

★ ANTI-FEDERALIST CONCERNS ABOUT THE ★ CONSTITUTION

The Constitution has worked so well for so long that we sometimes forget that many patriotic Americans opposed it. Those people who opposed the Constitution were called Anti-Federalists. Some Anti-Federalists wanted only a few changes to the Constitution and some would not accept it under any conditions.

Most Anti-Federalists objected to the Constitution for a few basic reasons. At the center of their objections was the belief that the Constitution created too strong a central government. They felt that the Constitution created a single national government, not a federal government. They believed that the power of the states would be destroyed by the new Constitution. They worried that as the states lost their power to rule, a few power-hungry individuals would seize control of the government. Eventually, the Anti-Federalists argued, people would lose many of their freedoms. As one Anti-Federalist stated: "We know that private interest governs mankind generally. Power belongs originally to the people; but if rulers be not well guarded, that power may be usurped from them. People ought to be cautious in giving away power."

One of the most important persons who opposed the Constitution was Patrick Henry. Henry was not opposed to a union of the thirteen states. However, he was concerned that the proposed Constitution lacked enough protection for state and individual rights.

Henry was not alone in his desire for the protection of rights. His fears were echoed by others, including Thomas Jefferson. James Madison listened to his friends Jefferson and Henry, and soon after ratification of the Constitution, he introduced a series of amendments that created the Bill of Rights.

Patrick Henry's Objections

"A general provision should be inserted in the new system, securing to the States and the people every right which was not conceded to the general government. I trust that gentlemen . . . will see the great objects of religion, liberty of the press, trial by jury, interdiction of cruel punishments, and every other sacred right, secured, before they agree to that [Constitution].

The necessity of a bill of rights appears . . . to be greater in this government than ever it was in any government before. All nations have adopted the construction, that all rights not expressly and [definitely] reserved to the people are [inevitably] relinquished to rulers. . . . If you give up these powers, without a bill of rights, you will exhibit the most absurd thing to mankind that ever the world saw,—a government that has abandoned all its powers—the powers of direct taxation, the sword, and the purse. You have disposed of them to Congress, without a bill of rights, without check, limitation, or control."