

Lesson Plans: Grades 9-12

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THE FEDERALIST AND ANTI-FEDERALIST DEBATES ON DIVERSITY AND THE EXTENDED REPUBLIC

Lesson 1: Anti-federalist Arguments Against "A Complete Consolidation"

A WE THE PEOPLE RESOURCE

Introduction



Richard Henry Lee (1732–1794), was the leading anti-federalist who is thought to have been the individual who wrote as the "Federalist Farmer."

Credit: Image courtesy of American Memory at the Library of Congress.

Throughout 1787-88, as Americans continued to debate the proposed Constitution, one of the most contentious issues was whether the Union – tightened into one indissoluble nation under a federal government – could be maintained without doing away with both liberty and the state governments. Anti-federalist Brutus summarized the issue thus: "The first question that presents itself on the subject is...whether the thirteen United States should be reduced to one great republic...or whether they should continue thirteen confederated republics, under the direction and controul of a supreme federal head for certain defined national purposes only?" One of the chief objections of Anti-federalists was that the new national government would likely not be able to efficiently govern an extent of territory as vast as the United States. "[I]n a republic of such vast extent as the United-States," wrote Brutus, "the legislature cannot attend to the various concerns and wants of its different parts." Other Anti-federalists objected that such a system would only work if the national government gradually usurped all powers from the states, resulting in what they called a "consolidated" government. With the United States thus "melted down into one empire," Anti-federalists argued that the national government would likely resort to force to maintain the Union and ensure compliance to national laws. As Centinel wrote, "It would not be difficult to prove, that any thing short of despotism, could not bind so great a country under one government." The result, Anti-federalists believed, would be a powerful tyranny, in which the national government exercised its virtually unlimited powers to oppress the people and deprive them of their liberty. "A free republic," Brutus concluded, "cannot long subsist over a country of the great extent of these states."

This lesson will focus on the chief objections of the Anti-federalists, especially The Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee), Centinel, and Brutus, regarding the extended republic. Students will become familiar with the larger issues surrounding this debate, including the nature of the American Union, the difficulties of uniting such a vast territory with a diverse multitude of regional interests, and the challenges of maintaining a free republic as the American people moved toward becoming a nation rather than a mere confederation of individual states.

Guiding Questions

What are the merits of the Anti-federalist argument that an extended republic will lead to the destruction of

liberty and self-government?

Learning Objectives

Understand what Anti-federalists meant by the terms “extended republic” or “consolidated republic.”

Articulate the problems the Anti-federalists believed would arise from extending the republic over a vast territory.

Better understand the nature and purpose of representation, and why, according to Anti-federalists, it would not be successful in a large nation.

Explain why Anti-federalists believed that eventually the extended republic would result in rebellion or tyranny.

Articulate how the problem of representation in a large republic would lead to abuse of power by those in national office or the use of force to execute the laws.

Explain why a great diversity of interests in a large republic was an obstacle, according to Anti-federalists, to uniting Americans together as one nation.

Background

After the Constitutional Convention of 1787 had ended and the proposed Constitution had been submitted to the American people for ratification, public debates raged between those who supported the Constitution (Federalists) and those who opposed it (Anti-federalists). One of the central issues in the debates was whether it would be possible to unite the thirteen states into one great nation, under one federal government, in such a way that the individual states and their respective governments would not be eliminated – and with them, the means of securing the liberties of the citizens of America. This question, in fact, had been one of the most important questions at the Convention, and had kept delegates preoccupied for the better part of half the time they had spent in Philadelphia. Delegates such as James Madison and James Wilson had put forward a plan that would transform the American Union from a loose confederation of sovereign and independent states – as they were considered to be under the Articles of Confederation – to a nation of one people, living in thirteen states, under a federal system that strengthened the national government but still left certain powers and responsibilities to the government of each state. This was accomplished, in the end, by altering the scheme of representation: under the Articles of Confederation, each state legislature selected delegates to a unicameral Congress, and each state delegation had an equal vote on all national matters; under the proposed Constitution, a bicameral Congress was created, and each state sent a proportional number of delegates, elected directly by the people of that state. The effect was that under the new federal arrangement, the Union was no longer to be based simply on a “league of friendship” between sovereign and independent states, but on a contract between all Americans united in one nation – a nation that was already vast by historical standards and that promised further growth in the future.

