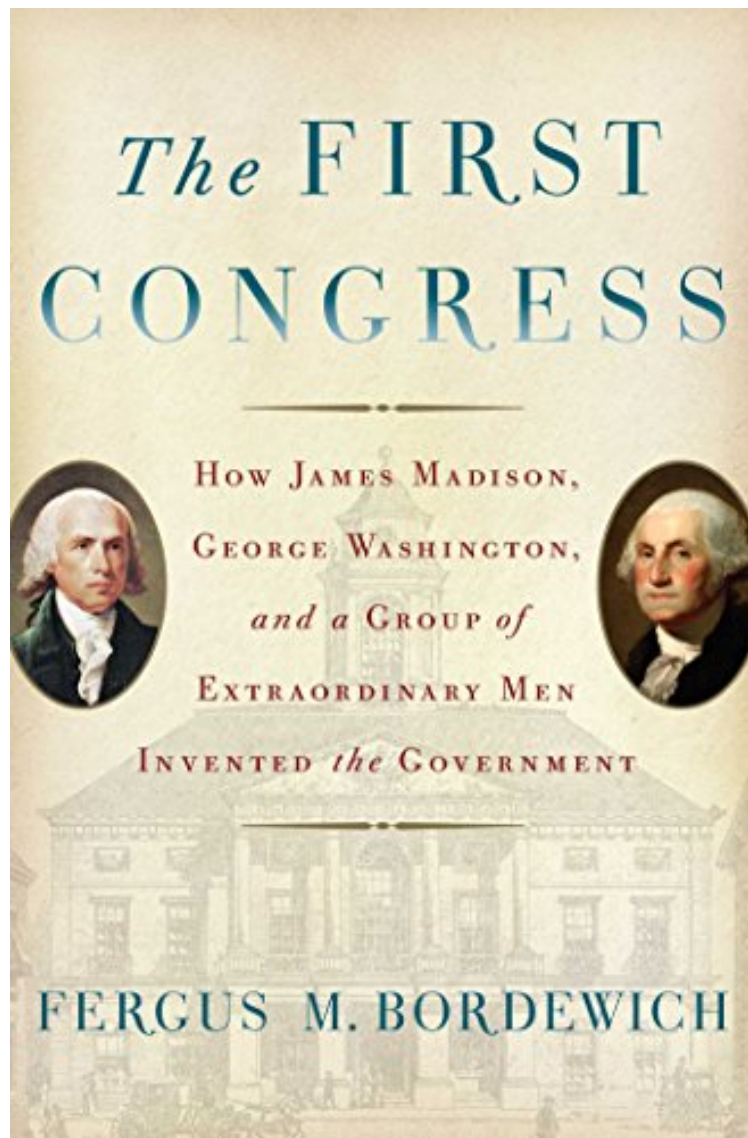


(Free and download) The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government

The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government

Fergus M. Bordewich

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Fergus M. Bordewich : The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. First Rate Story of the First Congress By Wayne A. Smith This is well written history that takes a thrilling story to great heights. Bordewich is that too-rare combination of solid historian and good story teller. His dissection of the First Congress is enjoyable and well told. The first part of the book is the James Madison story, as Madison struggles to give the new government of the United States staying power. The second part of the book is the Alexander Hamilton story, as Hamilton becomes Washington's legislative lodestar and displaces Madison as the Chief Executive's "prime minister" of sorts. Relying on diary excerpts (to a great extent in the telling of the Senate story as that was not an open body in its early years) as well as public records, the author gives a great account of the Bill of Rights and other seminal legislation that grounded our national government and allowed our people to accept and support it. The legislative battles and maneuverings are fascinating and well told. I learned a lot of interesting things (and I read a fair amount of history of the period) and enjoyed the well executed telling of more famous events like the assumption deal that fixed the location of our national capital. Washington's role and the execution of his office as he saw it (the man was very much aware that he was possibly setting precedents that would last for eons) is also explored as it must be in any such history. The change in Madison - from Federalist to what could be described as proto-Jeffersonian over the course of the session is an interesting example of how "great men" still must be politicians if they want to stay on the playing field. The men portrayed are patriots (mostly), some "great" and some hacks who many readers will conclude had no business being there. Thus, they were like any legislative body ever assembled, before or since. A quote by Charles Francis Adams in the book (paraphrasing here) to the effect that to call them gifted and special is to deny their greatness as they were able to forge a great governmental foundation despite the political pressures they faced and vanity and egos and prejudices they possessed.

