention was imminent, Washington cloaked his constitutional vision in generalities. A letter to James Madison shortly before he departed for Philadelphia comes closest to revealing Washington’s hopes, or intentions, for the convention. He confessed to Madison, first, that he would be disappointed if the national government did not emerge with more powers (“energy”) at the end of the day. Second, he would be equally disappointed if the national legislature “still wants . . . that secrecy and dispatch (either from the nonattendance, or the local views of its members) which is characteris-
tick of good Government." In short, he envisioned a legislative body fully capable of making national policy. A Congress that served as an assemblage of local ambassadors would no longer do. Third, any system for selecting national legislators should enable them to be national legislators. Congress must exercise its powers "with a firm and steady hand, instead of frittering them back to the Individual States where the members in place of viewing themselves in their National character, are too apt to be looking." His final observation revealed the despair induced by Shays's Rebellion, the failure of the Annapolis Convention, the weakness of Congress (and the states) in the face of European intrusions into American affairs, the rage for paper money, and other events of 1786–87. Washington wondered whether public virtue, the foundation of any truly republican society, had declined so far that perhaps his faith in the noble experiment had been misplaced all along. Republicanism depended on a shared notion of what was in the public interest. Without that consensus, force (or at least greatly centralized power) might be the only remedy for saving the union. "I have my doubts whether any system without the means of coercion in the Sovereign, will enforce Obedience to the Ordinances of a Genl. Government; without which, every thing else fails." But even here Washington's recommendations lacked specificity. Coercion was necessary, "'But the kind of coercion you may ask? This indeed will require thought.'\(^\text{12}\) Thought was certainly necessary. Washington prided himself on his ability to reflect deliberately and not succumb to unenlightened passion. But this same letter also signaled Madison that Washington had jettisoned his earlier fear that the convention might end in failure. Despite the risks, Washington was now prepared to move beyond the point of recommending half-measures. He admitted to Madison that he was anxious "that the convention may adopt no temporizing expedient, but probe the defects of the Constitution to the bottom, and provide radical cures [my emphasis]; whether they are agreed to or not; a conduct like this, will stamp wisdom and dignity on the proceedings, and be looked to as a luminary, which sooner or later will shed its influence.'\(^\text{13}\)

Madison had already come to the conclusion that the Articles of Confederation provided too fragile a scaffold on which to construct constitutional reforms and was preparing some proposals for a new constitution.\(^\text{14}\) Washington's letter emboldened Madison even further.
Perhaps his proposals could be endorsed by the entire Virginia delegation, adding the weight of Washington's enormous reputation to his own ideas? In words that virtually mirrored Washington's, Madison assured the general that his call for radical reforms was right on the mark: "Temporising applications will dishonor the Councils which propose them, and may foment the internal malignity of the disease, at the same time they produce an ostensible palliation of it. Radical attempts, although unsuccessful, will at least justify the authors of them." Having assured Washington that the two Virginians were of one mind on this point Madison then sought to enlist Washington's support, informing him that he (Madison) had "formed in my mind some outlines of a new system" and that he was taking "the liberty of submitting them without apology, to your eye." Madison's outline was nothing less than an exposition of the principles soon to animate the Virginia Plan.

The Virginia delegates were among the first to arrive in Philadelphia. In his diary Washington wrote of his continuing concern about the prospect of another Annapolis. May 14: "This being the day appointed for the meeting of the convention... it was found that two States only were represented." May 16: still "only two states represented." May 19: A day after New York's delegation arrived, "No more states represented." Despite these worries Washington met almost daily with the other Virginia delegates to review strategy and to revise Madison's recommendations in hopes that they might be the instrument by which Virginia could seize control of the convention. Virginia was, after all, the largest state in both land and population; some care was needed to assure that any new system would give "that great state a rightful place in the councils of the republic." The product of those deliberations was the Virginia Plan.

No notes of those meetings exist, so it is difficult to assess Washington's contributions to the plan. One account suggests that Washington was the dominant force within the delegation and that Madison, even granting his authorship of most of the plan's principal provisions, was a "brain truster" in service to Washington and the other senior members of the delegation. This assessment goes too far. Madison's leadership in presenting the ideas of the plan to his colleagues is indisputable. But it is useful to remember that Madison's notions did not spring ex nihilo. Washington and many other critics of confederational politics had
been voicing similar ideas for some time. Washington had, for example, previously urged consideration of some method of truly national representation (resolves 3, 4, and 5). He had pleaded since the days of the Revolution for the establishment of a coercive power in the national government (resolve 6). As commander-in-chief he often called on Congress to establish executives with clear responsibility and authority to implement the nation's laws, especially with regard to supplying the army (resolve 7). His antipathy toward the particularism of the states was well-known, and he certainly would have supported almost any provisions that prevented the states from obstructing great national purposes (resolves 6, 8, and 14). Thus, when Randolph arose to address the convention he truly spoke for Washington as well as for Virginia.

*The Silent Delegate from Virginia*

The Virginia Plan was the first substantive proposal before the convention, but it was not the first order of business. The delegates recognized that they would have to agree on rules and procedures for the convention before proceeding to the concerns that had brought them to Philadelphia. A presiding officer had to be chosen. Washington was the obvious choice, and the delegates quickly moved to place him in the chair. The delegates could not know exactly what would transpire in the convention. But they surely sensed that their recommendations, whether mild or radical, had little chance of success unless the delegates could lay claim to some measure of legitimacy; they needed to portray their work as a genuine legacy of the Revolution. Americans of 1787 were inclined toward a view of events that was more than a bit conspiratorial. If the convention could be portrayed by suspicious opponents as a self-interested, or even worse, unpatriotic, rump gathering, then its recommendations would be quickly dismissed. But with George Washington presiding, any criticisms of the convention's patriotic credentials would be deflected.