The question of the nature of the American Union carried over into the Federalist and Anti-federalist debates – both groups, in fact, took their names either from their support or opposition to the proposed changes to the nature of the American Union. Should the United States remain a loose connection of thirteen smaller republics,

or could they be united into one larger republic? The Anti-federalists generally agreed that the project of consolidating into one great republic should be rejected. As the Anti-federalist “The Federal Farmer” (believed to be Richard Henry Lee) wrote in 1787, “The first interesting question, therefore suggested, is, how far the states can be consolidated into one entire government on free principles...If we are so situated as a people, as not to be able to enjoy equal happiness and advantages under one government, the consolidation of the states cannot be admitted.” The Federal Farmer explains that there are three possible “forms” that the Union could take. First, it could retain its form as existing under the Articles of Confederation, in which “the respective state governments must be the principal guardians of the people’s rights, and exclusively regulate their internal police; in them must rest the balance of government. The congress of the states, or federal head, must consist of delegates amenable to, and removable by the respective states.” The second option, according to the Federal Farmer, is to “do away [with the] state governments, and form or consolidate all the states into one entire government.” The Federal Farmer rejects these first two options in favor of a third, in which a partial consolidation takes place, or, as he puts it, “We may consolidate the states as to certain national objects, and leave them severally distinct independent republics, as to internal police generally.” Although he favors this “partial consolidation” in theory, the Federal Farmer rejects the proposed constitution because in time – due to the lack of safeguards for the rights of citizens and the reserved powers of the states – a complete consolidation of power on the national level is inevitable. “The convention appears to have proposed the partial consolidation evidently with a view to collect all powers ultimately,” wrote the Federal Farmer, “in the United States into one entire government.”

Anti-federalist Brutus echoes these concerns, but elaborates on the disadvantages that must be felt from the attempt to create such a vast republic under one federal government. “If respect is to be paid to the opinion of the greatest and wisest men who have ever thought or wrote on the science of government,” wrote Brutus, “we shall be constrained to conclude, that a free republic cannot succeed over a country of such immense extent, containing such a number of inhabitants, and these increasing in such rapid progression as that of the whole United States.” History furnishes no example, Brutus says, of a large republic that did not eventually succumb to the political evils of disintegration or tyranny. The greatest flaw in an extended republic, Brutus believed, is that it would be impossible for legislative representatives to adequately know and act upon the interests of their constituents. The proposed Constitution would allow no more than one representative in the House for every 30,000 constituents, which would lead to a relatively small number of delegates in the national legislature. Federalists such as James Madison believed that a small number was necessary to prevent the House from being overcrowded and mob-like in character. Brutus agreed with Madison on this, but this just proved his point: the national legislature must have either too many members (and thus be unwieldy and inefficient) or too few members, in which case the interests of the constituents would not properly be represented.

Brutus and fellow Anti-federalist Centinel agreed that this problem of representation in a large republic would likely lead, eventually, to the emergence of either rebellion or tyranny in America. “It would not be difficult to prove,” wrote Centinel, “that any thing short of despotism, could not bind so great a country under one government.” In a large republic, Brutus argued, with relatively few representatives, constituents will not know their representative and vice versa. The result will be that the people “will have no confidence in their legislature, suspect them of ambitious views, be jealous of every measure they adopt, and will not support the laws they pass.” Without the voluntary support of the people, Brutus writes, the only way the national government could ensure prompt and efficient execution of the laws would be “by establishing an armed force to execute the laws at the point of the bayonet — a government of all others the most to be dreaded.” The small number of representatives – and their remoteness from the watchful eye of their constituents – would also lead them to “become above the controul of the people, and [to] abuse their power to the purpose of aggrandizing

themselves, and oppressing them.”

