

What the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists Agreed On: The Debate Over the Presidency
the Anti-Republican Nature of the Constitution, 1787-1788

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Introduction

Nobody to my knowledge has systematically counted the number of times participants in the public ratification debate explicitly mentioned each of the three branches of government in their public examinations of the Constitution. But it is obvious to anyone familiar with the texts that circulated during 1787 and 1788 that the “federalist” proponents of ratification and their “anti-federalist” adversaries¹ did not discuss the presidential office as frequently as they did Congress. This relative dearth of commentary on the presidency has led scholars to underestimate its importance to the

¹ There is some variation among scholars regarding precisely how to present the names given to the supporters and the critics of the Constitution during the ratification debate. Following the convention employed by Jeffrey L. Pasley, I leave both “federalist” and “anti-federalist” in lower-case (except where it appears in a quote), distinguishing both from organized political parties. See Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2001), xvii. Unlike Pasley, I have chosen to hyphenate the name of the opponents (“anti-federalist” as opposed to “antifederalist”) to convey the fundamentally reactionary character of anti-federalism. For discussion of the various objections to the Constitution raised by the anti-federalists, see Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 19-50, esp. 30-31. Other examples of valuable recent studies of the ratification debate include: Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Era of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 105-60; and Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-88* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

public ratification debate—part of a larger scholarly tendency to underestimate the early presidency’s overall national political importance.²

As Americans, we have a vested interest in viewing the Constitution as a charter of republican liberty. Imagining a presidential office of limited power, and relative insignificance to the ratification debate, buttresses this view. It also adds to the mythology of the Founding Era by defining it as a time when presidential power was tightly circumscribed and public discourse did not revolve around the presidency—a stark contrast to American political culture today. But it ignores a powerful truth about our Constitution—and ultimately, about the national values the Constitution reflects—that can only be recovered if we pay closer attention to the presidential office.

For federalists and anti-federalists alike, the Constitution was fundamentally a plan for concentrated national state power, and the central issue of the ratification debate was not representation, but the proposed government’s capacity to act independent of—and even contrary to—the people’s will. For both the Constitution’s allies and its opponents the presidency functioned as the personification of the proposed national government’s anti-republican essence.³ For federalists, the presidency symbolized the

² Dana Nelson has recently claimed in *Bad for Democracy: How the Presidency Undermines the Power of the People* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2010): “Citizens were not very interested in the presidency as a political office in the years of the early nation.” See Nelson, *Bad for Democracy*, 38. Historian Lynn Hudson Parsons has recently argued that “The Framers of the Constitution,” as “good republicans,” imagined a president completely subservient to Congress, tasked only with “carrying out the people’s will by enforcing the laws passed by the people’s representatives.” They could barely conceive “that the president too might claim to be the people’s representative.” See Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 190. See also Peter M. Shane, *Madison’s Nightmare: How Executive Power Threatens American Democracy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

³ I am, of course, not the first to make this observation. See, recently, Calvin Johnson, *Righteous Anger at the Wicked States: The Meaning of the Founders’ Constitution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

concentrated authority necessary to check the anarchy and instability that invariably dominated “purely republican” governments. For anti-federalists, the presidency epitomized the tyrannical “consolidation” of power they saw lurking behind every paragraph. Examined together, their commentary reminds us that power was at the heart of the ratification debate—power that federalists and anti-federalists agreed would define the American nation one way or the other if the Constitution were ratified: either as the source of republican liberty’s “safety” and vitality, or as the root cause of its downfall.

What the Ratification Debate Was Really About

“In our opposition to monarchy, we forgot that the temple of tyranny has two doors,” Pennsylvania physician and political leader Benjamin Rush sighed in January, 1788. “We bolted one of them by popular restraints, but we left the other open, by neglecting to guard against the effects of our own ignorance and licentiousness.”⁴ Rush’s quote perfectly captures the essential question the Constitution posed for participants in the ratification debate (and strongly suggests Rush’s own answer). The essence of the proposed Constitution was concentrated power that would ultimately be controlled by an elite few trusted to act on the people’s behalf, not by the people themselves. Its power was designed to trump local, regional, and state interests that had dominated the political scene under the Articles of Confederation.

