

Federalists, Songs, and the Populist Ratification of the Constitution

Despite elitist tendencies of the Federalists they used songs as a way to gain popular support for the Constitution. In order to ensure the ratification of the Constitution, Federalists published and performed songs to create the impression of a national movement towards the ratification of the Constitution.¹ Though they used popular politics, Federalists tended to distrust the people at large and, as David Waldstreicher states, saw republican government “in terms of elite leadership and popular spectatorship.”² Songs were a pithy and memorable way to package political ideas. Often a part of street culture such as parades and festivals, songs were easily learned and spread as well as widely published in newspapers. Their publication and use in public places meant that songs were accessible to people at all levels of American society. The use of songs to create popular support during the ratification process was part of a long tradition of employing songs for political purposes. Ballads and songs had long been a part of British culture and American colonists continued to use political songs in America.³ Throughout the American Revolution, and continuing on into the party years of the nineteenth century, songs filled an important role in the popular political life of early Americans. From the distribution of songs during the New-Hampshire Grand Procession to the printing of songs in various newspapers throughout the American states, songs played an important role in the success of the Constitutional ratification process.

¹ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 53-55

² David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) for Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 55. For more on Federalists as elites see, Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy “The People,” the Founders and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171-184.

³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

Songs were an important part of the Constitution ratification process, but songs were used as a tool for social and political change long before the 1780's. Ballads formed an important part of British culture. As oral culture, it is difficult to know exactly when ballads became prevalent in Britain, but many ballads can be traced to the fifteenth century.⁴ There are numerous examples of English ballads being used for political purposes. One account stated that, "ballad-singers were paid, and stationed at the end of streets, to chant the downfall of the Jacobins...", another that, the singing of a parliamentary Civil Wars song in a tavern offended a fellow drinker.⁵ These instances of political ballads were not anomalies; the use of ballads for political purposes was a common occurrence in England. One study found evidence of the publication of at least seven hundred ballads dealing with public affairs in England from the 1640's to the 1690's.⁶ By the seventeenth century political ballads were used extensively throughout Britain. British Americans knew of the efficacy ballads held as political tools, it is therefore unsurprising that ballads became an important part of colonial American politics.⁷

Evolving from the English ballad tradition, the use of political songs and ballads continued in colonial America and were especially important during the Imperial Crisis. Liberty trees and poles became gathering places for America supporters and staging point for parades, feasts, and toasts, each of these events included songs and singing.⁸ Revolutionary period street culture created opportunities for people of all races and genders to show support for the

⁴ Ruth Perry, "War and the Media in Border Minstrelsy: The Ballad of Chevy Chase," in Patricia Fumerton, et al., eds., *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 251.

⁵ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 133. Angela McShane, "'Ne sutor ultra crepidam': Political Cobblers and Broadside Ballads in Late Seventeenth-Century England," in Patricia Fumerton, et al., eds., *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800*, 208.

⁶ Angela McShane, "'Ne sutor ultra crepidam,'" in Patricia Fumerton, et al., eds., *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800*, 210.

⁷ E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English Working Class*.

⁸ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street, Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 24-26.

revolution's ideals. Whether implemented during a gathering at a liberty pole or a mourning procession for 'liberty,' songs were an important part of colonial resistance to British rule.⁹ The use of songs was particularly important in the street gatherings which reached multi-ethnic male and female audiences and led to widespread participation. Political songs, with simple melodies and easily remembered lyrics were made to learn and share easily.

Though intended to reach mass audiences, the political messages embedded within songs were clear to Americans. Colonial society took the implications of these messages within songs very seriously. In 1734, the printer of the *New-York Weekly Journal* was tried for libel because he printed a political ballad.¹⁰ This incident demonstrates how the serious implications political songs could hold. The important meaning of political songs and ballads was not overlooked by colonial audiences. Printed in newspapers or distributed as broadsides throughout the Imperial Crisis and the Revolutionary War, songs and ballads played an important role in street culture. A 1770 broadside entitled, "A New Massachusetts Liberty Song," stated things like, "We led fair FREEDOM hither" and "torn from a World of Tyrants... We form'd a new Domain, a Land of LIBERTY"¹¹ This song and many like it, exemplify the predominant themes and ideas used in songs and ballads to inculcate positive feelings towards the American cause.

