**Ratification of the Constitution**

Leaders of the Philadelphia Convention had completed the Constitution for the United States of America, but many of the convention members had lingering doubts as to whether the states would approve it. According to the Articles of Confederations, unanimous approval was needed to ratify the Constitution, and convention leaders feared that this was unachievable.

The fears of the Philadelphia Convention’s members were well founded. Rhode Island so staunchly resisted the idea of a strong central government it earned the nickname “Rogue Island.” The diminutive state, fearful of being overwhelmed by a central authority, refused to send delegates to Philadelphia or participate in the development of the Constitution. Although Rhode Island was the state that most vehemently opposed ratification of the Constitution, other states, including New York, Massachusetts, and Virginia all expressed concern over a federal union.

Since the framers had already decided to discard the Articles of Confederation when drafting the Constitution, they no longer felt bound by its requirement of a unanimous vote for ratification. The delegates agreed that approval from only 9 of the 13 states would be adequate to ratify the United States Constitution.

Even with the lower ratification requirements, the framers knew the process would not be easy. In an effort to combat the fear of a large, powerful government, convention leaders decided to set up conventions within each state where the people would approve or reject the Constitution. The Philadelphia Convention members finalized the Constitution and submitted it to the states for ratification on September 28, 1787.

The public, expecting a revised version of the Articles of Confederation, was shocked by this new document. The Philadelphia Convention had been a very private affair, and only the individuals inside the meeting room were aware of the drastic changes that were taking place. At times during the convention, the windows were boarded over to ensure the framers’ privacy. As a result, the public, assuming that the convention’s purpose was to revise the existing Articles of Confederation, was taken aback by the innovative Constitution.

Public opinion about the Constitution quickly became separated into two camps, the Federalists and the Antifederalists. Most Federalists were wealthy, well-educated, and unified by the desire for a powerful, centralized government. Their leaders were usually influential men such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. They were proponents of an orderly, efficient government that could protect their economic status. The Federalists were well organized and in many states they often controlled the elections of ratifying conventions with their power and influence.

Their opponents, the Antifederalists, were generally farmers, debtors, and other lower class people who were loyal to their state governments. Antifederalist leaders, including Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry, typically enjoyed more wealth and power than the people they led. Henry was notorious for fighting for individual liberties, and one of the primary objections the Antifederalists had to the Constitution was the lack of a Bill of Rights, which would have afforded basic liberties to the public. They also feared the powers that would be assigned to a large central government, especially powers of taxation. Many Antifederalists believed a republican government could not rule a nation as large as America, since previously republics had only been successful in small regions like Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay stepped forward with a series of essays designed to alleviate the Antifederalists’ fears. These essays came to be known as the Federalists Papers, and they were the most influential political writings of the time. Hamilton, Madison, and Jay argued that limitations on governmental power were built into the Constitution with a series of checks and balances. In these essays they also explained the need for centralized government so the United States could earn the respect of other countries.

With the assistance of the Federalist Papers, the Federalists were able to break down resistance and gain enough support to ratify the Constitution. Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey became the first states to ratify, with all three taking action in December of 1787. Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, and South Carolina all ratified between January and May of 1788. The pivotal vote came in June of 1788 when New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify, meeting the criteria required to adopt the Constitution.

With this vote, the Constitution went into effect, and the Continental Congress respectfully bowed out. The City of New York was selected as the location for the new Congress, and March 4, 1789, was chosen as the date the new Congress would initially convene.

However, even with the ratification of the Constitution, the framers understood that all 13 states needed to accept the laws and boundaries of the Constitution. The Federalists continued to lobby and eventually earned the ratification of Virginia and New York in the summer of 1788. However, North Carolina, and Rhode Island held out until the new Congress had begun its work and had fulfilled its promise to draft a Bill of Rights. North Carolina ratified on November 21, 1789, and Rhode Island finally yielded—albeit by the closest vote of any state—on May 29, 1790.