2009). Numerous scholars have made the point that the Constitution is foundationally undemocratic. See, for instance, Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the Constitution?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁴ Benjamin Rush, in John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, 22 vols. to date (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976-), hereafter cited as *DHRC* 13: 46.

The framers of the Constitution had despaired of the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation to compel state financial support for the Revolutionary War. Shays's Rebellion, a brief uprising of rural Massachusetts farmers against political and economic elites in 1786, added further urgency to their fears that the masses held too much power and that national government held too little. The Revolution against monarchy, nationalists like Rush lamented, had yielded a nation too suspicious of concentrated authority, and too comfortable with entrusting all substantive power to popular assemblies and the local, fickle, and self-serving interests they invariably represented.

Federalists and anti-federalists alike widely recognized that the resulting Constitution was fundamentally designed to *oppose* the diverse political interests that the current Confederated system facilitated. It was designed not merely to be less republican, but to offset the natural centrifugal force that was republicanism's worst feature. At issue was whether that change was a positive or negative one for the nation's future.

Anti-federalists were unequivocal in their denunciation of such a plan as nothing more than "consolidated" arbitrary authority vested in a national body that would result in the erosion of state autonomy and the eradication of the people's liberty. "The Constitution proposed has few, if any, *Foederal* features, but is rather a system of *national* government," Anti-Federalist Elbridge Gerry complained in a piece that first appeared in October, 1787, and which appeared in over forty newspapers in eleven states, by early January. For elite Anti-Federalists like Gerry, order was best maintained at the local level, by local elites, not at a national level, where it could too easily undermine the particular

interests of the community.⁵ Plebeian anti-federalists went even further, arguing, as “Centinel” did in his widely-published first letter, that the Constitution was emblematic of imposition by elites in general, “the wealthy and ambitious, who in every community think they have a right to lord it over their fellow creatures.”⁶

Federalists too agreed that the proposed national government claimed unprecedented coercive power over the states and the people. But the friends of the Constitution widely argued that such concentrated power was necessary to stabilize the young republic and protect it from the naturally corrosive influence of diffuse, popular political power. By their very nature, republics vested disproportionate power in legislative assemblies, which were tasked with representing the varied interests of the population. In “purely republican” nations, as Alexander Hamilton explained, these assemblies had all the power, and the result was invariably self-interest and political intrigue by unscrupulous politicians, not the true expression of the people’s sovereign will. With no strong, national force to compel legislative assemblies to look beyond local concerns and their own selfish interests, such governments invariably disintegrated.⁷ Even James Madison, the greatest American theorist of representative government, left little doubt that he too believed reserving some power to a national body preserved “energy” and cohesion that were constantly threatened by the divisiveness and inefficiency that were natural in republics. “Energy in government is essential to that security against external and internal danger and to that prompt and salutary execution

⁵ Elbridge Gerry to the General Court, October 18, 1787, in *DHRC* 4:99. For information on the document’s circulation, see *DHRC* 4: 96.

⁶ “Centinel,” No. 1, *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, October 5, 1787, in *DHRC* 13:330.

⁷ [Hamilton], *Federalist* 71, in Terence Ball, ed., *The Federalist, With Letters of “Brutus”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 350. All subsequent citations for *The Federalist* refer to this edition.

of the laws which enter into the very definition of good Government,” Madison wrote in *Federalist 37*. And “energy in government requires not only a certain duration of power, but the execution of it by a single hand.”⁸

This sobering fact—that the Constitution fundamentally called for “a certain duration of power,” controlled not by the collective will of the people but “by a single hand”—was the foundation of the entire ratification debate, including their debates over representation in Congress. When federalists and anti-federalists discussed issues of congressional representation, they were not primarily concerned with how the people would rule. Instead, the issue was *which* people (from which states) would be able to control a national government everyone agreed possessed enough power to impose its will on every person, community, and state.