Songs were not always free-standing works performed in parades and public gatherings, they also appeared in plays. During the Imperial crises, plays served, much like street demonstrations, to instill support for the American cause. The American Company was one of

⁹ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 24-26. Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, on page 12, Waldstreicher states that, "British America drew upon a rich spectrum of celebratory and anti-celebratory, or mourning, rituals through which they expressed their approval or disapproval of political institutions and events," and that such events "were the building blocks of the Whig rebels' resistance to the British Empire." Waldstreicher continues later to discuss these rituals in more detail (pg 20) stating, "Ballads, always a staple of festive culture, once again became key expressions of political opinions."

¹⁰ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*

¹¹ "The New Massachusetts Liberty Song, (to the tune of The British Grenadier.)," 1770, Early American Imprints.

the most popular American theatre troupes, performing in New York, Philadelphia, Virginia, and Maryland. The American Company adhered to the prevailing political sentiment of the 1770's and their final pre-Revolutionary season displayed increasingly anti-British sentiments.¹² The songs and themes found within plays, much like the songs performed in the street, served to spread political messages that were salient in the colonies during the Imperial Crisis and beyond.¹³ Whether performed in formal theatre productions or on the street by common people, songs were an important part of the effort to create popular support for the American cause in the years leading up to the American Revolution.

Though songs often served a political end, not all songs contained political themes. The songs printed in the years after the American Revolution focused on a variety of themes and ideas including nature, comedy, love, beauty, and morals. Songs appeared in newspapers throughout the United States with titles like, "A Parisian Song" (which mocked Parisians for drinking too much wine), "Ode to the Month of May," or "Ode to Modesty."¹⁴ Whether they served to promote social values like the "Ode to Modesty," or to simply praise nature, like the "Ode to the Month of May," songs were a part of the daily lives of Americans. An article that was widely published in newspapers throughout America, speaks of the ways songs appeared in everyday life. In the article, the author comes across a "blind man singing a song of love," upon

¹² Jason Shaffer, *Performing Patriotism National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theatre*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 72.

¹³ For in depth discussions on the role of theatre in the American republic see Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson, Into the Hands of the People*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Jeffrey H. Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ I use the word song to refer to texts variously entitled 'ode' 'song' or 'ballad.' Ode's are pieces of poetry traditionally set to music and sung or recited, therefore having a functionality which is very similar to songs. "Ode on the Month of May," *Independent Gazetteer*, Philadelphia, May 2, 1787. "Ode to Modesty," *Virginia Journal*, Alexandria, May 17, 1787. "A Persian Song," *Newport Herald*, Newport, May 24, 1787,

hearing the song a passing sailor “stopped and purchased a ballad of the blind man.”¹⁵ Whether fictional or not, the account of the blind man selling ballads and singing on the street shows how songs appeared within early American society. Songs were learned and spread in many different ways, and often performed in American homes as entertainment. Even if singers had little musical training the simple, short stanzas and melodies and variety of topics allowed for songs to pervade nearly every level of American society.¹⁶

Whether used as a political tool or for entertainment, songs diffused into nearly every sphere of American society. Transmitted through print and word of mouth in a time where recording and sharing were nonexistent, songs were at once part of oral and print culture. Because songs circulated widely throughout American culture, they became tools for unification. The act of singing together, especially during public celebrations, allowed people of different economic levels, races, and genders, to unite around a shared idea. Whether singing a song to the beauty of nature or to the downfall of the British crown, singing united people. They were printed, performed, and talked about in many settings including theatres, streets, and homes. As the delegates gathered to begin the task of creating a new constitution in 1787, they operated within a society in which songs played an important role. The delegates knew that songs had long been used in English and colonial American society to enforce social norms, they also knew of the political role songs played in the Imperial Crisis and in maintaining support for the American cause during the Revolution. Equipped with the knowledge of the social and political role songs had played before and during the Revolution, and of the prevalence of songs in the

¹⁵ For the first of many republications of this account available through America’s Historical Newspapers database see, “Sentimental Miscellany. Scene, a Street in New-Haven,” *Hampshire Chronicle*, Springfield, April 3, 1787.

¹⁶ Nicholas E. Tawa, “Secular Music in the Late-Eighteenth-Century American Home,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 61:4, October 1975, 515-518.

everyday lives of Americans, Federalists began to utilize songs as the states considered the ratification of the Constitution.¹⁷

The Federalists believed in the necessity of a new government, yet the process of creating a new constitution was neither easy nor swift. The experiences of the Continental Congress during the Revolution highlighted what Federalists saw as the fatal flaws of the Articles of Confederation.¹⁸ One widely published song noted several of the issues faced by Americans under the Articles of Confederation:

From Scenes of Affliction-Columbia opprest-
Of credit expiring-and commerce distrest,
Of nothing to do-and nothing to pay-
From such dismal scenes let us hasten away¹⁹