Apart from this symbolic function, though, what role did Washington play in the work of the convention? Can he be counted among the most important framers? At first glance the answer seems obvious. Washington believed that his position as the convention's presiding officer obliged him to direct the proceedings without expressing his own
views. Only once, at the very end of the convention, did Washington speak on a matter of constitutional substance. The delegates were about to approve the enrolled version of the Constitution when Nathaniel Gorham, a delegate from Massachusetts, moved that the number of representatives not exceed one for every thirty thousand persons, instead of forty thousand persons as the draft Constitution stipulated. According to Madison's account Washington rose and said

that although his situation had hitherto restrained him from offering his sentiments on questions . . . yet he could not forbear expressing his wish that the alteration proposed might take place. It was much to be desired that the objections to the plan recommended might be as few as possible—The smallness of the proportion of Representatives had been considered by many members of the convention, an insufficient security for the rights & interests of the people. He acknowledged that it had always appeared to himself among the exceptional parts of the plan; and late as the present moment was for admitting amendments, he thought this of so much consequence that it would give much satisfaction to see it adopted.19

Madison notes that there was no opposition to Gorham's motion and that it was immediately agreed upon unanimously, apparently without even a recorded vote. The unanimity is a bit surprising. The size of congressional districts had been debated earlier in the convention. The draft of the Constitution at that time had stipulated that each state would be allocated one representative for every forty thousand persons. Madison feared that with immigration and the addition of new states this rigid formula would soon make the House of Representatives too large to act as a deliberative body. Therefore, he and Roger Sherman proposed that the phrase be amended so that apportionment would be assigned by a rate not exceeding one for every forty thousand persons. The motion was approved without dissent.20 In other words, on the one earlier occasion when the convention had considered the question of the size of legislative districts it had replaced a rule that guaranteed one representative to every forty thousand persons with one that stipulated that the minimum size of districts would be forty thousand persons—a choice that clearly favored energy and legislative effectiveness over rep-
representation. It was a time when the large-scale republicans who favored an invigorated national government dominated the convention's agenda.

Washington's support for lowering the threshold for representation is curious for two reasons. First, Washington was firmly in the camp of the large-scale republicans before, during, and after the convention. Yet Gorham's motion not only revived a notion more dear to the small-scale republicans than to men of Washington's ilk, it reopened a question on which the nationalists had earlier prevailed without much opposition. Second, the whole matter of the size of legislative districts was, frankly, not very important in the grand scheme of things. It did not affect the structure, purpose, or powers of the federal plan of government that was about to go forth to the states. It was an interesting detail, to be sure; but it was still only a detail.

Yet Washington took this one occasion to speak before the convention and in so doing persuaded the earlier winning coalition to concede a point they had already obtained. Washington's reason for reducing the minimum size of congressional districts reveals the pragmatic side of his constitutional thinking. The sentiments of most Americans in 1787 were, broadly speaking, republican. But one of the most important distinctions between small-scale republicans and large-scale republicans was the former's concern for adequate representation. Representatives had to be close to the people; they had to truly reflect the values and interests of the community in which they lived. Indeed, small-scale republicans believed that the representative and his constituents should be so much in harmony that the representative would perceive the protection of the people's rights and liberties as the protection of his own. To this end, there should be many representatives (to avoid domination of the assembly by a few), and they should be close to the people (in other words, they should be chosen from small, homogeneous districts). Washington, Madison, and other large-scale republicans understood that ratification of the new Constitution would require the support, or at least the quiescence, of some of these small-scale republicans. Washington correctly anticipated that the representation question, if not shaped well, might confirm the fears of many of the Constitution's potential opponents. Washington thought it wise to moderate the apportionment formula in order to focus the ratification debate on issues more advantageous to the federalists.
If, however, this were Washington's sole contribution to the founding, some might wonder why his portrait hangs in the gallery of constitutional demigods. How could a delegate who took such a minuscule role in the debates and who spoke not at all on the great issues of the convention be characterized in nearly every interpretive history of the Constitutional Convention as one of the most important Founders? This, however, is the wrong question. It equates one's level of oratory with one's effectiveness; it suggests that political influence can only be evidenced by overt public activity.

First, the contributions of Washington-as-symbol would have been indispensable even had he not taken an active role in the convention's deliberations. We often fall into raptures about the careful architecture of the Constitution or about how the delegates manifested the highest form of reason and deliberation or about the elevated quality of the convention's debates or about the collective intelligence of the Founders. However much these encomiums are deserved, it is paradoxically true that for much of America the work of the Constitution was judged on an entirely irrational, personalistic criterion—George Washington was for it. In this sense, it might be argued that Washington's greatest founding contribution was in his decision to attend the convention. By lending to the project his unparalleled public reputation and status as revolutionary hero he provided a reservoir of public sympathy that the federalists were able to tap effectively in the ratification struggle.24

But Washington was no mere symbol; he was an active participant in the work of the convention. Harkening back to his diligent service as commander-in-chief, he was one of a handful of delegates who attended every session of the convention. He despaired that the wrangling and periodic deadlocks at the convention would cause the delegates to disperse without finishing their work, a result that would cause him far more personal humiliation than it would the rest of the delegates. But he never abandoned the project.25