33 of 33 people found the following review helpful. The Power of Compromise By Ricardo Mior The First Congress of the United States (1789-91) was arguably the most productive of all subsequent Congresses. Like the infant presidency of George Washington, the federal legislators were starting from scratch, creating a new government as they went along. Among their achievements: passage of a federal taxation bill (something the previous Confederation government had failed to do and would lead to its downfall); creation of the federal judiciary system including the Supreme Court; creation of the executive departments of state, treasury, and war; the writing and passage of the Bill of Rights; passage of the Funding and Assumption Bills that made provision for paying the crushing war debt and restored the nations foundering credit; creation of the Bank of the United States, lender of last resort and forerunner of today's Federal Reserve bank; and finding a permanent home for the federal government. It's a startling list of achievements considering opposition inside and outside of Congress, and it did not come without a struggle and compromise. Debates were rancorous, secession was threatened on more than one occasion, the germs of the two-party system were planted, and hanging over all like some deathly pall was slavery, which was debated briefly and shelved for another time. Fergus M. Bordewich covers it all with insight and the slightest bit of cynicism. The story is made rich by its focus on the players, many of whom only get passing mention in other books about this period. They are often quite colorful cerebral Oliver Ellsworth, Roger Sherman, fiery James Jackson, Robert Morris, Elbridge Gerry, Fisher Ames, Elias Boudinot, Aedanus Burke, and dour William Maclay, who kept a journal. The stars of the story are, of course, George Washington, whose very presence made the startup government possible; James Madison, who wrote much of the legislation and guided it through Congress; Alexander Hamilton who, as Secretary of Treasury, wrote the funding and assumption bills that made provision for the debt. He also wrote bank bill and the legal opinion that trumped Madisons and Jeffersons opposing legal opinions and swayed Washington to sign the bill into law. The operative word for the success of the First Congress is compromise. Without a willingness to compromise, very little would have been accomplished. The great motivator behind a willingness to compromise and given only passing mention by the author was fear, fear that the anti-Federalists would hold a second Constitutional convention to dispense with the new Constitution and restore something akin to the Articles of Confederation and this return all power back to the states, and the fear of secession, not just of the slave-holding South, but of New England too. Tensions were rife during the first six months of the new government, and only eased up when George Washington signed the Bill of Rights act, which then went to the states for approval. Thomas Jefferson's role during this time was slight, except for hosting the dinner for Hamilton and Madison that led to compromise: Madison backing away from blockage of the assumption bill, and Hamilton convincing congressmen from the Northeast to back down and let the residence bill pass, which moved the capital to Philadelphia for a ten-year period, and then to its permanent home on the slopes of the Potomac. Bottom line: there was nothing inevitable about the survival and success of the new government. It was never a foregone conclusion. It came about by men hailing from all parts of the country, each with his own agenda, willing to overlook their pride and prejudices and create a workable government. The result of their spirit of compromise was the successful launching of a government that continues to this day. Writing a detailed account of such an active and crucial period in our nation's history is a monumental task, and I salute the author for having done it. However, it's not the last word on this subject. I also very much appreciate *The Presidency of George Washington* by historian Forrest McDonald (McDonald wrote a great deal about this time but his name is not among those listed in the bibliography); the monumental *The Age of Federalism* by Stanley Elkins Eric McKittrick. Another name missing from the bibliography is Joanne B. Freeman and her wonderful book *Affairs of Honor* which likewise delves into the

personalities of this time. That said, I enjoyed Bordewich's polished and informative narrative and recommend his book highly. Five stars. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. James Madison is incredible. By 101Eagle I really enjoyed this book which puts the reader in a front-row seat watching the First U.S. Congress debate such contentious issues as the assumption of debt, slavery, the location of the Capitol and the creation of a national bank. One takeaway I have is a good sense at how incredibly difficult it was for this first Congress to develop a form of government which had never been tried before. The rules which our contemporary Congress follows had not been established and these men were essentially developing how our government functions while trying to execute those functions. Another takeaway is how difficult it was to get any sort of legislation passed. There was as much debate, arguing, cajoling and deal-making that there is today. It's almost amazing that given the size of our Congress, that any bill is passed outside of party lines. I will say that the title of the book left me a little confused because it mentioned that James Madison and George Washington, along with a group of extraordinary men, invented our government. Throughout the book, I was waiting for George Washington to do something on the level that James Madison was doing in the House of Representatives. Maybe George Washington was working behind the scenes because besides a couple of instances where Washington addressed the Congressmen and Senators, he rarely made an appearance in the book. Overall, I really enjoyed reading the book and have a new found appreciation for James Madison who I intend to read on further as well as Alexander Hamilton.

