

James madison essay sample



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James Madison was born on March 16, 1751 in Port Conway, Virginia. His parents were both wealthy, his father, James Sr., having been an heir to substantial wealth while his mother, Nelly Conway, belonged to a rich tobacco merchant family. He spent most of his young life in a plantation called Montpelier in Orange County near the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, staying close to his mother because he had been sickly as a child. In fact, his youth was plagued by stress-induced seizures which were very similar to the fits brought about by epilepsy (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

Although sickly, James was a voracious reader and a good student of languages. He was tutored at home first by Donald Robertson who was considered among the influential tutors of the time and later by the Reverend Thomas Martin (Kelly). Before his enrolment at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), he had already mastered the Latin and Greek languages. He finished his course in college after only two years but spent another term at the College of New Jersey in order to study philosophy and the Hebrew language. When he went back home to Montpelier in 1772, he spent his time at home studying law but abandoned the idea because of lack of interest (Miller Center of Public Affairs). Despite the lack of a law degree, however, the 5'4" Madison who weighed less than 100 pounds later became known as the "Father of the [U. S.] Constitution" otherwise known as "the most important legal document in modern history." He was also the last surviving founding father when he died in June 1836 at the age of eighty-five (ConstitutionFacts. com).

In 1774, two years after leaving school, Madison became a member of the "Committee of Safety," a patriot group tasked with supervising the local

militia. That move marked the first step in his life as a public servant. Since then, things moved rather quickly for Madison because not two years later, the American War of Independence which the colonies declared against England was about to begin. Caught in the revolutionary fervor of the time, he actively participated in the debates over the issue of the independence of the colonies from England (Miller Center of Public Affairs). He was elected delegate to the Virginia Convention of 1776 which discussed the move to declare their independence from England. The convention was also tasked with the drafting of a new constitution for the state of Virginia. During that convention, he strengthened the articles on the freedom of religion when he proclaimed the concept of “liberty of conscience for all” (Notable Biographies).

Unfortunately, during the regular election of the new state assembly’s delegates, he was defeated because, unlike his opponent, he refused to distribute free whiskey to the voters. In other words, he lost an election which was characterized by vote-buying. In spite of his defeat, however, he was able to secure an appointment in a powerful government agency in 1778. He became a part of the Virginia Council of State which had the function of directing the affairs of the state during the revolutionary war against England. It was while serving with that committee that his friendship with Thomas Jefferson, who was then the governor of Virginia, blossomed. Their relationship continued until the death of Jefferson in 1826, with Madison serving as his closest friend and adviser (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

When Madison represented Virginia in the Continental Congress of 1780, he was the youngest delegate in that Congress at age twenty-nine. In spite of his young age, however, he proved to be the most conscientious delegate. Before the first year ended, he stood out as one of the most respected leaders of the Congress. From 1780 up to 1783, Madison argued the need for the strengthening of the confederacy of the colonies. He maintained that a strong central government was needed in order to achieve military victory over the English. He also worked with Jefferson in thwarting land-grabbing plans by unscrupulous speculators by convincing the state of Virginia to surrender to the Continental Congress its western territory up to the Mississippi River.

In 1784, when his three-year term at the Continental Congress ended, Madison went back to the House of Delegates of Virginia where he opposed the plans of then Governor Patrick Henry to levy taxes in order to support the Christian religious denominations. Governor Henry believed then that it was necessary for the state to support religion. Madison, who was a strong supporter of religious freedom, battled Henry's plan because it only favored the Christian religious denominations. He also successfully opposed Henry's proposal to subject public officials to religious tests and worked against the proposals advanced by some delegates to consider heresy a criminal act (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

James Madison has been referred to as the “ Father of the Constitution” for several reasons. Foremost among these reasons was his being instrumental in convening the constitutional convention which drafted the constitution of the country in 1787. First, what he did was to persuade John Taylor, who was

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then advocating for the rights of the states, into calling for a meeting of the representatives of the different states ostensibly to discuss problems concerning commerce which existed among the different states. He did this because he was convinced that the Articles of Confederation needed some strengthening if they were to prevent future turmoil and protect the new Republic from possible foreign attacks. Taylor did so by convening an assembly of the representatives of the states in Annapolis, Maryland. Although that particular assembly had been a poorly attended affair, it was nevertheless able to issue a call for a convention for the express purpose of drafting the “ constitution of the Federal Government [which was] adequate to the exigencies of the Union” (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

