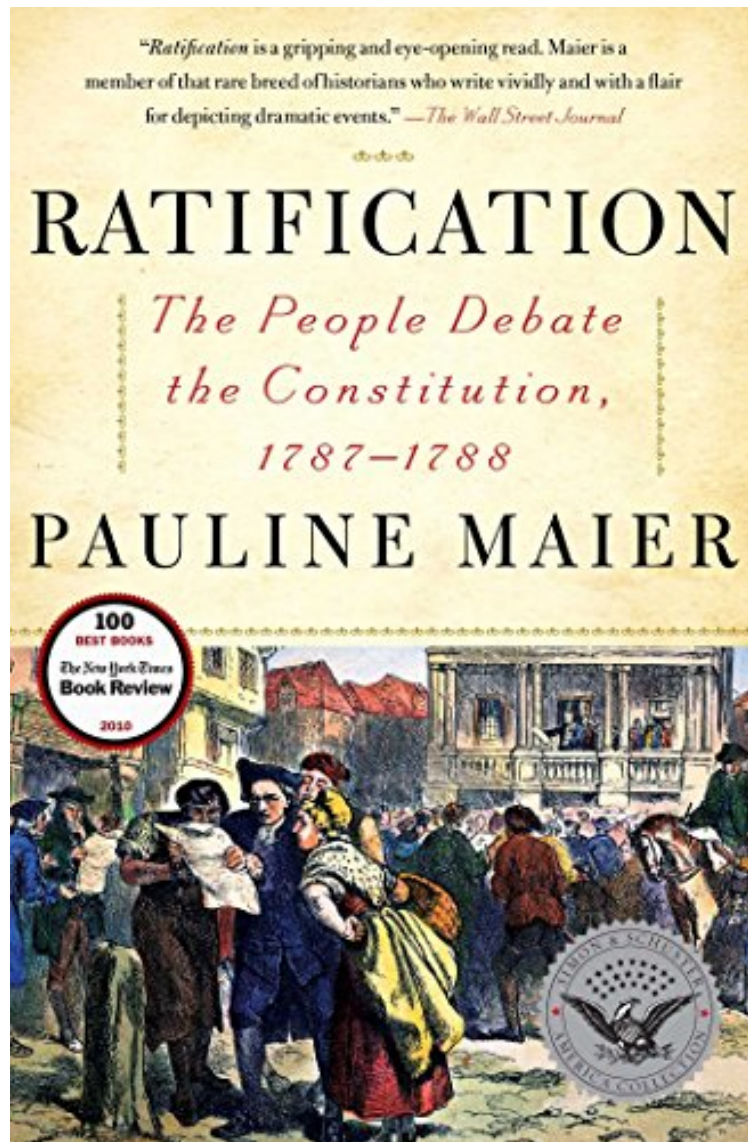


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Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788

Pauline Maier

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Pauline Maier : Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. The story you don't know By John Nordin It's our story, citizens of the United States, but we have converted it into a simplistic myth. Maier shows us the details, the messiness, the fears and fights - and after it is done, we have a more interesting story than when we started. She goes through the battle for

ratification, state by state, giving time to the proponents and opponents alike. This means some degree of repetition of arguments, but that is inevitable. What is fascinating with this and most good history is to try to get inside the minds of people and see how differently they saw things. What they worried about was much different than our issues. Here are some of the things that emerge from her narrative: - there was significant opposition to the constitution and its passage was by very close margins in some states. Rhode Island didn't come in until after Washington was installed as president and only in response to a threatened economic embargo if they didn't ratify. Some in a few states thought staying out of the union and going it alone would be just fine. - the proponents of the constitution were active in manipulating press coverage to create a favorable climate for the debate - the Federalist Papers had little impact on the debate outside of New York - reasons to oppose the constitution revolved around the federal government's taxing power, the insufficiency of the number of representatives in the House, the excessive length of terms for national office holders, and the power of Congress to control aspects of how states managed elections. The absence of an executive council to advise the President was also a concern to some. - proponents clearly intended to set up a strong federal government with sufficient power to operate independently and to secure the reputation of the U.S. in the world. - George Washington took almost no part in the ratification debates - Patrick Henry was one of the most forceful opponents of ratification - opponents were fearful the constitution set up a tyranny that might well abolish the state governments - we've all heard that agreeing to a bill of rights was the price of adoption, but few used the term, and the amendments proposed by state conventions bore little resemblance to the ten we now know as the Bill of Rights