The little known story of perhaps the most productive Congress in US history, the First Federal Congress of 1789-1791. The First Congress was the most important in US history, says prizewinning author and historian Fergus Bordewich, because it established how our government would actually function. Had it failed as many at the time feared it would, it's possible that the United States as we know it would not exist today. The Constitution was a broad set of principles. It was left to the members of the First Congress and President George Washington to create the machinery that would make the government work. Fortunately, James Madison, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and others less well known today, rose to the occasion. During two years of often fierce political struggle, they passed the first ten amendments to the Constitution; they resolved bitter regional rivalries to choose the site of the new national capital; they set in place the procedure for admitting new states to the union; and much more. But the First Congress also confronted some issues that remain to this day: the conflict between states rights and the powers of national government; the proper balance between legislative and executive power; the respective roles of the federal and state judiciaries; and funding the central government. Other issues, such as slavery, would fester for decades before being resolved. The First Congress tells the dramatic story of the two remarkable years when Washington, Madison, and their dedicated colleagues struggled to successfully create our government, an achievement that has lasted to the present day.

Fergus M. Bordewich has transformed the recent multivolume collection of sources on the First Federal Congress into a lively narrative. . . . The First Congress is a perfect example of what a very good writer can do with these raw materials. (Carol Berkin *The New York Times Book Review*) "The First Congress faced its daunting agenda with resourcefulness. . . . [Bordewich] provides clear and often compelling analyses of the problems that required varying doses of compromise and persuasion, and he paints scenes in New York and Philadelphia with colorful illustrations that are enviable examples of the historians' art. . . . Readers will enjoy this book for making an intricate story clear and fascinating." (David S. Heidler *The Washington Post*) Fergus Bordewich paints a compelling portrait of the first, critical steps of the American republic, a perilous time when Congress a body that has proved naturally contentious and short-sighted had to be wise, and it was. The First Congress deftly blends many voices and stories into an elegant and gripping tale of a triumph of self-government. (David O. Stewart, author of *Madison's Gift: Five Partnerships That Built America* and *The Summer of 1787: The Men Who Invented the Constitution*) Bordewich's account is well worth reading and brings to life the First Congress and its members. Gracefully written. . . . Bordewich provides a balanced assessment of the many achievements of the First Congress, while not overlooking its shortcomings. (Mark G. Spencer *The Wall Street Journal*) Finally, a popular and finely paced account of the Congress that could have easily unmade the new American republic. (Allen Guelzo *The Washington Monthly*) The story of how these flawed but brilliant men managed to put the theory of the Constitution into actual practice and create a functioning government is the subject of Fergus M. Bordewich's fascinating *The First Congress*." (Tom Moran *The Chicago Tribune*) "With his highly informative *The First Congress*, historian Fergus M. Bordewich joins the ranks of familiar authors like Joseph Ellis, David McCullough, Fred Kaplan and others, whose biographies and studies of early American history have captivated so many. . . . Bordewich combines fascinating biography with a detailed account of the three sessions of Congress that ran from 1789-1791 and established the institutions and protocols that we follow today." (Tony Lewis *The Providence Journal*) Bordewich's worthy contribution to popular history shows us how a combination of high-minded determination, vote-trading and back-room deals created muscular and enduring institutions that could adapt and thrive for more than 200 years. (Frank Davies *The Miami Herald*) Entertaining. . . . The colorful machinations of our first Congress receive a delightful account that will keep even educated readers turning the pages. (Kirkus *s* (starred

