

Summer Assignment

At the founding of the United States, there was intense debate over the strength and structure of the United States government. This debate was played out in the newspapers of the many states. Since this was an era in which newspapers had not yet embraced the idea of a fair and unbiased press, the writers used this very popular medium to argue the merits and flaws of the recently proposed Constitution.

Nowhere was this more true than in the key state of New York. Although only 9 of the 13 states were required to ratify the Constitution into the supreme law of the land, practically it would have been impossible for the Constitution to go into effect without the approval of the largest states like New York and Pennsylvania. In New York, the Constitution was to be put to a public vote, and so the supporters and opponents of this new, strong, central government took their arguments to the people in a series of essays.

These essays, called *The Federalist Papers* provide us with a unique perspective on what the founders intended the federal government to look like, and how they anticipated it working (or failing). John Jay, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison (writing as Publius) wrote eloquently in support of the new Constitution.

In *The Federalist No. 10*, James Madison lays out the case for including all people in the new government. He argues that the use of division (he calls it “faction”) is actually good for the nation. (You can read federalist no. 10 here, if you want: <http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fed10.htm>). If you don’t want to read the Federalist 10, or it doesn’t make sense to you, here’s a synopsis: If you let the crazy elements of society have a voice in government, they will feel as though their voice has been heard, and they won’t do things like rebel against the government. But, since they are a small part of a democratic government, they don’t get to actually get their way. Clever, huh?

Today, the Constitution is nearly 220 years old. It has been changed 27 times. It is still the supreme law of the land. Though newspapers don’t hold the influence they once did, the press is still active in the form of television, radio, and the internet. Much of this “new” media is as partisan as the Revolutionary era newspapers that Madison and Hamilton filled with their essays. The question for you to consider is this: **is modern faction useful, or is it hurting America?**

The actual assignment:

1. Watch or listen to a partisan commentator for *at least an hour*.
 - a. You need to find somebody really partisan: Rush Limbaugh (KMJ 580AM 9-noon weekdays), Sean Hannity (KMJ 2-5 weekdays), Sean Hannity (FoxNews 9ET), Rachel Madow (9 ET/PT MSNBC), Ed Schultz (8ET MSNBC) Randi Rhodes (listen online <http://www.randirhodes.com/pages/affiliates.html>)
2. As you listen, keep basic notes:
 - a. Topic – what are they talking about?
 - b. Position – What is their position on that issue?
 - c. Guests – Do their guests agree with them or disagree?
 - d. Reaction – How does the host react to the guest?
3. Write a response:
 - a. Write or type a paragraph response to this prompt:
 - i. *Is this type of faction good for America or bad for America? Why? Use examples from what you heard to support your position.*