

Lesson Eight: The Use of Visual Symbols during Ratification

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTOR

Both the supporters and critics of the Constitution used rhetorical flourishes in poems, songs, and essays when describing the Constitution during the Ratification debates. The use of these devices assumed an audience that was well read since many of the metaphors and analogies referenced Biblical passages, literature, mythology classical antiquity, English history, and architecture.

Throughout the ratification debate, Federalists and Antifederalists referred to the Constitution metaphorically. Timothy Pickering called it a “mansion,” Francis Hopkinson “The New Roof,” “Centinel” “the monster,” “Brutus” “the gilded pill,” and “Philadelphensis” “the rivet of tyranny.” On 7 December 1787 the *Massachusetts Gazette* published a short piece describing “the *disunited* states of America” as “thirteen distinct, separate, independent, *unsupported* columns.” Later in December, a new metaphorical device was created by Benjamin Russell, printer of the *Massachusetts Centinel*. Russell introduced his reprint of the Delaware Convention’s form of ratification with the heading: “*The first pillar of a great federal superstructure raised.*” Thereafter, newspapers throughout the country published variations on this theme. Russell brought his metaphor to life visually on 16 January 1788 when he published a wood cut illustration entitled “THE FEDERAL PILLARS” that showed five state pillars erected with a sixth pillar labeled “Mass.” in the process of being raised by the hand of God. Russell updated his “pillars” as additional states ratified the Constitution. In the case of Rhode Island, a reclining or fallen pillar appeared or would be shown kneeling over a stool of repentance.

The use of the pillars and other architectural typologies would continue throughout the Ratification Period. Robert Alexander has noted that symbolizing concepts was part and parcel to discussions surrounding the Ratification Debate. In his article, “The Grand Federal Edifice” he concluded “these concepts traveled speedily through newspapers and pamphlets and, owing to the allegorical temper of the age, soon became commonly accepted synonyms for the Constitution. Even before the Constitutional Convention had completed its work, Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson evoked an architectural metaphor when describing the states as “the pillars of the national legislature.”

KEY IDEAS IN PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Massachusetts: The Sixth Pillar of the Great Federal Superstructure, 6 February 1788

States as Pillars: Divine Intervention and Assistance, Order of Ratification

The Sixth Pillar Raised, *Independent Chronicle*, 7 February 1788

Divine Intervention and Assistance, Massachusetts has Ratified

Newburyport *Essex Journal*, 13 February 1788

Dark Clouds, New Hampshire in Process, Reverse Order of Ratification

***Massachusetts Centinel*, 11 June 1788**

Order of Ratification, Virginia in Process, Divine Intervention and Assistance, New Hampshire on the Side

North Carolina *Wilmington Centinel*, 9 July 1788

Combination of Pillars and Dome, A Banner, Missing Pillars

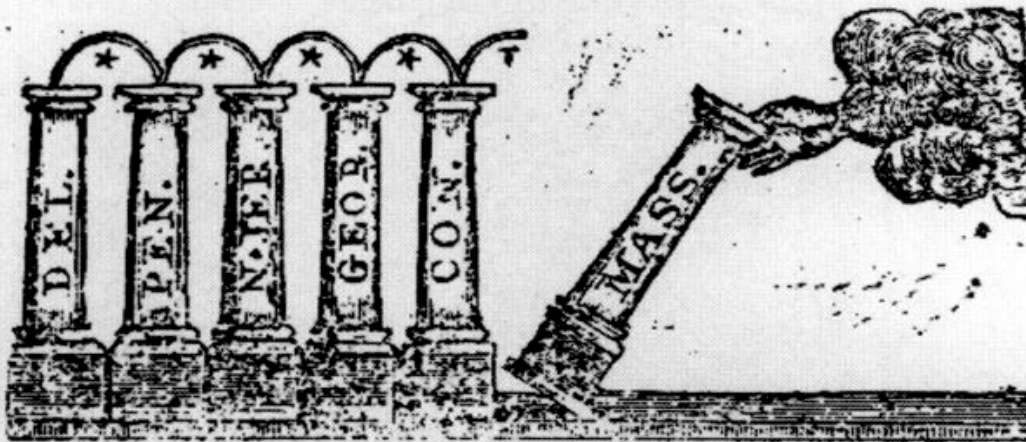
Charleston *City Gazette*, 16 July 1788

States as Pillars; Some Pillars Missing, Angelic Announcement

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Massachusetts: The Sixth Pillar of the Great Federal Superstructure,
6 February 1788

States—like the gen'rous vine supported livē,
The strength they gain is from th' embrace they giv
THE FEDERAL PILLARS.



UNITED THEY STAND—DIVIDED FALL.

A vessel arriv'd at Cape-Ann, after a short passage from Georgia, confirms the pleasing intelligence announced in our last, that that State has unanimously ratified the Federal Constitution. Thus is a **FIFTH PILLAR** added to the glorious fabrick. May Massachusetts rear the **SIXTH**.