review))Bordewich brings back to life the practical, impatient, and tired politicians who transformed the parchment of the US Constitution into the flesh and blood of a national government. . . . Anyone curious about the origins of today's much-maligned national legislature will marvel at this hair-raising story of stunning political creativity. (Richard A. Baker, US Senate Historian Emeritus and co-author of *The American Senate: An Insiders History*)Fergus Bordewich reminds us, with solid research and sprightly prose, that once upon a time Congress worked and leaders of the new nation understood that true patriotism requires that legislators actually get things done and keep the Government open for business. This book should be required reading for every member of Congress. (Paul Finkelman, Senior Fellow, University of Pennsylvania Program on Democracy, Citizenship, and Constitutionalism)[A] highly readable and sweeping account of the First Federal Congress. (Kenneth R. Bowling, co-editor, First Federal Congress Project; Adjunct Professor of History, George Washington University; and author of *Peter Charles L'Enfant*)Bordewich expertly conveys the excitement of how the first U.S. Congress(1789-91) created a government. . . . This engaging and accessible book sheds new light on the meaning of constitutionality. (Library Journal)Bordewich's noteworthy exploration of the foundation for a working constitutional government provides an important perspective on American history. (Publishers Weekly)About the AuthorFergus M. Bordewich is the author of several books, among them *America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise That Preserved the Union*, which won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in history. His articles have appeared in many magazines and newspapers. He lives in San Francisco. Visit him at FergusBordewich.com.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

The First Congress

CHAPTER 1 An Ocean Always Turbulent

Our Constitution is like a vessel just launched, and lying at the wharf; it is not known how she will answer her helm, or lay her course; whether she will bear in safety the precious freight to be deposited in her hold.

Representative James Jackson of Georgia

Winter in the Potomac River Valley was unpredictable. Sheets of icy rain, sleet, and sometimes snow waterlogged much of the farmland around Alexandria and turned the roads into glutinous muck that played havoc with travelers' schedules. One of those travelers, in late February of 1789, a diminutive figure bundled against the cold, had crossed Virginia from his home near the Blue Ridge Mountains to see a friend who was also the most famous man in America. As he approached George Washington's Mount Vernon, James Madison would first have noticed the long avenue of broad-boughed, winter-bare oaks, and eventually the stately house itself, porticoed and colonnaded on its bluff overlooking the river. Madison was en route to New York City, to take up his duties in the new Congress that was about to come into being. Mount Vernon was out of his way. A more direct route would have taken him across the Potomac at Georgetown, Maryland, and from there directly to Baltimore. But Washington had summoned him, a trusted protégé who they both knew was likely to play a central role in the great debates that were to come. Denied one of Virginia's Senate seats by his political opponents, Madison had just won a hard-fought contest against his friend James Monroe for a seat in the House of Representatives. Enemies of the Constitution, who were both passionate and powerful in Virginia, had warned that the election of Madison would produce rivulets of blood throughout the land. Fortunately such dire predictions did not come to pass. Washington wanted help with his inaugural address, which the president-to-be would deliver in April. He had first entrusted the job to his aide David Humphreys, who had delivered a seventy-three-page behemoth of an oration full of policy proposals that expressed Washington's support for a powerful federal government and an assertive executive. Madison told Washington, in essence, to toss Humphreys' handiwork: it was too long and tried to say too much. Instead, he urged Washington to speak more simply to a fragile nation that was about to embark on a political experiment whose outcome few could see, and many feared. They dismembered and finally discarded Humphreys' prolix draft and boiled down what Washington would say to the nation to essential ideas that every American could support. Drafting any address might have seemed like presumption on Washington's part: he was not yet president. Voting for presidential electors was still taking place in several states; no citizen could cast a vote directly for president and the results could not be officially declared until Congress met. But since he had no opposition, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. The two men could hardly have been more dissimilar. At fifty-seven the aging war hero, a giant by the standards of his time, with his great beak of a nose, broad shoulders, and massive thighs that seemed to have been crafted by the Almighty to fit the back of a horse, was a living demigod. During the war, he had exhibited superhuman stoicism through the years of brutal winters, hunger, battlefield defeat, and civilian disaffection. He was also brave to the point of foolhardiness, repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire; allegedly, at one point during the rout of American troops on Long Island, with a large rock in both hands, he was said to have stormed up to a boat filled with fleeing soldiers and threatened to sink it to hell unless the men went back to the fight. Popular writers commonly called him the nation's deliverer and savior and occasionally even likened him to Jesus Christ. O WASHINGTON! How do I love thy name! declared Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale University, in a widely reprinted sermon. How have I often adored and blessed thy God, for creating and forming thee the great ornament of human kind! Not all the gold of Ophir, nor a world filled with rubies and diamonds, could effect or purchase the sublime and noble feelings of thine heart. Thy fame is of sweeter perfume than Arabian spices in the gardens of Persia. His face, which appeared everywhere on engravings, mezzotints, dinner plates, wall plaques, jugs, and mugs was probably the only one that was known to virtually every American. Although he had publicly professed the most unfeigned reluctance to take on the presidency, Washington was, as one New Englander put it, the only man which