With pressing debts owed to the French and Dutch governments, a recently suppressed armed rebellion in Massachusetts, a flagging economy, and holding little power to change the Articles, Virginia called the Annapolis Convention in 1786. The Annapolis Convention included only twelve delegates from five states, all who had “unusually strong views about the need for a significantly more powerful central government.”²⁰ The Annapolis Convention did not make a quorum, but recommended another convention to consider revisions to the Articles of Confederation meet in May of 1787. Continental Congress belatedly agreed to the Constitutional Convention in February 1787 with the condition that the Convention only discuss amendments to the Articles.²¹

¹⁷ For the use of songs to unify see, Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 177-185. Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 20.

¹⁸ Richard Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men, The Making of the American Constitution*, (New York: Random House, 2009,) 9-10.

¹⁹ “The Grand CONSTITUTION: or the PALLADIUM of COLUMBIA: A NEW FEDERAL SONG,” *Massachusetts Centinel*, (Portsmouth), October 6, 1787.

²⁰ Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 19.

²¹ Paul A. Gilje, *The Making of the American Republic 1763-1815*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006), 76-77.

The Constitutional Convention assembled in Philadelphia on May 25, 1787. Though the Continental Congress only authorized the Constitutional Convention to amend the Articles, they proposed an entirely new document which was fundamentally different from the Articles of Confederation.²² The Convention recommended that the, “Constitution be laid before the United States in Congress assembled” and also, “be submitted to a Convention of Delegates, chosen in each State by the People thereof, under the Recommendation of its Legislature, for their Assent and Ratification.”²³ After nine states had ratified the Constitution, the Congress would set a date for the election of the president and for the start of the new government under the Constitution.

The ratification of the Constitution would span from September 17, 1787 to May 29, 1790 when Rhode Island became the last of the original thirteen states to ratify the Constitution. Though the Constitution went into effect by March 4, 1789, the ratification process lasted much longer; the length of the ratification process indicates the amount of contention that raged within the state conventions. As the debates unfolded the assenting and dissenting sides became known as the Federalists and the Antifederalists. The Federalists supported a strengthened national government led by a natural aristocracy and therefore promoted the ratification of the Constitution. Opposing the Federalists, the Antifederalists believed that the Articles should simply be revised and argued that the Constitution gave too much power to the national government. The Antifederalists critiqued the Federalists for favoring the wealthy elite interest and limiting the role of common people on the government.²⁴ Despite the eventual ratification

²² John K. Alexander, *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention, A History of News Coverage*, (Madison: Madison House, 1990), 2. Christopher M. Duncan, *The Anti-Federalists and Early American Political Thought*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 99-100. Pauline Maier, *Ratification The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2010), 29.

²³ *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 317-318, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-01-01-02-0008-0004>

²⁴ W.B. Allen, Gordon Lloyd eds., *The Essential Antifederalist*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), viii-xiv. Gilje, *The Making of the American Republic 1763-1815*, 63-64.

of the Constitution, the Antifederalist position had salience during the ratification debates and “had a public referendum been called in 1787 it is unlikely that the Constitution would have been ratified.”²⁵

Historians have identified many reasons for the Federalist victory in the ratification struggle; a list which should include the use of popular songs. The Federalists were better organized than the Antifederalists and the Federalists controlled more print outlets. For example, New York City had nine newspapers, eight of which were edited by Federalists.²⁶ Another important factor in the Federalist success was the people who endorsed their cause. Many Federalist leaders acknowledged the importance of having the right people associated with their cause. George Washington wrote to Henry Knox that, “It is highly probable that the refusal of our Govr and Colo. Mason to subscribe to the proceedings of the Convention will have a bad effect in this State.”²⁷ Federalist leaders recognized that the lack of support for the ratification of the Constitution by some of the leading men of the American Revolution was injurious to the Federalist cause. Yet the Federalist also had the support of many veteran politicians and war heroes, most notably, George Washington.²⁸ The strength of the Federalists and Antifederalists varied from state to state. Notable persons wrote for and against the ratification of the Constitution and the print war over ratification was fierce, but the last and most important element of the ratification debate was the utilization of popular political culture through political songs.

²⁵ Gilje, *The Making of the American Republic*. 80.

²⁶ Rutland, *The Ordeal of the Constitution*, 21

²⁷ George Washington to Henry Knox, 1787: Oct 15, from Theodore J. Crackel ed., *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/GEWN-04-05-02-0341> [accessed 29 Oct 2014]

²⁸ Rutland, *The Ordeal of the Constitution*, 17.