Although Washington as presiding officer chose not to participate in the great debates of the convention, he remained a member of the Virginia delegation and very likely voted on every substantive issue before the convention. Indeed, on those many occasions when the convention deliberated as a committee of the whole house Washington stepped down from the chair and sat with his fellow Virginians. But at no time did he surrender his vote as a delegate. We know this despite the fact
that Madison recorded the roll calls by states, not by individuals. On a few occasions when the sentiments within the Virginia delegation were not unanimous Madison reveals how those individuals voted. In almost every instance, Washington is shown to have cast a vote. Why Madison goes to these lengths in explaining the votes of Virginia's delegates is uncertain. He offers no such individual polling for any of the other state delegations. Some have suggested that Madison was attempting to show to a later generation that Washington and Madison were on the same side of many of the more controversial issues at the convention. Whatever Madison's motives were, his notes are powerful evidence that Washington actively participated in the work of the convention.

What did Washington vote for? That is a more elusive question. Since Madison only recorded a few of Washington's individual votes, we cannot know for certain where he stood on the hundreds of other motions and proposals. But it is reasonable to assume that he probably voted with his fellow Virginians in most of those cases. Thus, Virginia's vote is probably a fair reflection of Washington's constitutional agenda. And where did Virginia stand? She consistently supported a national government with substantially extended powers, a national legislature and executive chosen directly or indirectly by the principle of proportionality (a typical large-state position), substantial limitations on the powers of the states to restrict or interfere in national concerns, a strong executive with virtual independence from the states, and she opposed an enlargement of the powers of the Senate (again, a large-state position). Virginia, then, supported the broad notion of large-scale republicanism but also voted so as to enhance Virginia's relative influence within that national republic. There is nothing in this agenda inconsistent with ideas that Washington had advocated months and even years before the convention, so it is likely that he lent consistent support to the delegation's positions.

But Washington's votes on several specific questions, including a few in which he was on the losing side, are known. Those votes provide a more specific frame of reference for assessing Washington's constitutional intentions. Aside from his aforementioned support for smaller legislative districts, Washington's known positions at the convention can be grouped into two areas of concern: first, his consistent support for a strong, independent, and energetic executive, and second, his
commitment, with one significant exception, to an expansion of powers for the national government.

Washington was justifiably uncomfortable with discussions of the executive power. His political instincts were almost always on the mark, and he surely knew that his presence at the convention affected the way the other delegates, aware that Washington would probably be offered the mantle of national leadership, perceived the structure and powers of the national executive. Some hint of this feeling can be seen on the first day in which the matter of the executive branch was considered. James Wilson moved that the executive consist of a single person, and Charles Pinckney seconded the motion. Madison then reports that "a considerable pause" ensued in which no delegate appeared willing to speak to the motion. Washington, as chair, was forced to ask the delegates if they wished to vote on the motion—a suggestion intended to elicit debate on this important matter. Again, silence. John Rutledge finally offered some thoughts on the subject, but only after he had "animadverted on the shyness of gentlemen on this and other subjects." One can only speculate on the cause for this initial reticence since the delegates were rarely without strong feelings on other important questions. The most likely answer is that the delegates did not wish to offend Washington and had some difficulty at first in separating the man from the office. But Washington's reluctance to engage in these debates apparently assured the delegates that he intended to distance himself from the discussions. After those first awkward moments, the executive debates proceeded vigorously.

But Washington's silence did not signal his lack of interest in the subject. His sentiments toward executive authority appear at least three times. On James Wilson's motion recommending a single executive, Washington predictably voted "yes." His revolutionary experience had soured him on executive power administered by committee. Only the singular energies of Robert Morris had enabled the army to win its decisive victory at Yorktown. At most other times, the executive arrangements under the Confederation had amply demonstrated their inadequacy to Washington. He did not wish to see the new Constitution travel down this rutted road again.

When executive branch matters were taken up again six weeks later Washington again confirmed his sentiments in favor of a strong executive. This time the issue was executive independence. At this point in
the debates the executive was to be selected by the national legislature for a renewable term of seven years. James McClurg of Virginia moved to have the executive serve "during good behavior." McClurg's resolution, supported by Madison, was intended to unfetter the executive from control by the legislative branch. A president's tenure in office could only be terminated as a result of actions so clearly detrimental to the national interest as to trigger the extraordinary majorities stipulated in the impeachment clause. They argued that the principle of separation of powers insisted that simple majorities within the legislature, subject as they might be to quickly shifting coalitions, could not be permitted to hold the executive hostage to its will. If reeligibility were contingent upon such tenuous arrangements no executive could ever perform his constitutional responsibilities without the specter of legislative disapproval and removal. Another Virginian, George Mason, spoke, and presumably voted, against the motion. Since Virginia voted to support the motion (the convention disapproved it) Washington almost certainly must have voted in favor of it. Such a view would be consistent with his "strong executive" sentiments, especially if Farrand is correct in suggesting that the motion was less concerned with proposing an elected monarch than with signaling a broader concern for executive independence.30 Washington would have been justifiably nervous about supporting the former but would have been quite comfortable with the latter principle.