The basic fact of national government power always loomed over debates over representation. Its ubiquity helps explain why federalists and anti-federalists did not explicitly point to it in all, or even most, of their publications. There was simply no need. Everyone knew what the conversation was really about. The Legislative Branch represented the multitude of interests that had jockeyed for political power under the Articles of Confederation, and which would compete for national supremacy under the Constitution. But it did not represent the most fundamental issue in the ratification debate: the “supreme,” national coercive power these interests, under the Constitution, would maneuver to control. That distinction fell to the presidency.

⁸ [Madison], *Federalist 37*, 170-71.

Why the Presidency?: The Tyrannical “Fountain of All Honors” Versus The Paternalistic “Man of the People”

Federalists and anti-federalists did not explicitly discuss the presidency as much as they discussed Congress. Indeed, as Jack N. Rakove notes, the presidency was the least explicitly discussed part of the Constitution by anti-federalists, and “few Federalists felt compelled to provide a comprehensive survey of Article II.”⁹ Yet when they did discuss it, federalists and anti-federalists assigned the presidency a uniquely all-encompassing significance. “Here the writers against the Constitution seem to have taken pains to signalize their talent of misrepresentation,” Hamilton remarked at the beginning of *Federalist 67*, the first of his eleven essays devoted to the presidential office, “calculating upon the aversion of the people to monarchy, they have endeavoured to inlist all their jealousies and apprehensions in opposition to the intended President of the United States; not merely as the embryo but as the full grown progeny of that detested parent.”¹⁰ We find similar statements in anti-federalist texts, as well. “[O]n the judicious organization of executive power, the security of our interest and happiness greatly depend,” James Monroe declared in the Virginia state ratifying convention. His colleague George Mason concurred. Referring to Article II of the Constitution, Mason declared that “[t]here is not a more important article in the Constitution...The great fundamental principle of responsibility in republicanism is here sap[p]led.”¹¹

What was so special about the presidential office?

⁹ Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 275, 279.

¹⁰ [Hamilton], *Federalist 67*, 327.

¹¹ [Virginia State Ratifying Convention] Debates, in *DHRC*, 10: 1371, 1365.

For starters, the institutional power the presidency wielded made it uniquely important for the Constitution's allies as well as its opponents. One thousand twenty-five words comprise Article II, less than half of the 2,268 words the Framers devoted in Article I to describing the powers of the Legislative Branch. Yet the powers the presidency held were potentially enormous. The very first sentence of Article II set the tone for the potentially unlimited authority the lone occupant of the presidential office could claim: "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America"—period. Even if one interpreted that first sentence as a reference to the more specific powers listed in the Constitution, and nothing further (what would come to be the interpretation of Jeffersonian Republicans)—and not a blanket grant of executive power that applied to everything except what the document specifically excluded (Hamiltonian Federalists' preferred interpretation)—one was still left with a presidential office that represented broad-ranging political power vested in a single individual.

Because the presidency vested such considerable power in the fewest possible hands, it was of interest to federalists and anti-federalists because it embodied the Constitution's overall purpose of concentrated national government removed from direct popular influence. It not only possessed the power to direct national government power through its role as the executor of the laws, it also *embodied* the national government's capacity to act swiftly and decisively to channel competing interests toward—or override them in favor of—an overarching, national interest. Vested with the power to act, the presidency possessed a fundamentally different role in national government than the

deliberative functions of the legislature, and even the judiciary.¹² That role, and the authority the presidency possessed to fulfill it, was broad, and might well dominate the national political landscape—portending a future government more prone to act against the people than to deliberate on behalf of their diverse interests. Whether one saw this as the Constitution’s signal achievement, or its most egregious flaw, determined where one stood in the public ratification debate.