The vast extent of the American Republic would also bring other disadvantages, especially to the people of those states most remote from the seat of the national government. With the institution of a federal court system, citizens would be forced to travel great distances – a lengthy and expensive undertaking at the time – in order to bring legal suits or defend themselves at trials in federal courts. “I think it one of the greatest benefits in a good government,” wrote the Federal Farmer, “that each citizen should find a court of justice within a reasonable distance, perhaps, within a day’s travel of his home; so that, without great inconveniences and enormous expenses, he may have the advantages of his witnesses and jury.”

One of the strongest objections that Anti-federalists made against the extended republic was that it would consist of a great multitude of diverse interests, which would not only be inadequately represented in the national legislature, but would also serve as an obstacle to complete unity as one people and one nation. “In a republic,” writes Brutus, “the manners, sentiments, and interests of the people should be similar. If this be not the case, there will be a constant clashing of opinions; and the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other.” In the extended American Republic (consisting of “near three millions of souls” and growing) a wide variety of occupations – “professional men, merchants, traders, farmers, mechanics, &c.” – is made even more diverse by the differences in climate, manners and habits from state to state, not to mention the complexity of local laws and customs. Harmony among the citizens and cooperation in Congress could hardly be expected in such a vast nation; rather such a Union “would be composed of such heterogenous and discordant principles, as would constantly be contending with each other.” All of these difficulties led the Anti-federalists to conclude that the project of melting the states “down into one empire” in “so extended a territory” would be worse than in vain – it would, in fact, lead to the loss of liberty and to the eventual dissolution of the Union altogether.

For more background information, the EDSITEment-reviewed resource “Ratification of the Constitution” website at Teaching American History offers useful texts and timelines of the Federalist and Anti-federalist debates, including their arguments regarding the extended republic.

Preparation Instructions

Review the lesson plan. Locate and bookmark suggested materials and links from EDSITEment-reviewed websites used in this lesson. Download and print out selected documents and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing. Alternatively, excerpted versions of these documents are available as part of the Text Document for each activity. Download the two Text Documents, Activity Worksheet 1 and Activity Worksheet 2, for this lesson, available here as PDFs. These files contain excerpted versions of the documents used in the activities, as well as questions for students to answer. Print out and make an appropriate number of copies of the handouts you plan to use in class.

NOTE TO TEACHERS ON PRIORITIZING AND MODIFYING ACTIVITIES:

This lesson, because of the importance and complexity of the subject matter, involves activities that might require more time than is normally allotted for this topic. If your available time is limited to one day, it is recommended that teachers skip to Activity Two, which focuses on the specific arguments of Anti-federalists against creating an extended or consolidated republic, namely, the danger of tyranny and the inability to adequately represent the diverse interests of such a large nation. Teachers also have the discretion of

modifying the assignments and materials to be covered in class to fit their allotted schedules. Teachers may also have the entire class engage in Activity One, and then assign the second activity to three smaller groups, which would then prepare a class presentation teaching the main points of the materials and activities to the rest of the class.

Because this lesson uses primary documents that include language that students might find difficult to understand or translate into modern terms, teachers may find it useful to create a vocabulary chart for the room, or a chart listing the main points of the Anti-federalist arguments. Students could refer to these charts before beginning the reading assignments.

Analyzing primary sources:

If your students lack experience in dealing with primary sources, you might use one or more preliminary exercises to help them develop these skills. The Learning Page at the American Memory Project of the Library of Congress includes a set of such activities. Another useful resource is the Digital Classroom of the National Archives, which features a set of Document Analysis Worksheets.

Lesson Activities

Activity 1. The "consolidated republic" over a vast extent of territory

Activity 2. Dangers of the extended republic

Activity 1. The "consolidated republic" over a vast extent of territory

Time required for activity: One homework assignment and one class instructional period

Preparing for the activity:

Print copies (or provide links) for students of the documents and questions assigned for homework and class discussion (listed below, included in the Text Document for Activity One).

