



THINKER
IN
BOXES

JAMES MADISON

Team: Federalist United

Position: Cover point

Status: Almost completely dead

James Madison (1751–1836) was short and less than charming. He was also the fourth president of the United States and is often called the father of the U.S. Constitution. While he was quick to point out that he was but one of many who contributed to that document, his intellectual contribution to the design of the new government the Constitution produced is made quite clear in the *The Federalist Papers* that are attributed to him. Most notably are the papers that present the logic underlying the republican form of government (Papers No. 37–51), and the attribution of most of these essays to Madison is probably why he is given so much credit for the creation of the U.S. Constitution.

Many of ideas offered in this portion of *The Federalist Papers*, such as the separation of powers, are now such common and fundamental parts of most democratic governments that it can be a bit difficult to imagine a time before they were articulated as they are in *The Federalist Papers*, and it can be even harder to imagine bringing together all the hints and insights from British, Roman, and Greek history to assemble them into a coherent logic for a government that would balance the need to limit government from the excesses of kings and emperors, make it responsive to the needs of the people, avoid the tyranny of the majority, and still be dynamic enough to govern effectively and respond to the needs of the country. Madison, himself, discusses this challenge in *Federalist Paper* No. 37.

In terms of this chapter's focus on structures and institutions, *The Federalist Papers* No. 47–49 are, simply put, astounding. In these three essays, Madison describes the logic of a government structured around checks and balances and about turning the danger of a jealousy for power into something that will prevent the transformation of a **republic** into a **dictatorship**. This simple explanation of the separation of powers, written for a general audience so they could be published in a newspaper, provide the logic that now defines the basic structure of almost every modern **democracy**.