What so disturbed anti-federalists about the presidency was the range of powers it possessed. By the stroke of the president's pen, legislative measures either became federal law or died, most likely permanently (for how likely was it that two-thirds of *both* houses of Congress would be able to unite to override his veto?). As Commander-in-Chief, he directed the standing army, regardless of whether Congress declared war. His treaty-making authority made him the primary determinant of the nation's foreign policy, and his appointment power gave him authority to determine the personnel responsible for carrying out the laws at all levels of the federal bureaucracy. For anti-federalists, these powers acted like tentacles, extending outward from the president and grasping every conceivable corner of authority within a government that already stood supreme over the states. Simply put, there was no branch, no body, no function of the federal government described in the Constitution whose authority the presidency did not share. The presidency’s powers knew no bounds, “Cato” argued in the *New York Journal*. They consisted of all but absolute “controul over the army, militia, and navy—the unrestrained

¹² Daniel Walker Howe has examined how federalists compared the separate branches of government to the separate dimensions of an individual’s intellect: the Executive the nation’s “will,” the Congress was the nation’s “understanding,” and the judiciary its “conscience.” See Daniel Walker Howe, “The Political Psychology of *The Federalist*,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series, Vol. 8, No. 3 (July, 1987), 485-509.

power of granting pardons for treason,” and a disturbingly long “duration in office.”

“[T]hese and various other principles evidently prove the truth of the position—that if the president is possessed of ambition, he has power and time sufficient to ruin his country.”¹³

“An Old Whig” agreed. The President acted as “the fountain of all honors in the United States, commander in chief of the army, navy and militia, with the power of making treaties and of granting pardons, and to be vested with an authority to put a negative upon all laws...” “An Old Whig” challenged readers “to look into the constitution of that country, and then tell me what important prerogative the King of Great-Britain is entitled to, which does not also belong to the President during his continuance in office.” True, the President did not possess the power to “create nobility” as the British king did, “but our President will have the power of making all the *great men*, which comes to the same thing.”¹⁴

For anti-federalists, the presidency perfectly encapsulated the Constitution’s essence as a plan of arbitrary, limitless, and expansive government power, “a compound of *monarchy* and *aristocracy*” packaged as a necessary foundation for a secure and lasting American republic.¹⁵ In the breadth of its power, and the singularity of that power’s concentration, the presidency both embodied, and would surely direct, the Constitution’s consolidated government authority designed to surpass the power of the ostensibly sovereign people.

¹³ “Cato,” Letter No. 4, *New York Journal*, October 25, 1787, in *DHRC* 14: 8-9.

¹⁴ “An Old Whig,” Letter No. 5, *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, November 1, 1787, in *DHRC* 13: 541-42.

¹⁵ “Philadelphiensis,” Letter 9, *Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal* February 6, 1788, in *DHRC* 16: 58.

Two and a quarter centuries removed from the heat of the ratification debate, we often forget that the battle over the Constitution was a game of competitive prediction, a guessing game, the outcome of which was far from certain. That, anti-federalists insisted, was precisely the point. Federalists were asking the American people to trust vast amounts of power to a national government and offering little more than promise that their trust would not be betrayed. In response, anti-federalists predicted that the result would be a despotic government that was destined to “produce a Monarchy, or a corrupt and oppressive Aristocracy,”¹⁶ and the major point of anti-federalist disagreement was over who would ultimately control the power of the presidential office. Would it be the president himself, as a king-like single executive who ruled over the people and dominated a cowed Senate, or whether it would be the Senate, who would make the incumbent a “tool” and the office into as a vessel through which the aristocratic “upper house” ruled supreme?¹⁷

The answer one gave was not as important as the point of the comparison itself. Regardless of who ultimately controlled the presidency—the incumbent or the Senate—the people would ultimately lose. Their liberties would be trampled underfoot by the unstoppable imposition of national government power, epitomized and facilitated by the

¹⁶ George Mason, “Objections to the Constitution of Government Formed by the Convention,” October 7, 1787, in *DHRC* 13: 350.