This activity is designed to introduce students to the Anti-federalists' views on extending the republic, as this, in their view, would involve doing away with the sovereignty of the thirteen separate and independent states and "melting them down" into one national republic. Students will also see that the initial arguments of Anti-federalists against the extended republic included the following: 1. A vast republic under a consolidated central government would prove fatal to the liberties of the people; and 2. History (and the authority of Baron de Montesquieu) had shown that no large republic in the past had survived without succumbing to either disintegration or tyranny.

On the day before the activity:

1. For homework, have all students read the documents for Activity One and assign the corresponding worksheet (available on pages 4-5 of the Text Document for Activity One). These documents are available in their entirety at the EDSITEment-reviewed Online Library of Liberty and Teaching American History, and in excerpted form on pages 1-3 of the Text Document for Activity One:

The Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee) No. 1, October 8, 1787

Brutus No. 1, October 18, 1787

On the day of the activity:

1. Divide the class into smaller groups, and allow 10-15 minutes for students to discuss and compare answers, updating their worksheets as they do.
2. With the remainder of class time, the teacher should initiate and lead class discussion over the ideas in the documents. The teacher can broaden the scope of the discussion by raising the following questions:

How does the Federal Farmer's distinctions between the possible "different forms of free government" show that the central question is whether the people of the United States should be firmly united in one nation, or loosely united as citizens of thirteen separate and independent states?

Why does the Federal Farmer favor only a "partial consolidation" into one republic under a national government?

Why does the Federal Farmer oppose the "partial consolidation" that will result from the proposed Constitution?

Do the Federal Farmer and Brutus give the same reasons for rejecting an extended republic?

Why does Brutus believe an extended republic would be fatal to liberty?

Activity 2. Dangers of the extended republic

Time required for activity: One homework assignment and one class instructional period

Preparing for the activity:

Print copies (or provide links) for students of the documents and questions assigned for homework and in-class analysis (listed below, included in the Text Document for Activity Two).

The purpose of the activity is to provide students with an understanding of the core arguments of Anti-federalists against creating a large republic under a consolidated central government. Students will better understand why Anti-federalists believed that a large republic would eventually result in either anarchy or tyranny, and how proper representation and the administration of justice would be rendered ineffective in a large extended republic.

On the day before the activity:

1. For homework, have all students read the documents for Activity Two Reading Set A and assign the corresponding worksheet (available on page 4 of the Text Document for Activity Two). These documents are available in their entirety at the EDSITEment-reviewed Teaching American History, and in excerpted form on pages 1-3 of the Text Document for Activity Two:

Reading Set A: Fear of despotism or anarchy under a consolidated government

Centinel No. 1, October 5, 1787

Brutus No. 1, October 18, 1787

Brutus No. 4, November 29, 1787

On the day of the activity:

1. Discuss the homework assignment before going on to Reading Sets B and C.
2. Divide the class into two groups and assign each group Reading Set B or Reading Set C, as well as the corresponding worksheets (available on pages 7 and 9 of the Text Document for Activity Two). These documents are available in their entirety at the EDSITEment-reviewed Online Library of Liberty and Teaching American History, and in excerpted form on pages 5-6 and 8 of the Text Document for Activity Two:

Reading Set B: Disadvantages of the “remote states”

The Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee) No. 2, October 9, 1787

Reading Set C: Representation and the diversity of interests

Brutus No. 1, October 18, 1787

3. Allow each group approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the worksheet for their assigned reading set.
4. Reshuffle the groups, and make sure every student has the readings and worksheets for both Reading Sets (B and C). Allow approximately 10-15 minutes for students to complete both worksheets.
5. With the remaining class time, each group should select one student to make a brief presentation to the class on the arguments against the extended republic in the readings.
6. The lesson can be extended by having each student write a short paper (1-2 pages) summarizing the Anti-federalist arguments against the extended republic.

Assessment

After completing this lesson, students should be able to write brief (1-2 paragraphs) answers to the following questions:

What did the Anti-federalists mean by a “consolidated republic”?

