

Capstone

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James Madison

James Madison was a very important man in history. Nicknamed “the father of the constitution”, there were many people who had their own opinions about him and his work. Among all of the people, three were closest to James Madison: his wife Dolley, his friend Thomas Jefferson, and his butler Paul Jennings. This paper will explore the relationships, feelings, and opinions of the people who were closest to James Madison.

James Madison was born on March 16, 1751. He was named for his father and was the oldest of seven siblings. As a teenager, Madison went to the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton) in 1769. He graduated in 1771, completing a four-year course of study in only thirty months. After college he did not know what he wanted to do with his life, but took time to rest and study law (although he never became a lawyer) (Rakove 1). At age 25, James Madison took office as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention. Madison was a member of the Council of State in 1779, when Thomas Jefferson was serving as the governor of Virginia. The two men became friends during this time. At 29, he took a seat on the Continental Congress. When he turned 36 he returned to Congress, working on the federal Constitutional Convention. In 1787, Madison began drafting “Vices of the Political System of the United States”. Some of this writing led him to co-authoring *The Federalist*, a collection of 85 articles and essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay promoting the ratification of the United States Constitution. It was a work in progress but it led to the working agenda for the Constitutional Convention.

Madison looked at not just what the problems were but why they were the way they were – the causes around a problem. Madison criticized the Articles of Confederation because they did not give Congress the authority to carry out its duties (Rakove 2). In Madison’s conclusions he states that the people cannot rule fairly. Madison’s biggest fear was that the people will enact laws that were harmful to the individuals and minorities (Madison). Madison created a way called vetoing for the government to play defense, which is a way of saying “No” to changes.

Item 7 of his “Vices” paper created a clean cut identity of congress as an authoritative entity in government. Item 7 also defended his view of state rule as well. A federal constitution ratified by only the state legislators and not the people could be regarded as legally superior to ordinary acts of state legislation (Madison).

Madison promoted completely eradicating the articles of confederation. He said that national government’s decisions will take the form of law and will be enacted, executed, and adjudicated by independent federal authorities known as the branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. The government will be replaced by two chambers (Madison).

James Madison brought his ideas to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, and although not all of his ideas were adopted, he did have a tremendous influence on the Constitution, thus earning him the nickname of “the Father of the Constitution.”

Dolley Madison

Dolley Madison was a widow when she met and married James Madison in 1794. The two were proof that opposites attract. Dolley Madison had many suitors, but she chose James Madison, a serious, older man, to be her husband (Historynet.com 3).

Dolley stood by her husband and found a fun way to unify the political parties. By hosting big parties and get-togethers she provided a place for opposing viewpoints to be shared and discussed calmly (Historynet.com 3-4). Dolley helped edit Madison's papers and notes on the Constitution. After James Madison's death Dolley looked for an editor for his papers. However, she could not find one that she trusted or one who wanted to publish the papers so she sold them to the local government (Schulman 8). Dolley Madison died in 1849.

Paul Jennings

Paul Jennings' mother, a slave in the Madison household, gave birth to Paul Jennings in 1799. At ten he was selected to be a footman in the White House. Paul may have considered running away during his teenage years to work as a cook on a ship, but ended up staying with the Madisons and eventually got the more prestigious role as James Madison's personal valet. He joined Madison on many of his trips, including the state Constitutional Convention in 1829 (Taylor 3). When Madison was old and sick, Paul Jennings was Madison's main caregiver (Taylor 4).

Jennings wrote a book about his life in the White House in 1863. It was called "A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison." In his writings, Paul Jennings mentioned how

he thought of James Madison as probably the best man that ever lived because he never hit a slave and never allowed an overseer to hit a slave; because of this his slaves served him loyally (Jennings 17). Paul Jennings died in 1874.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson met James Madison in October 1776 when both men were in the Virginia House of Delegates, serving on the committee on religion. That started a fifty-year friendship. Madison admired Thomas Jefferson because of his experience. When Jefferson was inaugurated in 1779 Madison was on the Governor's Council. They shared many common interests – they loved books and were intellectually curious. They had similar outlooks on American government, approaching it as a great experiment in applying the principles of ancient republics. From 1784-1789, when Jefferson served in France as commissioner and US minister, he and Madison exchanged over 100 letters. They discussed mutual friends, science, and politics. They discussed the debates going on at the constitutional convention. After the Convention closed, Madison confided to Jefferson his disappointment that the national government would have no executive veto power over state laws (Montpelier).

During Washington's presidency, Jefferson was Secretary of State and Madison was a leading member of the House of Representatives. A rift gradually developed between Washington, who wanted a strong central government, and Madison and Jefferson, who prized individual liberty. This split led to the development of the Federalist and Republican political parties. When Jefferson became president in 1801, his choice for Secretary of State was James Madison.

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