¹⁷ For predictions that the president would dominate the Senate, see “An Old Whig V,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, November 1, 1787 in *DHRC* 13: 541-43; “The Impartial Examiner,” *Virginia Independent Chronicle* June 11, 1788 in *DHRC* 10: 1611-12; “Cato IV,” *New York Journal*, November 8, 1787, in *DHRC* 14: 7-11; and Patrick Henry, June 5, 1788 in Murray Dry and Herbert Storing, eds., *The Anti-Federalist: Writings by the Opponents of the Constitution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 308. For predictions that the president would be a “tool of the Senate,” see John Smilie, PA State Const. Convention, in *DHRC* 2: 508; John De Witt, No. 3, “To the Free Citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” *American Herald*, November 5, 1787, in *DHRC* 4: 194-99; “Centinel I” (Samuel Bryan) *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer* (October 5, 1787), in *DHRC* 13: 335.

President of the United States. They would find themselves on the outside of government power looking in, and the House (the most democratic body in the national government) would be powerless to stop it, or worse, rendered an “Assistant Aristocratical Branch,” as one anti-federalist dubbed it, complicit with the executive in the people’s subjugation.¹⁸

Monarchy, aristocracy, well-born, great men: these terms were so ubiquitous in anti-federalist literature they drew federalist derision. Federalists mocked what they considered to be anti-federalists’ inability (or unwillingness) to acknowledge the presidency as anything other than a king in embryo, and thus unable to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate authority. True, no one could see the future, but everyone could see a Continental Congress powerless to enforce contracts, raise funds, or ensure an ordered, secure society, federalists claimed. Anti-federalists had made the presidency exemplary of the proposed government’s anti-republican essence, but their zealous opposition had clouded their ability to appreciate the necessity of powerful national authority removed from the people’s direct control. In misinterpreting the presidency, federalists argued, anti-federalists had revealed how fundamentally they had misinterpreted the point of the Convention, and the necessity of its product. “Can a government exist without a strong executive power?” “Americus” demanded in his first letter. “Can the national character be preserved without the punctual performance of our contracts? Can the union exist without an adequate foederal head?”¹⁹ In their wisdom, the framers of the proposed federal system recognized that the government's power, even power shared across multiple branches, “must center in some head,” an anonymous

¹⁸ John DeWitt, No. 3, in *DHRC* 4: 198.

¹⁹ “Americus I,” *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, Dec. 5, 1787, in *DHRC* 8: 204

writer for the *Massachusetts Gazette* observed, “or the grand American fabrick of liberty, which has cost us so much blood and treasure, [will] tumble to pieces, to the eternal disgrace of this new and free world.”²⁰

That the president—the agent of government action, responsible for the execution of national laws—did not represent the interests of the populace, federalists insisted, exemplified the framers’ signal achievement in melding republican ideals with the necessity of a workable, efficient government system. The president was still subject to the natural advantages legislative assemblies possessed in republican governments: his veto could be overridden, his military command could be denied funding by a Congress that controlled the nation’s finances, and his appointments were subject to Senatorial approval. His power was limited to providing “energy” and strength in service of national interests. Through the presidency, national authority could provide all the benefits of un-republican governments while avoiding their pitfalls. Subject to the people’s oversight through their representatives in Congress, the president was nonetheless freed from the provincial interests that would invariably dominate the Legislative Branch, as it had the Continental Congress. Thus, the President would be “THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE,” as James Wilson declared, but not in the sense that he would be expected to serve the multiplicity of their narrowly-construed desires. Rather, “being elected by the different parts of the United States, he will consider himself as not particularly interested in any one of them, but will watch over the whole with paternal care and affection.”²¹

²⁰ *Massachusetts Gazette* January 11, 1788, in Sheehan and McDowell, eds., *Friends of the Constitution*, 31.

²¹ “Convention Debates,” in *DHRC* 2: 452.

