

Name:

Per:

Date:

### US CONSTITUTION: VIEWPOINTS

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of September 17 1787, and then men who had been working all day in the State House packed up their belongings and adjourned to the City Tavern to relax and discuss the events of the day before heading home. On this day they had finished the job they had been sent to do: write a new constitution for their country. Now their task would be to convince their country that this new constitution was right for America. It was not at all certain they would be able to do so.

Some 75 delegates had been selected from 12 states the previous spring to journey to Philadelphia for what came to be known as the Constitutional Convention. (Rhode Island refused to send a delegation.) Of those selected, 55 actually made the journey. At least one delegate declined to go for political reasons. Patrick Henry explained he chose not to attend because "I smelt a Rat." As it turned out, Henry and others who suspected the motives of the Convention were justified in their suspicions, for the delegates, once assembled, went beyond their mandate: They were directed to "devise & discuss" alterations to the Articles of Confederation; what they did instead was to propose a completely different form of government.

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Below, you will find arguments that both support & oppose the proposed Constitution.

Which of the criticisms of the opponents seem valid? Which arguments of the supporters seem particularly convincing?

*As you read - highlight & make notes. Determine whether the statement is from someone who supported or opposed the Constitution. Then determine whether their point seems valid (why or why not?).*

#### Source 1

**It cannot be denied, with truth, that this new Constitution is, in its first principles, highly and dangerously oligarchic; and it is a point agreed, that a government of the few is, of all governments, the worst.**

**-Richard Henry Lee, Oct 16, 1787**

#### Source 2

**My decided opinion on the matter is, that there is no alternative between the adoption of it and anarchy... All the opposition to it that I have yet seen is addressed more to the passions than to reason. General government is now suspended by a thread; I might go further, and say it is really at an end...**

**I saw the imperfections of the constitution I aided in the birth of, before it was handed to the public; but I am fully persuaded it is the best that can be obtained at this time, that it is free from the imperfections with which it is changed, and that it or disunion is before us to choose from. If the first is our election, when the defects of it are experienced, a constitutional door is opened for amendments and may be adopted in a peaceable manner, without tumult or disorder.**

**-George Washington, Dec 14, 1787**

**Source 3**

The public mind cannot be occupied about the nobler object than the proposed plan of government. It appears to be admirably calculated to cement all America in affection and interest as one great nation. A result of compromise cannot perfectly coincide with every one's ideas of perfection; but, as all the great principles necessary to order, liberty, and safety are respected in it, and provision is made for amendments as they found necessary, I hope to hear of its adoption by all the states.  
-John Adams, Dec 1787

**Source 4**

It is ascertained, by history, that there never was a government over a very extensive country without destroying the liberties of the people: history also, supported by the opinions of the best writers, shows us that monarchy may suit a large territory, and despotic governments ever so extensive a country, but that popular governments can only exist in small territories. Is there a single example, on the face of the earth, to support a contrary opinion? Where is there one exception to this general rule? Was there ever an instance of a general national government extending over so extensive a country, abounding in such a variety of climates, &c., where the people retained their liberty? I solemnly declare that no man is a greater friend to a firm union of the American states than I am... But my principal objection is, that the Confederation is converted into one general consolidated government, which, from my best judgment of it, is one of the worst curses that can possibly befall a nation.  
-George Mason, June 4, 1788

**Source 5**

What was the situation of this country before the meeting of the federal Convention? Our general government was totally inadequate to the purpose of its institution; our commerce decayed; our finances deranged; public and private credit destroyed: these and many other national evils rendered necessary the meeting of that Convention... The federal Convention devised the... remedy to remove our political diseases.  
-Edmund Pendleton, June 5, 1788

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Again, having read the documents...

Present the arguments for and against the Constitution proposed by the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. Which of the criticisms of the opponents seem valid? Which arguments of the supporters seem particularly convincing?

Write your response on a separate sheet of paper. Be sure to address all components of the question and reference the documents. When referencing, please use the person's name (not the Source #). For example, "As stated by George Washington,..." Response should be at least 7-8 sentences.