Man, Woman Child, Whig Tory, Feds and Antifeds appear to agree in. Madison, twenty years Washingtons junior, was respected in political circles for his scholarship and persuasive powers, but not much loved. Sickly and slight he stood five feet four and weighed only a hundred pounds and deemed unmanly by many of his contemporaries, it seemed as if all his vigor had been sucked into his copious and muscular mind. The wife of one prominent Virginia politician dismissed him as a gloomy, stiff creature... the most unsociable creature in Existence. The two men had first met in 1781, when Madison was serving in the Continental Congress. Washington immediately recognized the Princeton-educated Madison as a young man of unusual talent. Although his wartime soldiering consisted only of a brief turn in the Virginia militia, his background in government was impressive. He had already served as a member of Virginias revolutionary convention, and then still only in his midtwenties as a political adviser to Governor Patrick Henry, and to Henrys successor, Thomas Jefferson. After the war, as a member of the Virginia Assembly, Madison advocated for Washingtons commercial interests in the Potomac Valley and became one of the former generals closest advisers. Although Madison spoke in a whispery, often-difficult-to-hear voice, and without oratorical flourish, he consistently impressed those who worked with him with his most ingenious mind, and his mastery of parliamentary strategy. He understood, as many of his more emotional colleagues did not, his biographer Richard Brookhiser acutely observed, that losing a vote was not the same as losing the argument, because if you could then write the guidelines for implementing the decision, you could nudge it in a better direction. It was a lesson well learned at the Constitutional Convention, where Madison had unsuccessfully proposed, among other things, that the president be chosen by the legislative branch rather than by a popular vote channeled through an electoral college, that Congress be given the power to override state laws, and that the membership of both houses of Congress be based on population. Madison would carry with him to the First Congress a disdain for Pyrrhic moral victories, and a pragmatic determination to make the imperfect machine of government work. Madison, more than any other man, had convinced the conflicted Washington first to attend the convention, and then to accept its chair. Washington would have preferred to remain at Mount Vernon beneath his vine and fig tree, his favorite euphemism for political disengagement, although he well knew that he could not remain so if the convention were to succeed. Though he shared Madisons anxiety for the country, he feared that he would be accused of selfish ambition if he reentered public life, having so publicly proclaimed his official retirement from it in 1783. Madison, however he was nothing if not persuasive, everyone agreed made the case that no other American had the prestige to win nationwide support for a radical overhaul of the hapless Confederation government. Once committed, Washington was unshakable. Jefferson observed of him, Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose whatever obstacles opposed. As Madison had hoped, Washingtons presence in Philadelphia helped to balance the discontent of those in the convention who felt that it was going too far in reinventing the government. Madisons reputation increased during the long campaign for ratification of the Constitution when, as a coauthor of *The Federalist* (with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay), he had laid out a reasoned case for a powerful central government, arguing that it would not weaken but strengthen personal liberties, and explaining to a doubtful public how its machinery would actually function. He boldly challenged the widely held belief that stable republics could work only in miniature societies, such as Greek city-states or homogeneous American communities. Latent causes of faction that is, individual self-interest he argued, was sown in the nature of man, and because it was inescapable, it had to be accommodated, not denied. This could best be accomplished in an extensive republic whose very diversity would prevent dangerous majorities from riding roughshod over political minorities, where it was less likely that any single party could outnumber and oppress the rest, and that a representative government rather than direct democracy would refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country. Like many political men at the time, Madison believed that the legislature would long remain the most powerful branch of government, and the most likely to suck all power into its impetuous vortex. To restrain the legislatures greed for power, he maintained that all three branches of government had to be made equally vigorous and endowed with the means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others, to prevent an accumulation of legislative power that would inexorably lead to tyranny. Mere parchment barrier that is, well-meaning sentiments with no force to back them up would not be enough. Dividing Congress itself into two branches vested with different powers was just a first step. The greater challenge was empowering the two weaker branches of government the executive and judiciary to resist legislative dictatorship. To this end, the president had been given a veto to protect the independence of the executive branch, while lifetime tenure for members of the Supreme Court would help insulate the judiciary from political interference. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition, he declared, in a famous formulation. What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. As election results for the new Congress trickled in from the states there was no fixed day for elections the results proved vastly more favorable than Washington, Madison, and their fellow supporters of the new Constitution had hoped. Federalists had won overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress. Americans, in Washingtons opinion, had shown good sense, but the future remained fraught with risk. It might not take much to unravel the tentative fabric of a nation that had been rewoven at the Constitutional Convention