The role Federalist print and personages played in the success of the ratification has been studied extensively, but the Federalist success was due in large part to their utilization of popular street culture and political songs. The Federalists knew the successful history of political songs in America. As one historian stated, “The founding generation drew on music and harmony to create aural representations of national union.”²⁹ The songs that featured in Federalist organized parades and processions helped create popular support for the Federalist view. Though there is evidence that Antifederalists attempted to utilize street political culture to amass popular support for their cause, the Federalist’s use of street culture was much more successful than the Antifederalists.³⁰ Federalist planned processions where songs played an important role. Both performed during the processions, and afterward printed and spread throughout the states, songs served as oral and print tools for disseminating Federalist notions. The Federalists were particularly prolific songwriters, their songs appeared throughout America during 1787 and 1788. These songs created a popular movement towards the ratification of the Constitution.

Though some historians argued that American populist political appeals did not appear until the 1790’s, the use of songs and political street culture during the ratification debates show that the Americans appealed to mass politics long before the Jeffersonian era.³¹ The political use of songs during the ratification debates was part of a long tradition of using out-of-door festivities, which included songs, in order to achieve political ends.³² The American Revolution owed a great deal to the ability of common people to organize around outdoor events and resist

²⁹ Kirsten E. Wood, “‘Join with Heart and Soul and Voice’: Music, Harmony, and Politics in the Early American Republic,” *American Historical Review*, Oct2014, 119:4, 1083-1116

³⁰ Harlow Giles Unger, *America’s Second Revolution, How George Washington Defeated Patrick Henry and Saved the Nation*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 93. See also, Maier, *Ratification*, 120-122.

³¹ Todd Estes, “Shaping the Politics of Public Opinion: Federalists and the Jay Treaty Debate,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 20:3, Autumn 2000, 393-422.

³² See Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*. Robert W. T. Martin, *Government by Dissent*. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*.

British taxes and ideologies. Part of the revolutionary era's legacy was the songs used in many outdoor political events. The appeal to popular political participation continued to remain prolific during the 1790's. Closely aligned with the rise of political parties, in the street culture of the 1790's songs were a staple of popular political life. In 1798 Federalists and Democratic-Republicans engaged in a "singing contest," and many historians have explored the French and English origins of the songs which Federalists and Democratic-Republicans used to gain popular political support.³³ The use of songs in performance and print by Federalists during the ratification debates is no surprise, given the history of popular political culture in America. Songs were political tools that reached every level of American society; Federalists implemented them in a variety of ways to maximize the impact songs had on the ratification conventions. Often published in newspapers, songs aimed to draw attention to the ratification conventions. Songs were also used as a part of parades which celebrated the successful ratification of the Constitution and created a national push towards ratification.

Newspapers published songs in the months preceding a state's ratification convention. One of the most extensively published Federalist songs was the "The Grand CONSTITUTION: or, The PALLADIUM of COLUMBIA: a NEW FEDERAL SONG." First appearing in *The Massachusetts Centinel* on October 6, 1787, "the Grand Constitution" instructed singers:

With gratitude let us acknowledge the worth,
Of what the CONVENTION has call'd into birth
And the Continent wisely confirm what is done

³³ Andrew W. Robertson, "'Look on This Picture... And on This!' Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787-1820," *American Historical Review*, October 2001, 1275. Wood, "'Join with Heart and Soul and Voice': Music Harmony, and Politics in the Early American Republic." Liam Riordan, "'O Dear, What Can the Matter Be?' The Urban Early Republic and the Politics of Popular Song in Benjamin Carr's *Federal Overture*," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Summer 2011. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 177-182.

By FRANKLIN the sage, and by brave WASHINGTON.³⁴

This verse, by linking the Constitution and the Constitutional Convention to Benjamin Franklin and George Washington draws on the celebrity of both men to gain popular support for the Constitution. The chorus of “the Grand Constitution” called for widespread ratification with the line, “unite, boys, unite.”³⁵ Other Federalist songs slandered their Antifederalist opponents; one song stated that, “men of might with ranc’rous spite,” had “scatter’d forth...their Antifederal notions” which were,

Supported by some British spy,
Who secret spreads his money,
Which makes the Anti-Lawyers speak
As smooth as any honey.³⁶

By casting Antifederalists as unvirtuous traitors, this song utilized the ideal of republican virtue that was already prevalent in the American consciousness.³⁷ Rather than working for the common good, as republican thought upheld, the song cast Antifederalists as avaricious and immoral. Other songs highlighted the compatibility between republicanism and the Constitution. Many songs spoke of the economic gain the Constitution would bring for all Americans, a theme also ubiquitous within Federalist processions. Unlike the Antifederalists in the above song, this song shows that Federalists wanted all Americans to gain wealth. One verse stated:

Then, Men for men, shall each citizen,
Adopting the *New Constitution*,
Behold the increase, in plenty and peace,
Of riches and same in profusion.³⁸

The above examples demonstrate the many themes and tactics employed by Federalists through the publication of songs in newspapers throughout the United States. Often such songs were

³⁴ “The Grand CONSTITUTION: or, The PALLADIUM of COLUMBIA: a NEW FEDERAL SONG,” *Massachusetts Centinel*, (Portsmouth), October 6, 1787.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “A Federal Song,” *Freeman’s Oracle*, (Exeter), July 11, 1788.

³⁷ Gilje, *The Making of the American Republic*, 30-39.

³⁸ “The New CONSTITUTION. A Song,” *Massachusetts Gazette*, (Boston), July 4, 1788.

used in many different states as their ratification conventions neared and republished after the Constitution was ratified in order to maintain popular support.

Federalists used songs during the state conventions, often planning performances and distributing them during parades and other outdoor celebrations. Federalists frequently planned a procession in the weeks following a successful ratification convention; these processions often included a song composed expressly for the occasion. Reaching people of various backgrounds, genders, and races with their large numbers of participants and onlookers, processions spread Federalist ideas. For example, the New York Federal Procession featured approximately 66 different groups of artisans and professionals.³⁹ By including many groups in the actual procession as well as the audience, Federalists created the impression that the ratification of the Constitution was part of a popular, national movement towards ratification. An editorial, which preceded a description of the federal procession in Baltimore, demonstrated the Federalist desire to create the feeling that all thirteen states would inevitably accept the Constitution. The author stated that, “[Maryland] has erected the SEVENTH PILLAR, upon which will be reared the glorious fabric of American greatness...” he continued with, “O! may the happy moment soon arrive when the August temple of Freedom shall be supported by Thirteen Pillars...”⁴⁰

Federalists did not immediately stop promoting their cause after a state had ratified the Constitution, the success in one state spurred other state’s ratifying conventions. A form of political peer pressure, Federalists published accounts of celebratory processions and parade songs throughout America. These accounts allowed states who had not yet ratified to see the political decisions of their neighbors. The celebrations which followed ratification included widespread participation and created the sense of broad support for ratification. By using

³⁹ *Independent Journal*, (New York City), July 23, 1788. Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 53-107.

⁴⁰ “Baltimore, April 29,” *Columbian Herald*, (Charleston), May 19, 1788.

processions and songs to celebrate one state's ratification, the Federalists created the impression of the inevitable American acceptance of the Constitution.

Designed to spread the feeling that ratification could not be stopped, accounts of post-ratification processions would not have been as effective without songs. Songs had a powerful immediate effect when sung during processions. The unification of participants and onlookers during the singing of political songs is extremely significant, but songs were also powerful tools when in print. Federalists widely published songs in newspapers as a part of descriptions of outdoor street celebrations. Not only did songs unite the participants processions, the account of the initial singing accompanied by the song allowed distant readers to associate with temporally and geographically removed processions. By reading an account of a celebration and song enacted in Boston, a Virginian could feel associated with the events and people who participated in the Boston celebration. Songs uniquely allowed distant readers to feel connected to the parades and processions. Reading a description of an event allowed a distant reader to visualize the Federalist celebrations in other cities, but without the use of etchings or pictures, these visualizations were necessarily imagined. On the other hand, singing a song performed at a celebration brought the reader a more realistic experience with geographically and temporally distant processions.⁴¹ The 1787 Fourth of July celebration in Boston featured an "ODE-set to musick by mr. Sleby." The "Ode to Independence," was performed by a soloist and chorus consisting of a "select company of singers." The article also included the verses of the ode.⁴² A reader in New York or Connecticut could both read a description of the Boston celebration and

⁴¹ For a discussion on the importance of newspaper accounts of in celebration culture see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 32-34.

⁴² "Boston, July 6. Fourth of July," *Massachusetts Gazette*, (Boston,) July 6, 1787.

sing the song featured in the celebration.⁴³ By publishing the songs used in processions, the Federalists ensured that the songs reached more people than if the song was simply allowed to spread organically by people who attended the celebration where the song was first presented. Whether through print or performance, songs were an important part of the ratification debates throughout the United States. The close examination of the ratification process in New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania show the specific ways political songs operated in individual state ratification debates.