Madison was at the head of the delegation from Virginia when the representatives of the states gathered in Philadelphia on May 14, 1787. During the first day of the meeting, he supported the clamor to convince General George Washington to accept the job as chairman of the body. With the gathering of the representatives of the different states and a chairman in the person of George Washington, it was deemed that the body had already acquired the “ moral authority it needed to draft a new constitution for the nation.” Hence, the Constitutional Convention for the drafting of the United States Constitution started its work (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

Another reason why he was considered as the “ Father of the Constitution” was his very active role during the proceedings. When the convention started its work in earnest, Madison surfaced as the floor leader of the delegates who were strongly advocating for a “ strong central government.” Four months into its work, it was already evident that Madison was not only

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the most impressive but also the most persuasive delegate who advocated for the adoption of a new constitution. As a matter fact, the so-called “Virginia Plan” which was submitted to the convention for consideration by then Virginia governor Edmund Randolph and which later became the “essential blueprint” of the United States Constitution, was written by James Madison in his own handwriting (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

Although several proposals were submitted to the convention, Madison’s “Virginia Plan” was considered to be the most outstanding. His plan established a federal system where the powers were lodged in a strong central government. As proposed, Madison’s plan would effectively prevent the possible abuse of power by a government whose activities, when went unchecked, could exceed the powers it was granted by the people. Under the plan, government would have three branches, namely: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judiciary branch. The Legislative branch would have two houses, the lower and the upper house. The people would be electing the members of the lower house while the upper house would be composed of members which would be picked by the lower house. Then the function of choosing the executive and the members of an independent judiciary would fall on the upper house. The underlying principle of the Virginia Plan was the separation of powers which Madison considered of primary importance for the survival of the new government. The plan, however, did not contain a Bill of Rights because Madison considered this to be the responsibility of the different states (Glowen).

Although Madison’s plan was the subject of a revision proposal contained under the New Jersey Plan which was submitted by William Patterson, the <https://assignbuster.com/james-madison-essay-sample/>

latter plan, which advocated for a unicameral legislature, was immediately rejected by the assembly in a matter of only four days after which, an impasse occurred. While majority of the delegates were already convinced of the need to replace the Articles of Confederation by a new document, the delegates could not agree on some “ sticky issues.” For instance, the states in the south, although well populated, had a population majority of which were slaves. The delegates from the North, on the other hand, were uneasy with the existence of the southern slave-owning elite who were, at the time, in the process of consolidating their power (Glowen).

Finally, the deadlock was broken when Benjamin Franklin and the committee which he headed came up with a compromise solution. The solution provided for equal representation in the Upper House where each of the state would be granted two seats each. Their representation in the Lower House, on the other hand, would depend on the population of the individual states. For this purpose, the slaves were counted as “ $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person.” The body exhaustively deliberated on this compromise and came up with a final document which looked very much like Madison’s Virginia Plan. Under the final document, the legislature would be bi-cameral. The members of the lower house would select the members of the upper house. It would also have an elected national executive whose election would be decided by an “ Electoral College.” In the election for the national executive, the popular vote would only serve as an indicator of the consensus of the majority of the voting population. The final document also provided for an independent judiciary branch which would be protected from the capricious desires or machinations of the changing administrations (Glowen).

When the final document was ready for the ratification of the states, Madison once again went to work. Together with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, they launched a massive campaign for the ratification of the constitution by publishing a collection of eighty-five essays which were later collectively called the “Federalist Papers.” Madison, using the pseudonym “Publius,” wrote twenty-nine of those essays. As Publius, he justified the need for a strong but centralized form of government which would be subjected to a “system of checks and balances.” He explained that such a system would be necessary because it would effectively counteract the ambition of some officials by the competing ambition of the other members of government. Considered to be one of the most significant among these Federalist papers was Madison’s essay number 51. This specific essay was the earliest “interpretation of the “meaning and intent” of the constitution of the country (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

After he was elected to the House of Representatives, Madison not only helped in the framing and in the introduction of the first ten constitutional amendments known as the Bill of Rights – he also guided them through the legislative process until they were finally passed. The amendments sought to protect the basic human rights to religion, speech, and the right to due process, among others, against “unreasonable, unsupported, or impulsive government authority.” After breaking up with the administration of George Washington over government’s official policy of promoting “commercial and financial interests over agrarian interests,” Madison teamed up with Jefferson, who had already resigned as State Secretary, to establish the

oppositionist Democratic-Republican Party which was also known as the Jeffersonian Party (Miller Center of Public Affairs).

After serving as Jefferson's Secretary of State, Madison was elected 4th President of the United States. He was the president who declared the second war against the British. He occupied the Office of the President for two terms, from March 4, 1809 up to March 3, 1817 (Biographical Directory of the United States Congress).

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