less than two years earlier. Some unforeseen mischance, Washington worried, could still blast [our] enjoyment in the very bud. The pressure on Washington was immense, and public expectations so high that he could never fully satisfy them, he knew. The president-to-be had received any number of importunate pleas from men such as John Armstrong Jr., a former member of the Continental Congress, who had begged him to yield your services to the providential voice of God expressed in the voice of your country. (Armstrong may have been one of the less convincing voices, however: In 1783, he had been a central figure in the so-called Newburgh Conspiracy, which toyed with the idea of a military coup against the Congress.) So many conflicting worries tore at Washington, both political and personal: the unrest on the frontier and the financial instability in the states, the resurgence of the Constitution's opponents in Virginia, the planting schedules for his next seasons crops of wheat and rye, the challenge of managing the remote lands he owned in the West, the declining health of his eighty-year-old mother, who was dying of cancer at Fredericksburg. And now he was about to shoulder the unprecedented burdens of the presidency. To his neighbor Samuel Vaughn he confessed, as he doubtless did to Madison, The event which I have long dreaded, I am at last constrained to believe, is now likely to happen. From the moment, when the necessity had become more apparent, as it were inevitable, I anticipated in a heart filled with distress, the ten thousand embarrassments, perplexities troubles to which I must again be exposed in the evening of a life, already near consumed in public cares. What was left of the old Confederation government was scheduled to cease functioning on March 3, and the new Congress to begin on March 4. But continuing wretched weather slowed Madison's northward progress to a crawl. From Baltimore, he wrote Washington the happy news, reported to him by a courier from Georgia, that Federalists had triumphed in that states elections, too: All the Candidates I understand are well affected to the Constitution. But Madison's spirits sank a few days later at Philadelphia, when a traveler from New York told him that only a handful of senators and congressmen had arrived there, and that neither New Jersey nor New York had even completed their elections. (The traveler, a planter whom Madison trusted, also delivered the ominous news that British agents were active in the trans-Appalachian Kentucky district of Virginia, agitating against the American government, a development that Madison knew would have to be dealt with.) Much more worried Madison as well during the long, muddy journey to New York: the countrys chaotic financial state... the angry veterans who everywhere were demanding back pay... the divisive debate raging over the site for a permanent federal capital... the numerous amendments that roiling popular conventions had demanded be made to the Constitution, which might well undo all the work that Madison had done. He also knew that popular hopes for the new government were unrealistically high. The people, wrote one Massachusetts voter, are on tiptoe in their expectation from Congress, we expect more than Angels can do from your Body. From all over the eleven states that had approved the Constitution, newly elected members of Congress were heading, if glacially, toward New York. None of them knew with confidence whether they could rise to the demands of a new, untested government whose machinery they would have to invent as they went along. Leaving my domestick peace and hapiness and plunging into the Ocean of Publick Business, Politicks, and Etiquette is unaccountable even to Myself But the fates will have it so, sighed Senator John Langdon of New Hampshire. Fisher Ames of Boston was so nervous at taking his seat in the House that it seemed like a kind of death. I am about to leave and renounce this world and go to New York and must so far settle my worldly affairs as to be in a degree prepared for my future state (a state of terror and uncertainty to me), he confided to a friend. One of Ames's traveling companions, the much more experienced Elbridge Gerry, hardly knew what to expect either. He had been one of only three members of the Constitutional Convention who refused to sign the final document, and the sneering ridicule he had endured ever since left him depressed and discouraged. You are now launching into the Ocean of Politics, an ocean always turbulent, a supporter gently advised him. I wish your habits Experience may preserve you from Seasickness while the rectitude of your mind may lead you to stem the rolling Billows. New York City, in 1789, occupied only the southern tip of Manhattan Island and still bore the visible ravages of the seven-year British occupation during the Revolutionary War. There was no New Yorker who didn't remember the overcrowding and starvation, the shortages, the streets torn up to build defensive works, the charred swathes of the city leveled by fire, the pathetic tent colonies of refugees, the harsh reprisals against rebels, the winters without firewood when the poor were found dead in their hovels at dawn. Even now, disintegrating forts and redoubts still punctuated the islands rural landscape, while across the East River the bones of American soldiers killed during the 1776 battle for Long Island lay yellowing in plain sight. As recently as June 1787, a visitor returning from several years in France had found the city still in a state of prostration and decay. Now, however, the city was roaring back to life. Everywhere, workmen were flattening hills, filling out the shoreline to create a new waterfront, erecting new houses, cutting new streets, constructing new docks. Business was thriving, trade on the rise, and the harbor a forest of tall-masted sailing ships from around the world. Although New York was the nations second city, with few buildings that rose higher than three stories, for the many members of Congress who hailed from rural areas, it was phantasmagorically cosmopolitan. Its doglegged lanes teemed with Hudson Valley Dutchmen, sailing men from the coast of New England, Jews and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Germans, frontiersmen from the backcountry of western New York, visiting Iroquois tribesmen, free blacks, slaves, and indentured white servants, wholike the enslaved were forbidden to buy or sell, gamble or marry, or travel more than ten miles from their masters home. The city's newspapers were unfettered and combative. At the Merchants Coffee House at Wall and Water Streets, one might