When Massachusetts ratified the Constitution on February 6, 1788 many of the leading Federalists believed neighboring New Hampshire would quickly follow. Yet when the New Hampshire convention met in early February 1788 things quickly went downhill. The Federalists, fearing defeat called for the convention to adjourn without voting, claiming they could not vote without consulting their constituents. It would not be till June of 1788 that the New Hampshire convention would meet again.⁴⁴ Several songs appeared in New Hampshire newspapers between the Constitutional Convention and New Hampshire's ratification. Some of these songs used tunes and imagery from the American Revolution. The use of Revolutionary symbolism created the impression of the Constitution as the natural outgrowth of the Revolution. These songs included a history of the Constitutional Convention sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle. Yankee Doodle was a powerful symbol in early America; it harkened back to the Revolution and American victory over the British.⁴⁵ Another song was entitled, "Our Liberty Tree, A Federal Song" spoke of the loss of the liberty tree and closed with the line, "Our

⁴³ "Boston, July 5," *Daily Advertiser*, (New York,) July 12, 1787. "Boston, July 5," *Independent Gazetteer*, (Philadelphia,) July 13, 1787. "Ode on the Anniversary of INDEPENDENCE, set to musick by Mr. Selby and performed at the Stone-Chapel, on Wednesday last," *Litchfield Monitor*, (Litchfield,) July 30, 1787.

⁴⁴ Maier, *Ratification*, 214-223. Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 391, 395.

⁴⁵ William Gibbons, "'Yankee Doodle' and Nationalism, 1780-1920," *American Music*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (Summer 2008).

Constitution confirm- it firmly shall fix, its idol-our Liberty Tree.”⁴⁶ Liberty trees were also important during the Imperial Crisis and Revolution. Epicenters of political activity, liberty trees and poles served as gathering places for American sympathizers. The ‘loss of the liberty tree’ the Federalist song spoke of indicates that without the Constitution, Americans would lose their independence and ability to create political change. Another song published in New Hampshire spoke directly to the ‘federal mechanics.’ The American Revolution caused the view of mechanics to undergo a drastic shift. Once the considered lowly wage laborers, American mechanics became “central components of the new, virtuous republic.”⁴⁷ Though unusual in its specificity, the federal mechanic song took advantage of the mechanics’ role as the virtuous middle man between the elites and poor. The chorus claimed that mechanics supported ratification when it stated,

For our roof we will raise, and our song still shall be-
A government firm and our citizens free.”⁴⁸

By casting mechanics as supporters of the Constitution, this song used a powerful and admired group to advance the Federalist cause. The songs which appeared in New Hampshire newspapers promoted Federalists views. The songs published in New Hampshire were just part of Federalist efforts in that state. The second ratification convention met in June of 1788 and with the help of political maneuverings, New Hampshire did vote to ratify the Constitution on June 21.

⁴⁶ “A Yankee Song,” *New-Hampshire Gazette*, May 12, 1788. “Our LIBERTY-TREE: A Federal SONG,” *New-Hampshire Spy*, January 15, 1788.

⁴⁷ Paul A. Gilje, “Mechanics in New York City in the Era of the Constitution,” in Robert I. Goler ed., *Federal New York: A Symposium*, (New York City: Fraunces Tavern Museum, 1990)

⁴⁸ “The RAISING: A new SONG for the FEDERAL MECHANICKS,” *Freeman’s Oracle*, March 12, 1788. Also published in New Hampshire during their ratification process was “The Grand CONSTITUTION: or, The PALLADIUM of COLUMBIA: a NEW FEDERAL SONG,” *New-Hampshire Gazette*, October 13, 1787.

On June 28, the Federalists celebrated the ratification of the Constitution in Portsmouth where a “numerous concourse of inhabitants” from Portsmouth and neighboring towns gathered to watch and participate in a Grand Procession.⁴⁹ The parade that unfolded included a full sized ship named “Union” pulled by nine horses, representatives from multiple trades, and a fully operational printing press which was, “employed during the whole procession in striking off and distributing among the surrounding multitude, songs in celebration of the ratification of the federal Constitution by the state of New-Hampshire.”⁵⁰ Here we see a direct connection between songs and processions. Thus, New Hampshire federalists, more than most, utilized the power of songs. The lyrics passed out during the Grand Procession described the American Revolution, in terms of the “NINE,” a reference to the nine states which had ratified the Constitution by June 1788, rather than in terms of the original thirteen colonies:

In vain did Britian forge the chain,
While countless squadrons hid the plain
HANTONIA, foremost of the NINE
Defy'd their force and took Burgoyne⁵¹

