

Primary Source Analysis: James Madison: Federalist No. 51



Source: James Madison, Federalist No. 51: "The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments." 1788.

In order to lay a due foundation for that separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government, which to a certain extent is admitted on all hands to be essential to the preservation of liberty, it is evident that each department should have a will of its own... Were this principle rigorously adhered to, it would require that all the appointments for the supreme executive, legislative, and judiciary magistracies should be drawn from the same fountain of authority, the people, through channels having no communication whatever with one another...

But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others... Ambition must be made to counteract ambition... It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

Historical Thinking Skill: Continuity and Change Over Time

THINKS Document Analysis

T (Topic)

H (Historical Context)

I (Intended Audience)

Political

Economic

Social

Religious

Other

1. When was this document created and/or circulated? Who wrote it?

2. What events were occurring during the time this document was written?

1. Who was the intended audience of this document?

2. Whose voice or perspective is not shared in this document?

N (New Vocabulary)

1. What words are new to you or need to be defined?

K (Key Purpose)

1. How would you describe the author's perspective, or point of view?

2. Taking into account the author's perspective, why do you think this document was created? In other words, what is its purpose?

S (Significance)

1. List two things or ideas that make this document historically significant.

2. Provide one quote from the document that demonstrates why it might be considered historically significant. Explain your reasoning.



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Continuity and Change Over Time



What was happening during this time period?	What changed (significant events, major turning points, developments)?	What happened after this period?
	What stayed the same (Continuity)?	