glimpse the politically potent young lawyers Aaron Burr or Alexander Hamilton amid the crowd of speculators, shipowners, importers, and traders in everything from real estate to slaves. In the surrounding business district, between Broadway and the East River docks, you could find whip makers and wigmakers, refiners of spermaceti and vendors of nervous essence for toothache, nurseries selling potted oleander and Arabian jasmine, retailers of tinderboxes, sleigh bells, quills, knee buckles, imported wines and liquors, publishers and printers, dancing masters to teach the latest European steps, and musicians such as the master klokkenist and composer Mr. Van Hagen willing to take on students. Even the city gallows was an astonishment, enshrined within a gaudily painted Chinese-style pagoda, next to the whipping post and stocks. The city's leading physician, the boosterish Samuel Bard, might gush over the city's healthful location, surrounded by luxuriant farmland and blessed with sweetening and salubrious air. But many members of Congress were appalled by the ubiquitous filth. The stink of rotting garbage was pervasive, while laundresses scrubbed the city's linen on the shores of the Collect, a body of water near the present-day courthouses, both state and federal, where tanners dumped their chemicals amid floating effluvia that included dead cats and dogs, and rotting offal. Congressman John Page of Virginia disgustingly observed, The Streets here are badly paved, very dirty narrow as well as crooked, filled up with a Strange Variety of wooden Stone brick Houses full of Hogs mud. And excrement. The poor simply dumped their chamber pots in the gutters, leaving it to rain and battalions of roaming, rooting hogs to deal with it. For the wealthy, sanitation (such as it was) devolved upon slaves: long lines of them could be seen in the dawn light trudging toward the river with tubs of plutocratic night soil on their heads. Unfazed by such noisome realities, the pious Senator Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut found New York reassuringly religion-minded, and well regulated. There were bans against sawing wood on the sidewalk, planting trees south of the Collect except in front of churches, and driving water carts any faster than a walk. Swearing was punishable by a fine of three shillings or imprisonment in the stocks; churches were plentiful and their pews were well filled. And what has added to my pleasure, Ellsworth wrote to his wife, Abigail, has been the great decency appearance of devotion with which divine service is attended. Instead of gazing, whispering laughing, most of the Ladies, many of the Gentlemen kneel at prayers on... benches in their seats with their heads inclined so as to conceal their faces. Ellsworth apparently never noticed the warehouses that jammed the lanes behind the docks just a few minutes stroll from his rooming house. In contrast to the inhabitants of Quakery Philadelphia and straitlaced Boston, New Yorkers prided themselves on their taste for fashion. Women wore spectacular dresses luxuriantly displayed over hoops that were flattened fore and aft and stood out two feet on either side. Hairstyles were architectural confections that rose a foot or more in height and were festooned with lace and flowers. Congressional wives were dazzled by the array of fabrics available in local stores: lawns, chintzes, calicos, palampoops, fustians, dimities, armozeens, taffities, crepes, velvets, bombazeens, osnaburgs, ticklenburgs, shalloons, fernaughts, and dozens of others that were unheard of in the backcountry of New Hampshire or Georgia. Puritanical Yankees were shocked at the bursting bodices of the local women, which they considered intolerably decadent, not to mention the outrageous behavior of the French ambassador, who affected American homespun clothing but lived openly in his embassy with a mistress who was also his sister-in-law. Others were offended by New Yorkers overly refined manners and incessant socializing. The Tyrant Custom particularly annoyed the austere Presbyterian sensibilities of Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania, who sneered at women who accoutered themselves with a bunch of Bosom and bulk of Cotton that never was warranted by any feminine appearance in nature and walked bent forward at the middle as if some disagreeable disorder prevented them from standing erect. Maclay detested not only New York's inhabitants, congestion, dissipation, and outlandish prices, but even Federal Hall, which he derided as a waste of money, the epitome of New York ostentation, and no better than a Great Baby House. (This was a play on words: L'Enfant's name meant child.) With so many windows and doors, and corners and loop holes... all your Honorable Body may play bo-peep, hide and seek, or anything else, for a whole twelve-month in it, without being found out, he wrote anonymously in the Federal Gazette. The majority of arriving legislators, however, were amazed at the hall's harmonious redesign and elegant, up-to-date interiors. The facade included an arcade in the Tuscan style, while inside, the lofty vestibule was flagged with marble and led to an atrium roofed with a glass cupola that bathed the first-floor lobby in light. The octagonal House chamber, where many of the most dramatic debates would take place, was widely regarded as a masterpiece. This fifty-by-seventy-foot representatives apartment, as it was often called, rose two stories and was amply lit by six tall windows, three on each side, and embellished with fluted, Ionic columns arranged throughout the room. The members desks and chairseach covered in blue damask that matched the curtains formed a semicircle. The smaller upstairs Senate chamber forty feet square and fifteen feet high was adorned with graceful pilasters whose capitals had been designed by L'Enfant, and a light blue ceiling from which a sun and thirteen stars radiated over the senators. The oversize chair some meaningfully referred to it as a throne of the presiding officer, the vice president, was elevated three feet above the floor beneath a draped canopy of crimson damask. Only the House chamber provided galleries for spectators, who flocked in great numbers to hear debates that were regarded as great public entertainment; the deliberations of the self-consciously elitist Senate would not be open to the public until 1795. On the evening of March 3, while Madison was still on the miry road from Virginia, the old Confederation was officially fired out by thirteen cannon posted at Fort George, at the foot of Broadway. Crowded one newspaper, The Copartnership of Anarchy and Antifederalism being dissolved by the