Why does the Federal Farmer reject the “partial consolidation” that will result from the proposed constitution?

Why did Centinel and Brutus believe that an extended republic would result in either rebellion or tyranny?

Why does Brutus believe that representation will not work properly in an extended republic?

According to Brutus, what problems would be caused by the diversity of interests among states and citizens in an extended republic?

Students should also be able to debate the themes addressed in this lesson, and write a longer (2-3 pages) essay answering the following question: Living in America 220 years after their objections were first raised, were the Anti-federalists’ fears about a consolidated government justified?

Alternative methods of assessment:

1. Divide the class into small groups, and have each one develop a thesis statement that encompasses all the various elements of this lesson. They should be given roughly 15 minutes to do this. Once they have done so, each group should write its thesis statement on the board, and as a class discuss which is the best, and why. The entire class could then be given a homework assignment to write an essay that defends the statement.
2. Allow students to prepare a podcast (or other recording) of a speech that addresses the questions above.

Students should be able to identify and summarize the views of the following Anti-federalists regarding the extended or consolidated republic:

The Federal Farmer

Centinel

Brutus

Students should also be able to identify and explain the significance of the following concepts:

Anti-federalist

Extended republic

Multiplicity of interests

Adequate representation

Administration of justice

Consolidated government

Extending The Lesson

Teachers can extend this lesson by engaging in the following supplemental activities:

1. Have students create a PowerPoint presentation explaining the arguments that Anti-federalists made against the extended or consolidated republic.
2. Have students choose two Anti-federalists discussed in this lesson with different arguments against the extended or consolidated republic, and have them write a summary report on the difference between them, as well as their reasons for holding their views.
3. Have students use the individuals and concepts in "Assessment" to prepare flash cards (cardstock or note cards will work). The front of the card should have the name of the individual or the concept. The back of the card should have a description of the individual and his beliefs or an explanation of the concept. When completed, place students in pairs and allow time to practice with the flashcards in preparation for a quiz or test using the assessment questions.

4. Have students write a paper in which they place themselves in the shoes of Brutus and explain how they would have reacted to the creation of extended republic. Students could also write as Brutus and explain their understanding of proper representation, the importance of protecting liberty, and the meaning of self-government.

Selected EDSITEment Websites

Online Library of Liberty

The Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee) No. 1, 8 October 1787

The Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee) No. 2, 9 October 1787

Teaching American History

Centinel No. 1, 5 October 1787

Brutus No. 1, 18 October 1787

Brutus No. 4, 29 November 1787

Grade Level

9-12

Time Required

2 class periods

Subject Areas

- History and Social Studies > U.S. > AP US History
- History and Social Studies
- History and Social Studies > Themes > Civil Rights
- History and Social Studies > U.S. > Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)
- History and Social Studies > People > Other
- History and Social Studies > Themes > U.S. Constitution

Skills

- Compare and contrast
- Critical analysis
- Critical thinking

- Debate
- Discussion
- Evaluating arguments
- Gathering, classifying and interpreting written, oral and visual information
- Historical analysis
- Internet skills
- Interpretation
- Making inferences and drawing conclusions
- Online research
- Textual analysis
- Using primary sources
- Vocabulary
- Writing skills

Authors

- Christopher Burkett, Ashland University (Ashland, OH)
- Patricia Dillon, West Virginia Department of Education (Charleston, WV)

Activity Worksheets

The Federalist and Anti-federalist Debates: Worksheet 1

The Federalist and Anti-federalist Debates: Worksheet 2

Student Resources

Celebrating Constitution Day

Media



Richard Henry Lee (1732–1794), was the leading anti-federalist who is thought to have been the individual who wrote as the "Federalist Farmer."

Credit: Image courtesy of American Memory at the Library of Congress.

The Federalist Debates: Balancing Power Between State and Federal Governments

This lesson focuses on the debates among the U.S. Founders surrounding the distribution of power between states and the federal government. Students learn about the pros and cons of state sovereignty vs. federalism and have the opportunity to argue different sides of the issue.