On July 26 the convention considered the now much-amended part of the Virginia Plan regarding the executive. It approved the resolution and committed it to a Committee of Detail for further fine-tuning. Washington, however, voted against the resolution, a position that at first glance might seem curious. Again, we have no discussion in the record that explains his position. But one provision in the resolution would have given him pause. The resolution called for the executive to be ineligible for a second term. Washington's views on rotation in office were well known and reflected his conservative republican beliefs. Some republicans believed that the power of political office was so inherently corrupting that all elected officeholders should serve short terms with no reeligibility. This provision would hold true especially for the national executive whose power of appointment might allow him to accrue an inordinate influence over public affairs if unchecked by a term limitation. It was the old Country fear of the Court—a fear
Washington no longer shared. The president would be an American, not some far-distant potentate. The Constitution provided for ample checks on his power. All that a term limitation would accomplish, Washington complained to Lafayette, was to preclude "ourselves from the services of any man, who on some great emergency shall be deemed universally, most capable of serving the Public." The electoral college virtually assured that any president would be a man of great virtue and reputation.

To then deliberately undermine the ability of the people to keep such a man in office seemed to Washington to assume such a depravity in men as to make republican government a hopeless quest. Again, Washington preferred energy in government over arrangements intended to limit the opportunity for corruption.

Finally, as the convention neared final agreement on the new Constitution, Hugh Williamson of North Carolina proposed that the legislative majority needed to override a presidential veto be reduced from three-fourths to two-thirds of Congress. A few delegates saw the matter as one in which seven senators (conceivably from only four states) could, with the cooperation of the president, thwart the will of the people. Others, and we must count Washington among this group, saw the resolution as an attempt to limit the independence and authority of the executive. The electoral college already ensured that the president would be a person worthy of the nation’s highest confidence. Additional limits on the president’s ability to protect the public interest from temporary majoritarian impulses would undermine the principle virtue of a republican presidency—an executive capable of guarding the people’s liberties against "democratical" forces. Washington (with Madison) voted against the motion, but it carried nonetheless.

These few votes place Washington firmly in the "strong executive" camp at the convention. His other votes reveal an almost equally fervent support for a strong national legislature with powers fully consonant with energetic government. On June 8 the delegates considered a motion "that the National Legislature should have authority to negative all Laws which they should judge to be improper." The Virginia Plan had stipulated that the national legislature could only negative those state laws that were deemed inconsistent with the federal constitution. Thus the effect of the motion was to restore the negative power to the scale first envisioned by James Madison, whose preference was for a "negative in all cases whatsoever." Discussions among the Vir-
Virginia delegates before the convention apparently modified Madison's original proposal in favor of the less expansive version that appeared in the plan, though for what reasons we cannot say for sure. Virginia voted in favor of the motion, with Madison, Wythe, and McClurg marked "aye" and Mason and Randolph opposed; but the motion failed in the convention. (Indeed, the negative on state laws would eventually be removed entirely.)

Madison notes, curiously, that Washington was "not consulted" on this vote. At first glance this seems odd, for Washington was one of the most diligent participants in the work of the convention. Yet Madison's account should not really be so surprising. Even in these early days of the convention it was clear that Washington would probably take a prominent part in the new government, most likely as chief executive. Washington seems not to have wanted to admit it; retirement still seemed preferable to the hurly-burly of national politics. But his abstention here is once again a mark of his political sense. Washington would certainly have supported the motion on its merits. He had long held little regard for many of the state legislatures and had spoken often of having a Congress empowered to legislate in all areas that affected the national interest. As a defensive mechanism, he surely would have supported a motion that prevented the states from intruding into Congress's plenary authority. Had he opposed the motion, his vote would have divided the Virginia delegation 3–3; thus we can presume that Washington supported the stronger negative. But since Madison did not need his vote, Washington wisely refrained from expressing his true sentiments. As a matter of principle, he strongly supported any measure that would prevent the states from passing "illiberal" legislation: paper-money bills, stay laws, limits on trade, and the like. As a matter of practical politics, he probably recognized that such an adamantly antistate stance might later threaten his ability to generate confidence in the national executive.

Another illustration of Washington's support for a strong, independent general government was his consistent support of taxing powers. The lack of such a steady source of revenue had often been the crux of General Washington's entreaties to Congress and the states during the Revolution. So long as it was dependent on the states for funds and had no means to enforce compliance with its requisitions, Congress was a government in name only. He had consistently urged the states to per-
mit Congress to lay taxes directly upon the people. He was especially enamored of the impost (a duty on imports). He believed it was a voluntary tax capable of enabling Congress to do "much good, justice, and propriety." Because the impost required the consent of all thirteen states, any one state could prevent its enactment. By 1786, after five years of compromise and cajoling, the impost had been ratified by twelve states—even by the usually obstinate Rhode Island. But the thirteenth state, New York, approved it with such conditions that Congress finally gave up. The failure of the impost, as much as Shays's Rebellion or any other event of 1786–87, hardened Washington's attitude toward the Articles of Confederation. The episode reaffirmed what Washington had known (and experienced) for almost ten years—the states would never give Congress the support that an honorable nation needed.

The nationalists at the convention believed that independent taxing authority went hand in hand with energetic government. But there was less consensus on the kinds of direct taxation that would be appropriate. On August 21 Madison moved that exports could not be taxed "unless by consent of two thirds of the Legislature." This amendment was a change from the absolute prohibition against such taxes that the convention had already approved. Supporters believed that the two-thirds provision would offer a sufficient safeguard against abuse. The issue was one of a number of measures where the state delegations divided roughly along the Mason-Dixon line. Southern states were opposed, believing that export taxes would penalize their substantial trade with Europe in agricultural commodities. Washington and Madison supported the motion, believing that such limitations might cut off the national government from an important source of revenue. Import duties, export duties, and the sale of lands were the only obvious direct sources of revenue. Remove one pedestal and the national government's independence might be irreparably weakened. Washington was a busy, though none-too-successful, exporter, as were many of his Virginia neighbors. But in a matter such as this, localism had no place in his thinking. How could the export trade or even his own state long remain healthy in a weak union? Without a strong national government the European leviathan would soon seize the very economic liberties that many of the delegates sought to protect. Clear as this truth was to
Washington, he could not convince even his Virginia delegation, and they voted with five other states to defeat the motion. 