By speaking of the Revolution as a victory of the nine states who had ratified the Constitution, and associating it with the surrender of British general Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777, the author made the Constitution into the natural and predestined end of the American Revolution. The “Federal Song” of New Hampshire was also extensively published, appearing throughout the United States. The publication of a song related to ratification in one state was a tool used by Federalists to help people in other states feel that the ratification of the Constitution was inevitable. The songs published throughout New Hampshire’s ratification process and the song

⁴⁹ “Grand Procession at Portsmouth,” *New-Hampshire Spy*, VO. 4 NO. 19 pg. 74 (Portsmouth, June 28, 1788)

⁵⁰ “Grand Procession at Portsmouth,” *New-Hampshire Spy*.

⁵¹ “Federal song, on the adoption of the federal Constitution, by the state of New-Hampshire, June 21st, 1788. (To be sung at the celebration, the 26th.)” Portsmouth, 1788, America’s Historical Imprints. Hantonia is an archaic name for Hampshire.

printed and handed out during the Grand Procession demonstrated the various ways which Federalists used songs to promote the adoption of the Constitution.

While Federalists thought the New Hampshire ratification would be easy and were surprised, there was no surprise at the difficult battle over ratification in New York. One of the most noted Antifederalists, George Clinton, was from New York. The refusal of New York to work with the Continental Congress highlighted the flaws in the Articles of Confederation.⁵² By the time the ratifying convention in New York began, ten states had already ratified, meaning that the Constitution would become the nation's government. Yet as Richard Beeman pointed out, New York's hostile attitude toward the Constitution "posed a threat to the effectiveness and durability of the new union." As a commercially powerful state, it was important for the Federalists to ensure that New York ratified the Constitution even though they had already surpassed the nine state required for the adoption of the Constitution. New York was one of the states where Antifederalists took to the streets. On one occasion they celebrated the Fourth of July by burning a copy of the Constitution along with an announcement of Virginia's ratification.⁵³

New York Federalists featured a song in the Grand Federal Procession which followed New York's ratification. Much like the other post ratification processions this parade included representatives from many different trades, artillery, and a full sized ship called, "Hamilton." The procession reached a massive audience; it was watched by six or seven thousand people according to contemporary sources.⁵⁴ The song composed for New York's Grand Federal

⁵² Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 15.

⁵³ Maier, *Ratification*, 374

⁵⁴ "New-York, July 2," *New York Journal*, (New York City), September 24, 1788. For a detailed examination of New York's Grand Procession see Paul A. Gilje, "The Common People and the Constitution: Popular Culture in

Procession was written by Samuel Low, a poet and playwright.⁵⁵ Entitled “Ode for the Federal Procession,” this song was longer than other songs associated with ratification celebrations.⁵⁶

Another interesting part of the “Ode for the Federal Procession” is the way it referred to the other American states. Earlier Federalist songs purposefully emphasized the number of states which had ratified the Constitution in their songs, for example the New Hampshire ratification song refers to “the nine” because only nine states had ratified the Constitution up until that point. The New York ode referred to “ten sovereign states in in Friendship’s league combin’d.” But later stated,

The Fed’rel System, which, at once, unites
The Thirteen States, and all the people’s rights⁵⁷

The song referred to the federal system as unifying thirteen states, though in July of 1788 only eleven states had ratified the Constitution. The reference to the federal system uniting the thirteen states rather than the eleven who had ratified, demonstrated the assumption that now that New York had joined the Union, the remaining two states had little choice but to do likewise.

As New York and New Hampshire’s ratification histories attest, the use of songs within state ratification debates varied, but nearly every state had a post-ratification procession which included a song composed especially for the occasion. The post ratification songs and processions served to create a feeling of national movement towards ratification. Pennsylvania, the second state to ratify the Constitution, shows how Federalists began to manipulate street politics in order to advance their cause. After Pennsylvania’s ratification on December 12, 1787

New York City in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *New York in the Age of the Constitution 1775-1800*, eds. Paul A. Gilje, William Pencak (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1992), 20-47.

⁵⁵ Thomas Edward Vermilye Smith, *The City of New York in the Year of Washington’s Inauguration, 1789*, (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., 1889), 200.

