

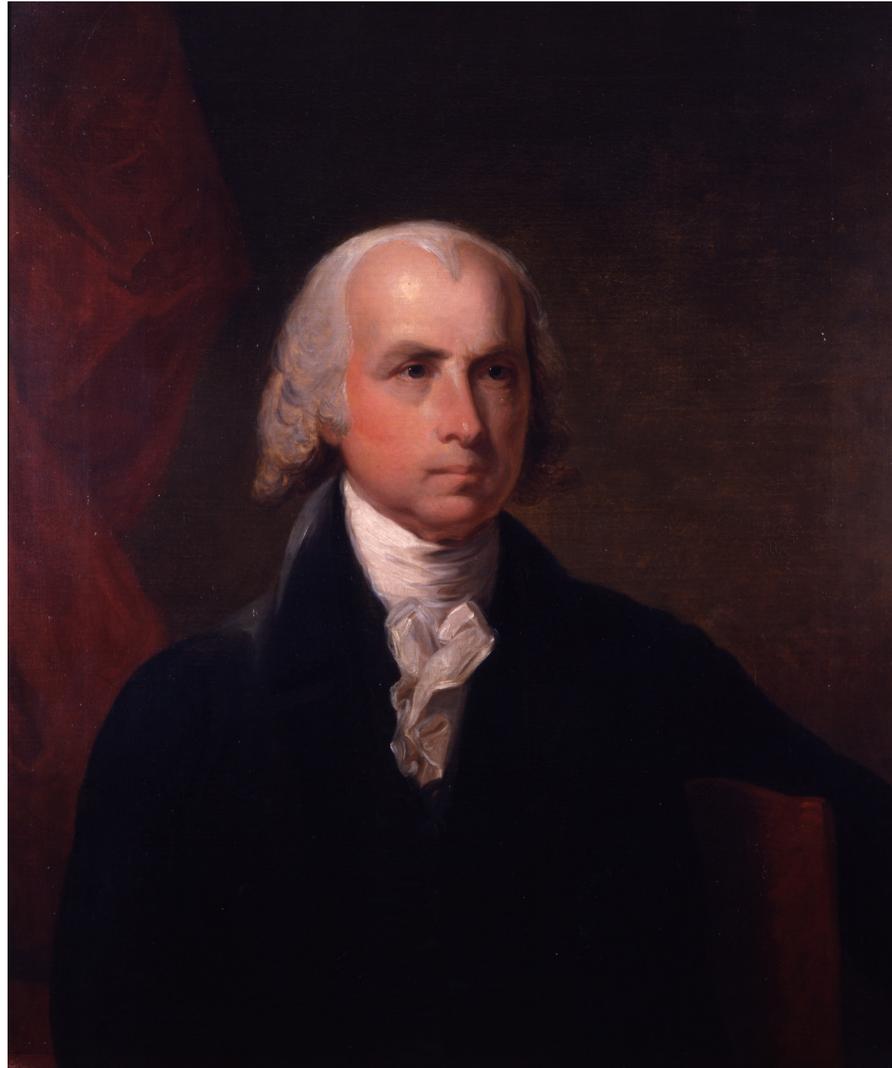
## James Madison 1751–1836

### Education and Revolution

James Madison was the oldest son of a wealthy slave-holding family in Virginia. Montpelier, the family's mansion, was built when James was a boy. He was educated by tutors and in private schools, and graduated from the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University, in 1771. He did not fight in the Revolution because he thought he was not physically strong enough. His political contributions, however, provided the nation with its monumental founding documents. At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, his Virginia Plan became the model for the U.S. Constitution. He then joined Alexander Hamilton and John Jay in writing the *Federalist Papers* to encourage ratification.

Throughout the 1780s, James Madison was a Federalist. He may have had misgivings about potential abuses, but he believed a strong federal government was needed to stabilize the country. Anti-Federalists disagreed. They feared that a strong central government could easily become British-style tyranny, and wanted most political power to rest with individual states. Pressure from anti-Federalists prompted the addition of the Bill of Rights, also written by James Madison, to guarantee individual liberties.

But the central government's power was not the only issue that divided these camps. Federalists dominated in



Asher Brown Durand, *James Madison*, 1835. Oil on canvas. New-York Historical Society, Gift of The New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, 1858.10.

the urban North, where slavery was ending, farms were small, and the future seemed tied to manufacturing. Anti-Federalists were more likely to live in Southern states, their views shaped by tradition, slavery, plantation ownership, and vast fields of tobacco and cotton.

Despite his strong defense of the Constitution, James Madison had more in common with anti-Federalists. Once the nation was established, he sided especially with his Virginia neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, the leading anti-Federalist, over Alexander Hamilton, his old ally. In 1790, the three men arrived at a famous compromise. James agreed not to fight Hamilton's proposal for a central bank, which would strengthen the federal government; Hamilton agreed that the nation's capital would move south, out of New York City. President George Washington himself selected the site of Washington, D.C. The government relocated temporarily to Philadelphia while laborers, black and white, free and enslaved, built the capital city.