On August 13, the convention considered (for what seemed like the umpteenth time!) whether money bills should originate exclusively in the House of Representatives. The request was not extraordinary. It was a right under the ancient British constitution that only the people's representatives could authorize taxes. Many colonial assemblies jealously maintained that right against the usurpations of the royal governors, and nearly every state constitution continued this tradition in some form or another. Yet some delegates insisted that in a bicameral legislature with both chambers responsible to the people, the British analogy was not apt. Strict adherence to such a rule would only clog the machinery of government. Moreover, without equal authority in such business the Senate would fail to attract the "better sort of men." Madison comments that Washington opposed giving the House this exclusive role regarding money bills, a position that was hardly surprising given his sentiments in favor of high-toned government. But Madison notes that the matter was not a high priority with Washington and that he was willing to concede the point in order to mollify other delegates whose votes might be needed later. Ironically, the convention defeated the proposal (in other words, supporting Washington's real sentiments) this time, but later revived it.\textsuperscript{37}

There was at least one other issue, though, on which Washington was averse to yielding any ground. He had long reserved a special kind of animus toward paper money. Charles Beard argued that Washington's hatred of paper money was a result of his personal economic circumstances. Beard pointed out that much of his wealth was tied up in landholdings whose value was principally in the rents and mortgages that Washington could collect. If debtors could pay those obligations in depreciated currency at, say, forty cents on the dollar, then Washington would find himself at a disadvantage.\textsuperscript{38} (Keep in mind, however, that much of this land came to Washington either through marriage or by bounty. In either case, he had not paid for it in specie.) Others insist that Washington's economic status was more complicated.\textsuperscript{39} As is true with most "farmers," Washington was often in debt for his seed, forage, equipment, and even his taxes. Under those conditions Washington would have been as delighted as any other debtor to pay off in paper.
In sum, Washington's interests cannot be exclusively classified as either debtor-oriented or creditor-oriented.

It is just possible that Washington opposed paper money as a matter of principle. Recall, for example, Washington's adamant insistence on Americans paying their lawful debts to the British at a time when his self-interest would have been better served by "stiffing" them. Washington was both a conservative and a Virginia "gentleman." As such, he believed that a contract was a bond of personal honor. To pay off a debt in devalued currency, even when such payment was legal tender, was to devalue one's personal reputation as well. He could occasionally joke about the issue, as when he urged Madison to write him regularly even though Washington admitted that he might not always have the time to reply: "I shall become your debtor, and possibly like others in similar circumstances [when the debt is burthensome] may feel a disposition . . . to pay you off in depreciated paper, which being a legal tender . . . you cannot refuse. You will receive the nominal value, and that you know quietes the conscience, and makes all things easy, with the debtor." But he could also be brutally serious, at one point authorizing his manager to look for ways to evict tenants who "have taken advantage of me by paying paper money when Six pence on a shilling would pay a pound."

Like most conservatives Washington tended to project private virtues (and vices) onto the public arena. If deception, opportunism, and dishonorable conduct were departures from private virtue, so also were they corruptions of public virtue. And no republic worthy of the name could long survive if it provided ordinary citizens with the wherewithal (paper money) to undermine private virtue. Washington saw paper money as a cancer, a political virus capable of sweeping all before it: "Paper money has had the effect in your State that it will ever have, to ruin commerce, oppress the honest, and open a door to every species of fraud and injustice."

As a political economist, George Washington was rather unsophisticated in his thinking and drew much from vestiges of his old Country ideology. Beyond his concern for public virtue, his specific objections to paper money were threefold. First, it disadvantaged the "productive" classes—those in society who generated the wealth that benefitted all. "Depreciation keeps pace with the quantity of the emission, and articles, for which it is exchanged, rise in a greater ratio than the sinking
value of the money. Wherein, then, is the farmer, the planter, the artisan benefitted? The debtor may be, because as I have observed, he gives the shadow in lieu of the substance; and in proportion to his gain, the creditor or the body politic suffer."

Paper money favored consumption over production, profligacy over frugality, and short-term gain over long-term prosperity. Such policies did not, in Washington's view, favor the genuine public interest.

His second objection to paper money was in the way he thought it promoted speculation. "An evil equally great is, the door it immediately opens for speculation, by which the least designing, and perhaps most valuable, part of the community are preyed upon by the more knowing and crafty speculators." Washington was especially sensitive about the evils of speculation. During the Revolution he railed against the actions of speculators, middlemen, and stock jobbers, all of whom he accused of war profiteering. Such men added nothing to the wealth or productive capacity of the community; indeed, they drained off resources in a way that jeopardized the freedom of all Americans. Some of this feeling was no doubt the traditional Virginia planter's distrust of banking and cities. But the war had made Washington's hatred of speculation even more pronounced. If speculators were for paper money, then that was all the more reason for him to oppose it.

Finally, paper money introduced the very sort of social divisions that Washington believed were incompatible with true republicanism. By pitting debtor against creditor and class against class, the paper-money question destabilized society and jeopardized the sense of common purpose essential for the survival of republicanism.