⁵⁶ “Ode for the federal procession, upon the adoption of the new government. Composed by Mr. L**,” New York, 1788.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

a procession was announced for the following day. Yet after the procession Philadelphia papers stated that, “the conduct of our fellow citizens on the late glorious occasion of solemnly proclaiming to the people, the ratification and adoption of the proposed new constitution...does them no honor.” The papers went on to indicate that the many of the judges, justices, state officers, university faculty, militia officers, and citizens supposed to participate in the procession did not even attend.⁵⁸ The author also noted that, “the common people, I observed, were as inattentive as the others; they did not shew any attention...”⁵⁹ The first Pennsylvania procession was a resounding failure, perhaps due to factors outside of Federalist control, such as the weather. Regardless of the cause of failure, Federalists planned a second Pennsylvania procession, the makeup of which was very different from the first. On July 4, 1788, the Pennsylvania Federalists made up for the failed earlier procession in grand style. The July Fourth events aimed to celebrate, “the Declaration of Independence...and the establishment of the Constitution or Frame of Government.”⁶⁰ Unlike the earlier procession, the Grand Federal Procession featured participation from men of all classes. This included the elites of Pennsylvania, but also boat builders, porters, cordwainers, watchmakers, bricklayers, and taylor among many others.⁶¹ The first procession included elites, the second included the lower sorts; the first procession was not noted by the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, the second was the subject of articles published throughout the American states. The inclusion of the lower sorts into the second Pennsylvania procession which celebrated the ratification of the Constitution indicates that the Federalists knew the import of having popular support and participation in the ratification process. The Federalists did not neglect songs in the second procession. The song

⁵⁸ “Mr. Oswald,” *Independent Gazetteer*, December 21, 1787. Maier, *Ratification*, 120-122.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ “Grand Federal Procession,” *Pennsylvania Mercury*, (Philadelphia,) July 10, 1788.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, “Grand Federal Procession,”

composed for the Pennsylvania Grand Federal Procession was written by Francis Hopkinson who was a signer of the Declaration Independence, known supporter of the Constitution, accomplished musician, and author of several articles which contributed to the ratification debates in Pennsylvania.⁶² The song Hopkinson composed is similar to many of the Federalist songs used throughout the ratification process; it spoke to American greatness and strength and of future prosperity. One of the most telling verses stated,

My sons for *Freedom* fought, nor fought in vain;
But found a naked goddess was their gain:
Good government alone, can shew the Maid,
In robes of SOCIAL HAPPINESS array'd⁶³

Like many of the Federalist songs, this verse portrayed the Constitution, or good government, as the culmination to the American Revolution. The imagery of the 'naked goddess,' or America, who emerged out of the Revolution and who needed 'good government' to clothe her evoked popular depictions of America as the classically styled Columbia. The Pennsylvania ratification parades demonstrate an evolution in Federalist strategy concerning their utilization of popular political culture in the ratification debates. Though previously Federalists had been publishing songs that promoted their cause, after the failed December procession they created the July Fourth Grand Federal Procession. This procession became a model for many of the parades which followed ratification in various states. Both the inclusion of lower sorts in the procession itself and the composition and distribution of a song created expressly for the federal procession became hallmarks of federal processions throughout the American states.

As the state ratification conventions began, the Federalists realized that one way to further their cause was to utilize popular political culture, and particularly political songs. The Federalists tapped into a tradition which extended back centuries to England. Through their use

⁶² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Francis Hopkinson."

⁶³ Francis Hopkinson, "An ODE for the 4th of July 1788," Pennsylvania, 1788.

in colonial politics and the American Revolution, songs had been an integral part of American social and political life for many decades. Whether a simple secular tune or the political songs of the American Revolution, songs were an important part of American society. Federalists used songs in many ways, as freestanding works printed in newspapers and as a part of the highly orchestrated processions which followed the ratification of the Constitution in many states. The last lines of the Hopkinson song sum up Federalist thought best when he stated:

And let the PEOPLE'S Motto ever be,
"United THUS, and THUS UNITED-FREE"⁶⁴

Songs as a political tool were particularly useful for inspiring unity. The act of singing together allowed people of every class, gender, and race to unify around identical tunes, lyrics, and ideas. Federalists created songs in 1787 and 1788 to ensure that the Constitution received the popular support needed for ratification but the same songs also contributed to the success of the Constitution once implemented. All governments depend upon a population willing to obey the laws it decrees. The American Constitution needed the support not only of elites but also of the general population in order to be successful. A ratified Constitution would mean nothing if the America people did not recognize its authenticity and power. Federalists understood this principle and used the ratification conventions as the ground for creating the popular support for the government they created. The Federalist songs circulated during the ratification process were an important part of the success of the Constitution ratification and establishment of a new and stronger national government.

⁶⁴ Hopkinson, "An ODE for the 4th of July 1788,"