

Creating the Constitution

Primary Source

James Madison's Speech Proposing the Bill of Rights

After the Constitution was ratified, many Antifederalists insisted that a bill of rights be added. Amending the Constitution became the focus of the new Congress in 1789. James Madison was a Federalist who supported a strong federal government but recognized that the nation's success depended on unanimous approval of the Constitution. The following two excerpts are from James Madison's 1789 speech explaining the purpose of the Bill of Rights.

Directions: Read the excerpts below. Then answer the questions that follow.

There have been objections of various kinds made against the Constitution: Some were leveled [made] against its structure, because the President was without a council; because the Senate, which is a legislative body, had judicial powers in trials on impeachments; . . . because it grants more power than is supposed to be necessary for every good purpose; and controls the ordinary powers of the state governments. I know some respectable characters who opposed this government on these grounds; but I believe that the great mass of the people who opposed it, disliked it because it did not contain [a sufficient clause] against encroachments [violations] on particular [individual] rights . . .

. . . I do conceive that the Constitution may be amended; that is to say, if all power is subject to abuse, that then it is possible the abuse of the powers of the general government may be guarded against in a more secure manner than is now done . . .

1. What did the people object to about the President? the Senate? the power of the government?

2. What was the objection of the majority of people?

3. What would amending the Constitution guard against?

4. **Apply Information** Since Madison already supported the Constitution, how does this speech represent the Federalists' willingness to compromise?