As Washington arrived in Philadelphia, the paper-money cancer had already metastasized into the political bloodstream of Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island (where Washington later referred to its adherents as the "paper money junto"), and even of Virginia. Thus it should come as no surprise that when, on August 13, the convention considered whether to strike the clause that granted Congress authority to "emit bills on the credit of the United States" Virginia (and presumably Washington) voted in favor of the motion. This was the only vote Washington cast that would have restricted the power of the new national government. Thus, we cannot say that his nationalistic fervor knew no bounds.
The Intentions (and Successes) of a Framer

On September 17, 1787, almost four months after the Convention had been called to order, Benjamin Franklin rose to implore the delegates to consider their own fallibility and join in signing the finished document as a sign of their collective efforts. George Mason, Edmund Randolph, and Elbridge Gerry declined, each for his own reasons. But the remainder agreed to affix their signatures to the document. The immediate business of proposing a new Constitution was at an end.

How important was George Washington to the shaping of that new Constitution? How successful was he in imprinting his own constitutional agenda onto the final product? The first of those questions is the more problematic. It is always difficult to sort out the specific contributions that any one individual makes to a collegial enterprise. That effort is especially difficult when the historical record is as incomplete as it is for the convention. Moreover, Washington's visible participation in the work of the convention was slight—just nine discernible votes and one substantive suggestion on the last day of the convention. Add to this the fact that on those nine votes he was on the losing side six times, hardly the record of an influential framer.

The second question calls for a different sort of assessment. Rather than asking what Washington's influence was relative to other delegates (a question that we have seen poses insurmountable measurement problems), it asks how completely Washington accomplished his own constitutional agenda. This view of political influence seeks to assess one's influence principally by measuring how well one achieves one's own goals. Players who consistently "win" in the political process (that is, those who achieve their goals) are deemed powerful. Whether those same players were the exclusive agency of their successes is largely irrelevant. By this approach Washington's effectiveness at the convention can be best determined by asking how closely its results conformed with his preconvention agenda. If Washington emerged with lots of "wins" and relatively few "losses," his effectiveness would be difficult to dispute.

Washington did not believe that the final work of the convention embodied a complete triumph of his constitutional aspirations. To Edmund Randolph, fellow Virginia delegate to the convention but a non-signer of the Constitution, he conceded that there were "some things
in the new form, I will readily acknowledge, which never did, and I am persuaded never will, obtain my cordial approbation." Yet, in his attempt to win over the wavering Randolph he further noted that "in the aggregate, it is the best Constitution that can be obtained at this Epocha."

Washington had good reason to support the Constitution. It contained much that did meet with his cordial approbation. Washington had recommended many constitutional reforms in the previous half-dozen years—some specific, some more general. A review of these themes suggests why Washington became one of the Constitution's most resolute advocates in the struggle for ratification.

One cluster of themes prominent in Washington's preconvention agenda was concerned with establishing a stronger, more energetic central government with powers sufficient to address and resolve what he believed were grave national problems. He had been particularly critical of the states and their propensity to interfere with the great goals of the union. To Washington's disappointment, the convention refused to grant to Congress the power to nullify state legislation. That decision was hardly surprising given the political realities confronting the delegates. The final document would have to be submitted to the states for their approval. Such a provision would probably have "nullified" any hopes of ratification.

But other provisions pleased him. The states were specifically prohibited from interfering with many of the most important functions of the national government (Art. I, Sec. 10). Both the president, through his authority to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed" (Art. II, Sec. 3), and the judiciary, through its authority to hear all cases involving federal questions (Art. III, Sec. 2), were given substantial power to enforce national law, even against the states if necessary. The Supremacy Clause (Art. VI) made it clear that federal laws and federal treaties were superior to state laws.

The new Constitution also granted exclusivity to the national government in military matters and foreign relations, an issue of central concern to Washington since his service as commander-in-chief. True, Congress under the Articles of Confederation held similar responsibility, but it was responsibility without authority. The new structure of the Constitution provided an arsenal of powers fully capable of preempting any state interference in such matters.
The Philadelphia Convention had also gone substantially beyond the Articles in providing constitutional authority for the national commercial republic that Washington had envisioned. Congress’s power over interstate and international commerce appeared to be plenary (Art. I, Sec. 8). More to the point, the states were prohibited from having any say in this business other than through their representatives in Congress (Art. I, Sec. 10). Washington must have been especially pleased that the Constitution had given to Congress exclusive power to “make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States” (Art. IV, Sec. 3)—a power absolutely indispensable to Washington’s plans for progressive settlement of the West. He had hoped, too, that the new government would have the vision, the will, and the power to undertake grand projects in the national interest, such as his trans-Appalachian canal. The ability to establish this infrastructure was essential to his notions of using the national government as the instrument for linking the West to the East. The Constitution did endow Congress with the power “to establish post roads,” but the plain words of the document fell short of the expansive national power Washington had envisioned. The “necessary and proper” clause would eventually provide the requisite constitutional legitimacy for just such efforts, but in 1787 this question remained ambiguous. Perhaps Washington was satisfied that at least such projects were not included among the specific prohibitions against national power (Art. I, Sec. 9).

Much of the remainder of Washington’s pre-convention agenda found its way into the Constitution. The guaranty clause (Art IV, Sec. 4), made effective by the president’s newly established power to nationalize the state militias, went a long way toward relieving his anxieties over the domestic crises of the 1780s. The source of many of those anxieties—the illiberal and unjust actions by the legislatures of several states—was addressed in two ways. First, the national government would be insulated against these forces by its thoroughly republican structure and its substantial checks on legislative tyranny. Second, the guaranty clause implied that national power could be invoked to suppress the “democratical” (and therefore un-republican) impulses that Washington saw taking hold in some of the states, principally Rhode Island.

