

History 101

James Madison

James Madison, Jr. (March 16, 1751 – June 28, 1836) was the fourth President (1809–1817) and is regarded as the “Father of the Constitution” and the author of the United States Bill of Rights. He has been called the chief architect of the most important political experiment in human history.

His most significant contributions to United States history came before his presidency. The United States Constitution is the world’s oldest written constitution, and is considered to be the most important document ever written in the history of freedom. The Constitution has been a model for other constitutions around the world ever since, and many of them read remarkably like America’s Constitution.

Madison wrote over a third of the *Federalist Papers*, which was a series of 85 newspaper articles, which explained to the public how the proposed Constitution would work. Thomas Jefferson referred to the *Federalist Papers* as “the best commentary on the principles of government, which ever was written”. They are still the primary source today for jurists and legal scholars interested in the original understanding of the Constitution. He served in the first Congress under the new Constitution, and was considered to be the expert on the Constitution. George Washington frequently sought out Madison’s advice on the Constitution and matters of precedent.

As Jefferson’s Secretary of State (1801–1809), Madison supervised the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the nation’s size. As president, after the failure of diplomatic protests and an embargo, he led the nation into the War of 1812, in response to England’s impressment of American seamen. Despite going up against a superpower of the day (England), and being a young nation without much of a military, America did better than might have been expected. England had been treating America as if it were still a colony. After successfully standing up to England, in this war, celebrations resounded throughout America. Americans felt that their nationhood and honor had been vindicated, and a new era of growth, trade and prosperity began.

Madison's most distinctive belief was the principle of divided power. Power must be divided, both between federal and state governments (federalism), and within the federal government (checks and balances) to protect individual rights from the tyranny of the majority.

He drafted the first ten amendments to the Constitution and thus is known as the "Father of the Bill of Rights". Madison worked closely with Washington to organize the new federal government. He and Jefferson organized what they called the Republican Party (later called by historians the Democratic-Republican Party) in opposition to key policies of the Federalists, especially the national bank and the Jay Treaty. He co-authored the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions in 1798 to protest the Alien and Sedition Acts. He died at Montpelier on June 28, the last of the Founding Fathers to die. He is buried in the Madison Family Cemetery at Montpelier. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison]

