“…and all the people cheered, each man pledged his life, his fortunes and his all to support the new Constitution …”

Video Transcript

One of the most consistent misconceptions people have about our Constitution concerns its ratification. More accurately, most people are shocked when they discover how much opposition there was to the new Constitution and the names of those leading the opposition.

Most Americans, if asked how the new constitution was received, have a vague notion that "all the people cheered, each man pledged his life, his fortunes and his all to support the new Constitution”. In other words, they romanticize George Washington, our constitution, and its acceptance.

The story might go something like:

George Washington, and his horse, after winning the Revolutionary War almost singlehandedly (usually by sailing with his horse through icebergs in a small wooden row boat), sat down one afternoon. After thinking for a few moments, George got on his horse and road down the street and struck the Liberty Bell with his sword. Immediately the Constitution appeared, fully written in its entirety. George – and his horse – then presented it to the people. The people all raised their hands and cheered, and the United States was born.

George – and his horse – then rode to a spot and declared, ‘Here I shall be President’ and George (not the horse) struck the ground with his sword
and the Capitol Building sprang from the ground and George – with his horse – was sworn in as our first President.

Does that sound about right? Well, that might not be everybody's exact story, but there is a general belief that once the war was won and the Constitution was written, everyone cheered and embraced the new government.

The reality was very different. After the Convention it was an uphill battle to have the “1787 New and Improved Model of Government” accepted and ratified by the people. There were important and influential Americans who opposed this new government and they did so for very valid reasons – men like Patrick Henry, George Mason, Samuel Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Those pushing for ratification were called the “Federalists”. Those opposing the ratification were, in a creative way, called “Anti-Federalists”. Both sides had a list of “Founding Fathers' Who’s Who” on their team, and both had sound logical and valid arguments, arguments you will uncover in this lesson.

In the end, George – and his horse – do become our first President. But the story itself is much more complicated – and more important – than that act because the philosophical arguments of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists have framed our political disagreements ever since.

About this transcript:

• Transcript Title: “… and all the people cheered, each man pledged his life, his fortunes and his all to support the new Constitution …”

• Corresponding Lesson: Ratification and Competing Interests – Federalists and Anti-Federalists

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