85 of 89 people found the following review helpful. THE Great Debate - Then and Now By Applewood I am only in the fourth chapter of this book (just as the public debate is heating up) but want to write this review, because 1) I can see the general form and substance of it so far, and (more importantly) 2) I get the feeling neither of the previous two reviewers have fully read it. (I say this because it is a long dense book but it was reviewed within a few days of publication, with neither review going into any details of the substance of the debates, nor how Maier distinctively presents them.) I'll keep this short and simple for now and add an update when I finally finish. What is so attractive about this book is how it purports to reveal a previously partially told story, one which we think is already complete and resolved, but is in fact still being debated today. Using extensive (all available) original sources, Maier turns her authoritative scholastic skills to perhaps the most important subject in our nation's history - the drafting and ratifying of our Constitution. For too long this has been an issue dominated by the (winning) Federalist protagonists - with scant or dismissive attention given to the (by implication disloyal, antagonist) "Antifederalists" (obviously not the name they chose for themselves), who ironically often took pseudonyms incorporating the name "federal", and were actually more federalist in really caring about a strong federation of states than the self-claimed "Federalists" were. The (centralizing) Federalist were unified mainly in wanting ratification to be a swift all or nothing proposal. The (decentralized) Antifederalist were anything but unified, which is why they lost. One of the things I like about Maier's approach is that she doesn't obviously and overtly set up this dichotomy of ideologies and characters - as they (ideas and people) were apparently more complex and evolving in regard to this. It does become clear however that from the very beginning there were real and strong difference in people's vision for the new country. There was also an imminent need to 'make it work'. What resulted was a profoundly idealistic but practical and, yet also secretive, partisan and elitist, document pushed through without much faith or interest in the democratic process... This is fascinating stuff! And it is perhaps even more important today as we look to move forward on a sound basis (needing to shore up our foundations), debating the same old issue of balance of powers between the government and the governed (expressed not just in the lopsided and formal arrangement of the separation of powers in the 'Three Branches of Government' - Legislative, Executive, and Judicial, but between the various States and the unified "Federal" government, and even more profoundly and directly between citizens and their elected appointed officials and the hired bureaucrats (the 'hidden iceberg' part of the government) - how we actually express our individuality and exercise our power to check the collective realm by how we freely choose - think, speak, vote, rule on juries, shop and invest.) Maier's writing style is dense and comprehensive, seeming authoritative to me (a nonacademic armchair historian), informed, thorough and balanced, yet also reading almost like a novel - a densely detailed, passionate and convoluted Russian novel.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Detailed examination of the process by which the American Constitution was ratified By Steven Peterson Over time, I have had a real interest in the founding period of the United States. The battle over ratification is one of those points in which I am especially interested (I have even done some professional research on the subject, to the extent that that has any relevance). This book, though, delves nicely into the ratification struggle after the Constitutional Convention concluded its business in 1787. The author begins by placing the work in context (Page xi): ". . . the ratification process was the first national election, although it was more like a series of primaries than a presidential election since the votes were cast not on a single day but successively, in one state after another." Indeed, Rhode Island did not accept the Constitution until it was already in effect! Then Constitutional Convention created a draft document. However, it would not become the "law of the land" until it was approved by state ratifying conventions. The heart of this book is exploring how the states actually discussed and voted on the Constitution. It was not a foregone conclusion that the document would be accepted. As the book notes, even George Washington was nervous that the Constitution would fail to get the requisite

number of states approving it. The book is well detailed, discussing the events in the various states' ratification conventions. The process was highly political. Some of the contests in states were bruising; others were easy triumphs for those supporting the Constitution. One of the real contributions of this book is showing the differing dynamics across the American states at that time. These were not Greek philosophers involved; they were practicing politicians and, in many cases, they played hardball. For example, in some states, supporters of the Constitution controlled newspapers. Guess what? Arguments against the Constitution never appeared. At any rate, this is a fine historical work that fills a need in the larger literature on the Constitution's origins.

CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title Winner of the George Washington Book Prize When the delegates left the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in September 1787, the new Constitution they had written was no more than a proposal. Elected conventions in at least nine of the thirteen states would have to ratify it before it could take effect. There was reason to doubt whether that would happen. The document we revere today as the foundation of our country's laws, the cornerstone of our legal system, was hotly disputed at the time. Some Americans denounced the Constitution for threatening the liberty that Americans had won at great cost in the Revolutionary War. One group of fiercely patriotic opponents even burned the document in a raucous public demonstration on the Fourth of July. In this splendid new history, Pauline Maier tells the dramatic story of the yearlong battle over ratification that brought such famous founders as Washington, Hamilton, Madison, Jay, and Henry together with less well-known Americans who sometimes eloquently and always passionately expressed their hopes and fears for their new country. Men argued in taverns and coffeehouses; women joined the debate in their parlors; broadsides and newspaper stories advocated various points of view and excoriated others. In small towns and counties across the country people read the document carefully and knew it well. Americans seized the opportunity to play a role in shaping the new nation. Then the ratifying conventions chosen by "We the People" scrutinized and debated the Constitution clause by clause. Although many books have been written about the Constitutional Convention, this is the first major history of ratification. It draws on a vast new collection of documents and tells the story with masterful attention to detail in a dynamic narrative. Each state's experience was different, and Maier gives each its due even as she focuses on the four critical states of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York, whose approval of the Constitution was crucial to its success. The New Yorker Gilbert Livingston called his participation in the ratification convention the greatest transaction of his life. The hundreds of delegates to the ratifying conventions took their responsibility seriously, and their careful inspection of the Constitution can tell us much today about a document whose meaning continues to be subject to interpretation. Ratification is the story of the founding drama of our nation, superbly told in a history that transports readers back more than two centuries to reveal the convictions and aspirations on which our country was built.

From Booklist A notable historian of the early republic, Maier devoted a decade to studying the immense documentation of the ratification of the Constitution. Scholars might approach her books' footnotes first, but history fans who delve into her narrative will meet delegates to the state conventions whom most history books, absorbed with the Founders, have relegated to obscurity. Yet, prominent in their local counties and towns, they influenced a convention's decision to accept or reject the Constitution. Their biographies and democratic credentials emerge in Maier's accounts of their elections to a convention, the political attitudes they carried to the conclave, and their declamations from the floor. The latter expressed opponents' objections to provisions of the Constitution, some of which seem anachronistic (election regulation raised hackles) and some of which are thoroughly contemporary (the power to tax individuals directly). Ripostes from proponents, the Federalists, animate the great detail Maier provides, as does her recounting how one state convention's verdict affected another's. Displaying the grudging grassroots blessing the Constitution originally received, Maier eruditely yet accessibly revives a neglected but critical passage in American history. --Gilbert Taylor Ratification is a gripping and eye-opening read. Maier is a member of that rare breed of historians who write vividly and with a flair for depicting dramatic events. The Wall Street Journal Delightful and engrossing. Richard Brookhiser, The New York Times Book Magazine . . . it is unlikely that anyone will duplicate what Maier has done. Gordon Wood, The New Republic About the Author Pauline Maier is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of American History at M.I.T. She received her PhD from Harvard University in 1968. She is the author of several books and textbooks on American history, including *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams*, and *American Scripture*, which was on the New York Times Book "Editor's Choice" list of the best 11 books of 1997 and a finalist in General Nonfiction for the National Book Critics' Circle Award. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.