Of all the defenses of the Constitution, and of the presidency more specifically, produced by federalists, none have proven more influential than *The Federalist*, the series of eighty-five essays written at a frenetic pace during the ratification debate and published to convince New York readers to ratify. Publius, the pen name shared by the series' three co-authors Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, devoted more essays to the presidency (eleven) than to the House (ten), the Senate (five), or the Judiciary (six). These eleven essays, *Federalist 67-77*, all penned by Hamilton, remain the most extensive and detailed exploration of the subject in the entire public ratification debate.

Hamilton's Publius essays also serve as a fitting microcosm of federalist commentary on the presidency throughout the public ratification debate. Limited in their circulation mainly to New York, the *Federalist* essays did not initially have the national public audience that many scholars have assumed. Historians of politics and print culture have pointed this out, usually as a plea for greater historical contextualization of the revered *Federalist* papers.²² But like the presidential office, the essays' lack of ubiquity in the national public debate belies their value in reminding scholars what the debate was really all about.

²² See, for example, Elaine F. Crane, "Publius in the Provinces: Where was *The Federalist* Reprinted Outside of New York City?" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series, Vol. 21, No. 4 (October, 1964), 589-92; Robert A. Rutland, "The First Great Newspaper Debate: The Constitutional Crisis of 1787-88," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 97, Pt. 1 (1987), 53; James Ducayet, "Publius and Federalism: On the Use and Abuse of *The Federalist* in Constitutional Interpretation," *New York University Law Review* Vol. 68 (October, 1993), 821-69; Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Vintage, 2003); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Era of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 105-160; and, most recently, Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-88* (New York: 2010), 83-85.

Like his federalist allies, Hamilton's eleven essays reversed the anti-federalists' formulation of presidential power and depicted it as the element that distinguished the Constitution from the doomed "purely republican" governmental structure anti-federalists appeared to prefer. It was precisely the presidency's singularity, its term in office, its power, and its independence from legislative control that made the office the crucial provider of "energy" that ensured "safety in the republican sense." The presidency was not the office anti-federalists had criticized the most. Rather, it was the office anti-federalists had most egregiously misunderstood. In misunderstanding the presidency, Publius and his federalist allies chorused, anti-federalists had fundamentally misunderstood the importance of the Constitution's anti-republican power in preserving the nation's nascent experiment in liberty.

Conclusion

If we judge simply by the frequency with which federalists and anti-federalists discussed Congress, we might be led to conclude that the Constitution was, at its foundation, a plan of republican government. We might be led to conclude that the presidency, the least republican office in the national government, mattered little to the discussion. We might forget (as we often do) that the central issue of the ratification debate for federalists and anti-federalists alike was not popular representation but the creation of a national government with enough power to override the people's interests—power that everyone involved in the debate at the time knew would be felt by every man, woman, and child in the nation, but which would be controlled by a select few. The most

conspicuous symbol of this most essential concern was not Congress but the presidency. An office designated for a single person, who would be vested with all “executive power,” as Article II declared, the presidency embodied the concentration of expansive, imposing national government authority that could be deployed against the people at potentially any moment.

The exchanges over the presidency during the public ratification debate suggest to us that the debate over the Constitution 225 years ago marked the beginning of an uneasy tension between the nation’s revolutionary ideals and the new reality of national government power; a tension that remains at the heart of national political culture in the United States to this very day. Thus, it offers evidence that our endeavor here at this conference is not an irrelevant exercise, but is vital to a deeper understanding of the problems of our contemporary political landscape.

It also suggests that a key to this deeper understanding of American politics is the office that was the least republican—and thus, for many scholars, the least “American”—in the national government. The presidency was a constant reminder of the concentrated, coercive purpose of the general government. Would the anti-republican authority of the new national government keep closed the second door to the “temple of tyranny” the Articles of Confederation had left ajar? Or would it usher in a new era of top-down despotism and the end of republican liberty? Despite their different answers, federalists and anti-federalists saw in the presidency a foundational truth they both agreed on: ratifying the Constitution would make power, not liberty, America’s core political value.