death of the concerned, the firm ceases to be. At sunrise the next day, eleven gunsone for each of the states that had approved the Constitution boomed out again across the New York harbor, along with more joyous tolling of bells. The old government has gently fallen asleep, and the new one is waking into activity, optimistically wrote Representative George Thatcher, who was a member of both. Church bells rang and rang, flags waved, crowds cheered in an atmosphere of uninhibited joy. The fourth of March 1789, predicted Pennsylvania senator and merchant prince Robert Morris, will no doubt be hereafter Celebrated as a New Era in the Annals of the World. Morris had crossed the Hudson from New Jersey that morning, just in time to watch the national flag hoisted atop Federal Hall, and to mingle with the rejoicing mobs of citizenry. He had good reason to celebrate. He had done more than most men to bring the new nation into being during the Revolutionary War. As superintendent of finance for the Confederation Congress, he had almost single-handedly saved the revolutionary government from collapse by underwriting its expenses with his personal fortune. As a staunch Federalist he had high hopes for the new government. But he was also a hardheaded businessman and no sentimentalist. That morning on the streets of Manhattan, he saw further than many, if not most, of his euphoric compatriots. No matter how hard Congress struggled to do its duty, he wrote to his wife, Molly, The Publics expectation seems to be so highly wound up that I think disappointment must inevitably follow after a while. But you know well how impossible it is for Public measures to keep pace with the sanguine desires of the interested, the ignorant, and the inconsiderate parts of the Community.