As we predicted in our last, so it happened—Monday morning, was ushered in with the ringing of bells in this metropolis, on account of the pleasing intelligence received by Saturday night's mail, that the State of Connecticut had added a **FOURTH PILLAR** to that **GRAND REPUBLICAN SUPERSTRUCTURE**, the **FEDERAL CONSTITUTION**.

The Sixth Pillar Raised, Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 7 February 1788

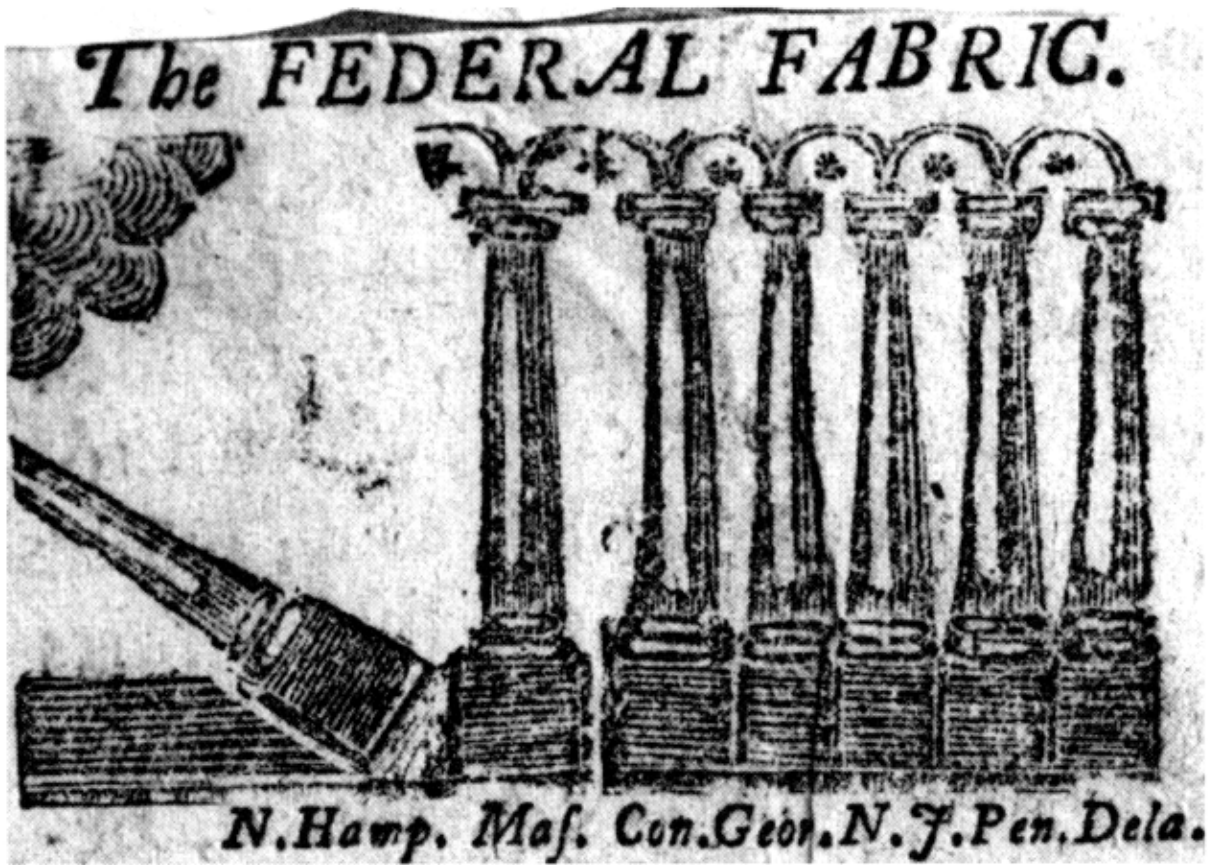
On the glorious sixth of February, 1788.

Hail the DAY, and MARK it well,
Then Old ANARCH's Kingdom fell—
Then our *dawning* GLORY shone,
Mark it, FREEMEN, 'tis our own.