He was probably also pleased with the way the Constitution dealt
with the question of republican representation. Like all good republicans, Washington perceived public consent as the keystone of any form of government. But he had expressed his dismay over the quality of national representation under the Articles. Republican theory required that the "better sort of men" be induced to serve their country and that such representatives be relatively free from immediate popular control in order to pursue the common interest as their reason, experience, and virtue dictated. This new Constitution seemed to strike an equitable balance between direct (House of Representatives) and indirect (Senate, presidency, judiciary) representation. The varied selection processes offered methods that assured about as much "filtration of talent" as a republican people were likely to tolerate. Longer terms for these more indirectly chosen officers would serve as a damper on the presumably less educated, less propertied, less disinterested, and, perhaps, less virtuous House. Washington may have been a bit disappointed by the convention's decision to provide salaries for federal officials. Washington's concept of civic duty, drawing upon the ideals of the Roman republic and of the Virginia gentry within which he was raised, made him scornful of the notion of pay for public service. But since the larger scheme of representation was both republican and conservative, he was quite happy about the convention's work.

Finally, for Washington the new Constitution promised to arrest the rising tide of fiscal irresponsibility and immorality. States were now forbidden entirely from coining money, emitting bills of credit, or allowing anything other than gold or silver as legal tender (Art. I, Sec. 10). This was a strong antidote, indeed, for the paper-money disease. Washington was unable to convince the delegates to place a similar restriction on the fiscal activities of the federal government, but with independent taxing powers that now operated directly on the people and that could not be interfered with by the states, there was now every likelihood that the federal government would have access to the sorts of revenue that would make such "soft money" policies unnecessary. The new government also assumed the debts of the old confederacy (Art. VI); but with ample taxing authority of its own, Congress would no longer have to make unmanly supplications to the states for money. Justice and honor could finally be done to the oft-deferred revolutionary promissories. Washington's personal pledge to his soldiers could now be redeemed. In addition, the contract clause (Art. I, Sec. 10), en-
forced by the national supremacy principle, would preserve the sanctity of private business dealings and prevent attempts by debtors to alleviate their obligations through state legislative action. The Constitution affirmed that "honesty [was] the soundest policy" and assured that all those who had expressed their faith in the Revolution would finally get their due.50

So, then, how successful was Washington at the convention? From this accounting we can confidently conclude that he was very successful. The Constitution addressed nearly every major concern that he had raised in the previous six or seven years and did so in ways that fit well with his avowed goals. George Washington was certainly not the only delegate to emerge with a close congruence between his pre-convention agenda and the finished constitutional product. Indeed, some delegates may have been even more successful than Washington in that respect. But it was clearly a document that greatly encouraged Washington. In contemplating the initial prospects of the convention he had insisted, 'Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair.'51 In retrospect, his equivocation to Randolph may have only been intended to bring the governor "on board"; Randolph's support was thought to be critical to ratification in Virginia. It is clear that the new Constitution was, for Washington, just such a standard.

A Partisan Founder

The extent of Washington's enthusiasm for the new Constitution can be seen in his willingness to enlist in the federalist cause.52 Philadelphia had been only the first step in redeeming the Union; the work would not be finished until ratification by each of the states. Until then, the crisis that inspired Washington to travel to Philadelphia would remain as threatening as ever.

Initially, Washington seemed prepared to occupy his usual position above the partisan fray, writing Lafayette on the day after the convention's adjournment that he would not campaign either for or against the Constitution.53 After all, he perceived quite correctly that a good portion of his public reputation was attributable to his image as a non-partisan Patriot. But by the time he had returned to Mount Vernon he had apparently concluded that he (and the Constitution) stood to lose
more if the ratification effort failed than if he came down foursquare on the side of the federalists. He wrote letters to some of the leading Virginia political figures (Patrick Henry, Benjamin Harrison, Edmund Randolph, and Thomas Nelson) hoping to persuade them of the Constitution’s benefits.\(^54\) (With the exception of Randolph these individualized appeals did not win any converts.) He then encouraged federalists to write essays in public gazettes—to appeal to public opinion in any way possible—and later encouraged the dissemination of tracts by James Wilson and, of course, the great essays by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay that are known to us now as the \textit{Federalist Papers}.\(^55\) He even allowed Madison to use the claim that "George Washington supports the Constitution" whenever Madison deemed that it might be useful to the cause.\(^56\) That he would delegate custodianship of his public reputation to anyone, even a trusted friend and federalist, indicates Washington’s commitment to the new Constitution. For almost a year Washington kept up a steady stream of correspondence with federalists throughout the nation, offering his moral support, rejoicing over the ratification effort’s successes, worrying about its potential defeats, and in a few instances counseling federalists about specific strategies for ratification.\(^57\)

For one who warned against the "baneful effects of the spirit of party" for most of his public life, Washington was remarkably partisan during the ratification struggle. His commitment to classical republican theory explains both his strong aversion to partisanship and, paradoxically, his willingness to engage in partisan behavior on behalf of the Constitution. He believed that a virtuous republic was one that valued harmony, order, and a common sense of purpose. A virtuous republic could have but one true constitution, one true expression of the public interest, one true protector of the liberties of the people. But constitutions could be corrupted by self-interest—an impulse so powerful that men of virtue had to be constantly on the alert to protect the republic against such corruption and depravity. So long as reason and virtue and frugality prevailed in society, the republic might continue. But once passion, guile, demagoguery, and self-interest began to dominate public discourse the decline and fall of the republic was inevitable. Classical republicans, therefore, tended to view political debate not as an arena in which different interests openly competed for the right to define public policy (the "pluralist" view that today dominates Ameri-
can political practice), but rather as a struggle between right and wrong, between good republicans and those who would tear down the republic to serve their own narrow interests. To these men the notion of a loyal opposition or of continuous party competition was sheer nonsense. A republic could only be rooted in one notion of the common good. Anything else was corruption.