### Dolley and Washington City

Among his friends, James was known as a storyteller with a great sense of humor. But the public saw a small, socially awkward man who had never married and had been jilted twice. People joked about his manliness.

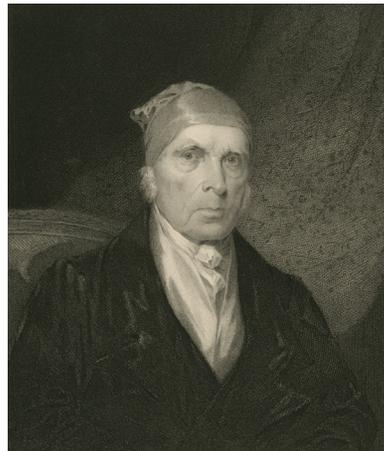
# James Madison 1751–1836 *continued*

In 1794, James asked Aaron Burr, a mutual friend, to introduce him to the recently widowed Dolley Todd. He even asked Catherine Coles, Dolley's cousin, to put in a good word. She told Dolley that Mr. Madison "thinks so much of you in the day that he has Lost his Tongue, at Night he Dreames of you. . . . [H]e has Consented to every thing that I have wrote about him with Sparkling Eyes." This was not the man the rest of the world knew. He and Dolley were married in October 1794. He raised Dolley's son Payne as his own.

In the bitter 1796 presidential election, John Adams won the most votes and Thomas Jefferson came in second. According to the rules of the time, they became president and vice president, despite their opposing views. With a Federalist in charge, James Madison declared himself tired of politics and retired with his new family to Montpelier. Jefferson was frequently close by at Monticello, and the two spoke often about their shared political philosophy, and called themselves Democratic-Republicans, or simply Republicans. When Jefferson was elected president in 1800, he named James Madison his secretary of state.

In 1808, when James Madison ran for president, ambition was frowned on, so candidates did not campaign openly. But Dolley's social events helped reinforce James's prominence, and kept Republicans

united behind him. When James took office, Britain was at war with France, seizing American sailors to serve on her warships, and arming Indians to fight against the U.S. With America's honor and independence apparently at stake, James asked Congress for a declaration of war in June 1812. Two years later, the British invaded Washington and torched much of the city. (See the life story of **Dolley Madison**, **Resources 6** and **8**.)



## Retirement

James Madison was roundly criticized for the war, but when it ended, even with no clear winner, Americans felt unified and patriotic, and warmly toward the president. He left office in 1817 and returned to Montpelier with Dolley and their enslaved servants, Paul Jennings and Sukey. James and Dolley organized his papers for sale, which he hoped would guarantee Dolley's



(Far left) Rembrandt Peale, *Thomas Jefferson*, 1805. Oil on linen. New-York Historical Society, Gift of Thomas Jefferson Bryan, 1867.306.

(Left) Baroness Anne-Marguerite-Henriette Hyde de Neuville, *Montpellier*, 1818. Watercolor, Musée Franco-Américain du Château de Blérancourt.



(Far left) J. B. Longacre (artist), T. B. Welch (engraver), *James Madison, Aged 82*, ca. 1833. Engraving, New-York Historical Society Library, PR 52.

(Left) Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The White House ("President's House") Washington, DC, East Front Elevation*, 1807. Drawing on paper: watercolor, ink, and wash. Latrobe Architectural Drawing Archive, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., 97505109.

income after his death. Otherwise, he took long walks, struggled to keep Montpelier solvent, and shielded Dolley from the seriousness of Payne's gambling debts. In the evenings, Ben Stewart, one of the slaves (and Sukey's son), would carry James's favorite chair to the garden so he could enjoy the night air. He had said he would free his slaves upon his death, and made this promise specifically to his personal servant, Paul Jennings (see **Resource 7**). But along with nearly all of his estate, James willed the slaves to Dolley, adding that "it is my desire that none of them should be sold without his or her consent." James Madison spent his last months bedridden and died in 1836.

## Discussion Questions

- ★ What challenges did James Madison face on his journey to the presidency?
- ★ How did Dolley Madison aid James Madison's career?
- ★ What concerns did James Madison have for Dolley at the time of his death? How did he address them?

**Sources:** William C. Allen, Office of the Architect of the Capitol, *History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol*, June 1, 2005 (accessed by M. Waters, 10-7-2016); Donald R. Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship: Myths of the War of 1812* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990); The Papers of James Madison, Digital Edition, J. C. A. Stagg, ed., <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN> (accessed by M. Waters, 9-10-2016).