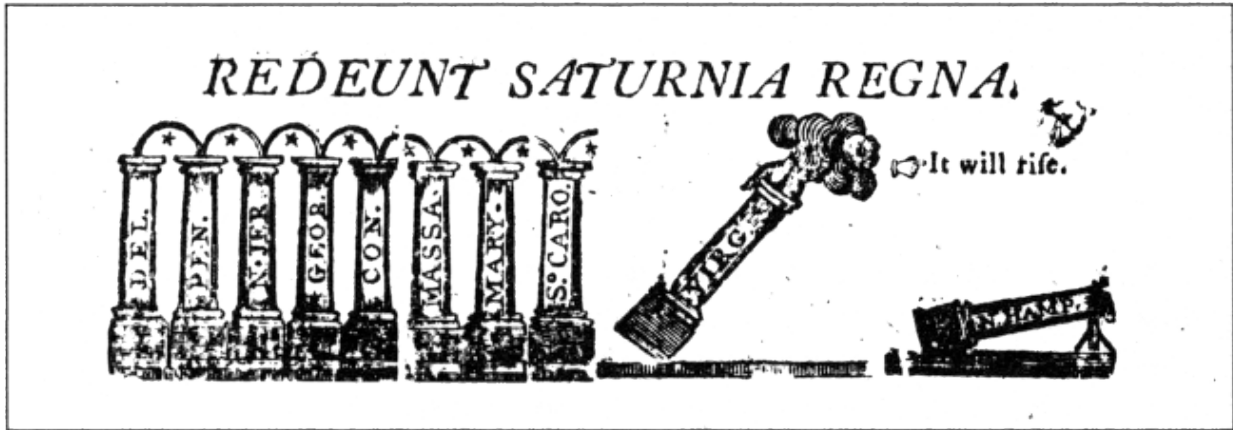


Ratification of the FEDERAL CONSTI-
TUTION, by Massachusetts!

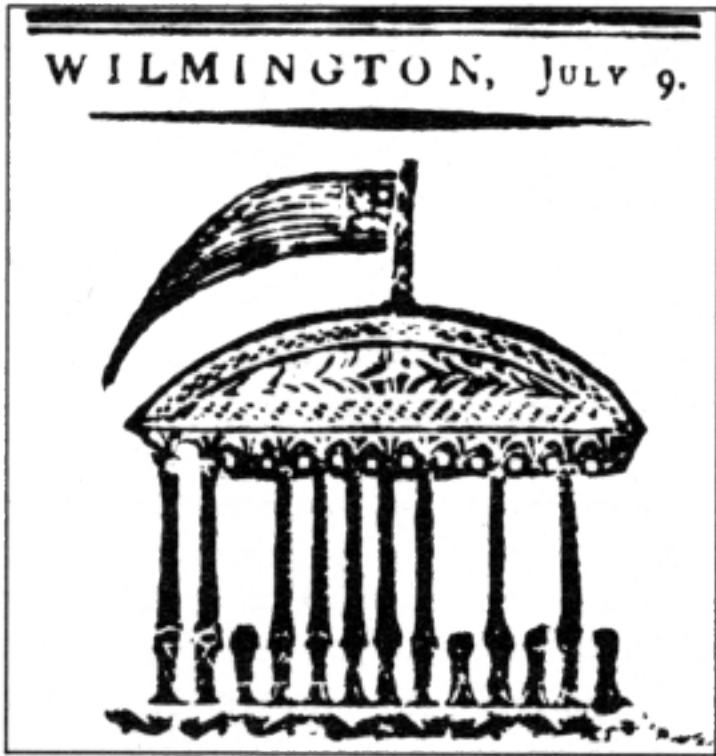
Newburyport *Essex Journal*, 13 February 1788



Massachusetts Centinel, 11 June 1788



North Carolina *Wilmington Centinel*, 9 July 1788



Charleston *City Gazette*, 16 July 1788



THE LESSON PLAN—The Evolution and Use of the Pillars Illustration

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON

- * Students will compare and contrast several visuals that illustrated the process of ratification.
- * Students will look for bias in the various illustrations.
- * Students will consider the merits of using the idea of pillars to illustrate the process of ratification.

THE LESSON

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Each group should select a recorder.
2. The group should evaluate all six illustrations. The recorder can use the worksheet below to take notes of their group's observations for each illustration.

<u>Illustration</u>	<u>Symbols Used</u>	<u>Bias or Opinion Expressed</u>
Massachusetts: The Sixth Pillar of the Great Federal Superstructure, 6 February 1788		
The Sixth Pillar Raised, <i>Independent Chronicle</i> , 7 February 1788		
Newburyport <i>Essex Journal</i> , 13 February 1788		
<i>Massachusetts Centinel</i> , 11 June 1788		
North Carolina <i>Wilmington Centinel</i> , 9 July 1788		
Charleston <i>City Gazette</i> , 16 July 1788		

3. Each group should discuss and note each of the illustrations and the opinions that they might see in them. (**Note:** Some illustrations will have more overt opinion in them than others. Some may have no opinion in them.)
4. After going through all of the illustrations, the groups should report their finding to the entire class.
5. Conclude with a discussion possibly centered round the following questions:
 - a) Is it important to have opinion in these types of illustrations? Why or Why not?
 - b) If you were to insert your opinion into these illustrations, how would you do that?
 - c) Why might you think the illustrator utilized the pillar as the symbol for states in these illustrations?
 - d) Do you think it is the best choice to use the pillar? Why or Why not?
 - e) Are there any other symbols that could be used in the process of ratifying the Constitution?
6. **An extension activity:** You could have students research the use of symbols for national identity in other nations. Begin by having student consider the ways and reasons various symbols are

used to represent various nations. Among the examples you might want to have students consider could be the following:

France- The Rooster

England- The Lion

Wales- The Dragon

Canada- The Maple Leaf

Thailand- The Elephant