Washington saw the federalists as the genuine republicans in this affair, and his descriptions of their qualities were heavily larded with phrases intended to situate them as the true defenders of republicanism. The Constitution’s supporters were men of “abilities and property.” They were the “zealous advocates for and patriotic sufferers in the acquisition of American Independence”; only the federalists could lay claim to the title of “true patriots.” He portrayed the federalist effort from beginning to end as predicated upon a commitment to prudence and reason. Federalists merely wished to present the case for the Constitution to the people. Since Washington believed that the weight of reason was all on the federalist side, the people, when properly informed, would see the merits of the new Constitution and decide rightly.

In contrast to this portrayal of federalists as the authentic vessels of republican virtues, the antifederalists were cast as enemies of the people and of the republic. Conspiracy theory was a common way of viewing one’s opponents in this age. Republican eschatology predicted that the corruption of the constitution would almost always come from within and that the enemies of the republic would seek to shield their self-interest behind the mask of public virtue. Washington was thus unwilling to concede any ground to the antifederalists; conspirators had nothing to commend them. Even before the Constitutional Convention had completed its business Washington had predicted that the sort of men likely to oppose any new constitution would be either demagogues, state particularists, or “interested characters.” Further, they probably would not engage in a fair and open public debate using principles of common reason; they would, instead, act as a conspiratorial cabal: “Whilst many ostensible reasons are assigned to prevent the adoption of [the Constitution], the real ones are concealed behind the Curtain, because they are not of a nature to appear in open day.” Washington’s letters contain the sorts of venomous criticisms that he had previously reserved only for Tories. Antifederalists were men driven
by motives of "disappointment, passion and resentment." They were, on the one hand, "persons of too little importance to endanger the general welfare of the Union"; yet, on the other hand, they were capable of introducing "anarchy and confusion" into public affairs. They were "apparently unprincipled men" capable only of "unfair conduct"—conduct largely directed at appealing to "the ignorant" and inflaming the "passions" of the people. They were demagogues dedicated to a campaign of lies and misrepresentation. This was strong stuff. But Washington was not alone in using this sort of language. The antifederalists were just as fervently convinced that they were the true guardians of republicanism and that federalism was the devil incarnate—the great corrupter of public virtue. Both federalists and antifederalists, like most Americans of the eighteenth century, were imprisoned by a conspiratorial worldview that compelled them to portray each other in such partisan terms.

Even after the Constitution had been ratified Washington could not bring himself to completely trust those who had been antifederalists. He suspected that they still maintained an active, covert conspiracy against the new Constitution and would do whatever they could to undermine its effective operation. He had hoped that a new spirit of reason and moderation would inform postratification political discussions. Early signs from Massachusetts gave him some cause for optimism; the antifederalists had conceded defeat in an honorable way and had announced themselves willing to support and participate in the new government. But he soon came to believe that this posture of moderation was a ploy and that the antifederalists were working in concert (a "junto" as Washington put it) to elect their own partisans as officials in the new government.

Washington was no less a committed partisan himself and showed it in his activities surrounding the elections of 1788. He confided that he wanted only the "most disinterested, able, and virtuous men" in the new government and that "much will depend upon having disinterested and respectable characters in both Houses." But when one looks more closely at precisely who these "disinterested" individuals were, it becomes clear that they were supposed to resemble Washington and his fellow federalists.

Washington warned his allies throughout the states that they had to be constantly on guard against antifederalist machinations. He was
particularly worried about events in Virginia. Virginians, he thought, were warm supporters of the Constitution, estimating at one point that seven in ten were sympathetic to the cause. But he feared that inattention by the federalists to the business at hand might surrender this hard-won advantage. Evidence soon confirmed Washington's fears: Madison had been denied a seat in the Senate. Washington now saw visions of a sinister conspiracy, with Patrick Henry's hand pulling the strings of the unrepentant antifederalists. He implored federalists to stand for election, arguing that if they declined, the Constitution would be robbed of its dignity. He applauded every federalist victory as a triumph of "patriotism, instead of faction." He applauded every federalist victory as a triumph of "patriotism, instead of faction."\(^{67}\)

Washington, of course, had another reason for his vigorous federalist partisanship in the 1788 elections. It was evident by the summer of that year that Washington would be the first president under the new Constitution. To those who were pushing his candidacy he had written that he had performed his full measure of duty for his country and that he wished to retire once again from public life. The ritual of reluctant acceptance was now rather familiar.\(^{69}\) But he must have known, perhaps even as early as the Philadelphia Convention the previous summer, that his willingness to accept the presidency was essential to the federalist endgame. Knowing that his own public reputation, the success or failure of his own administration, and the viability of his own constitutional vision were at stake, he wanted to be sure that the new government would be amply peopled with those who shared that vision. There would be much rough weather before the new ship of state sailed into safe harbor. It would be better to traverse those waters in the company of friends.