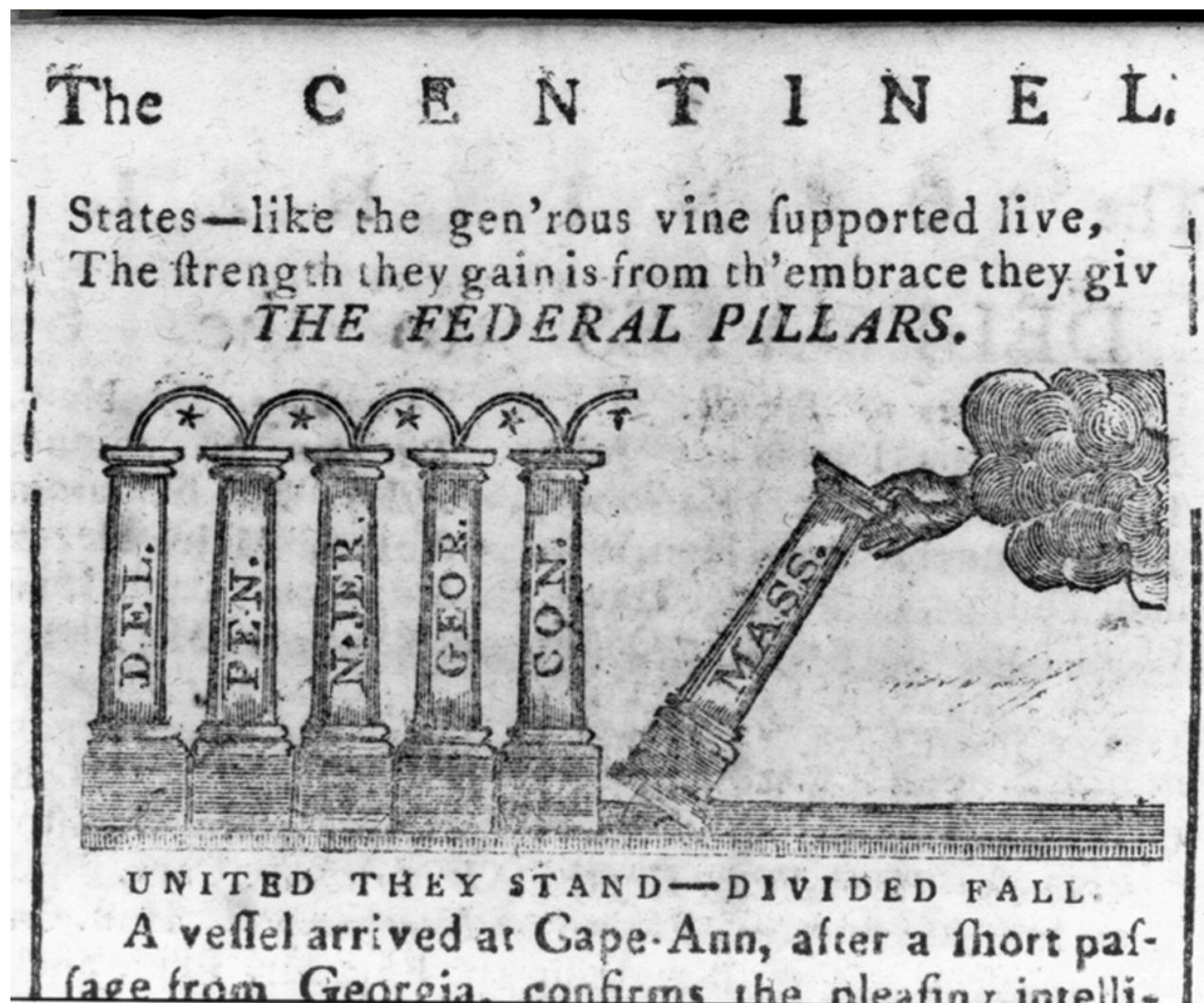




Sample answer: Visual analysis



Source 9.4 'The Federal Pillars', published in *The Massachusetts Centinel*, 16 January 1788

a Identify two features from the depiction that suggest that there was popular support for the image.

- 1 *The fact that what is ostensibly the hand of God is erecting the pillars for the superstructure is showing that even God supports the Constitution.*
- 2 *That there are already some states that have had their pillars erected; ergo, they are in support of the Constitution, with more on the way.*

b Identify two features from the depiction that refer to the conflict that was involved in the Ratification Debates of 1787.

- 1 *The very fact that the erection of a federal government in America requires God's assistance is indicative that it will require metaphysical 'godly' power to achieve this mighty feat.*
- 2 *That only six out of 13 states have accepted the Constitution (five erect, and one being erected).*



c Using the image and your own knowledge discuss the difficulties and problems that arose during the Ratification debates.

The Founding Fathers, who, in the words of Jefferson, were ‘demigods’, achieved an amazing feat by creating a governing system for a newly formed nation that was in the midst of many problems that could have prevented its ratification in any states. The image demonstrates the magnitude of this feat by the very fact that not only do the ‘The Federal Pillars’ appear to be sturdy, but they are being erected by God Himself. The very point of the Revolution was to fight against tyranny for ‘liberty’; however, what many Anti-Federalists saw was – as Patrick Henry said – ‘a rat’; the rat being the fears that the Constitution would wrest all power away from the states and place it in the hands of America’s nouveau riche: the gentry. This lack of a power balance was coupled with laws written into the Constitution on who may vote and be elected, namely, the aforementioned gentry of America, and this was seen by such enlightenment figures as being little more than a new aristocracy of Washington’s and Franklin’s replacing the Hutchinson’s of yore. Furthermore, there was the issue of human rights to be settled. While the Constitution itself did not contain a strict set of Amendments that would protect the basic rights of her citizens, the Anti-Federalists pushed for a Bill of Rights to be included in the Constitution, ensuring that the people of America would have God-given rights to protect their liberty and newfound ‘freedom’. As for rights, there was the deliberate lack of rights for minorities such as the Indians – who were to be dispossessed to put it lightly – to appease the land speculators, and also the Southern states whose fears of losing their rights to hold slaves (the ‘right’ they came into the war for) would be taken away. Finally, the civil unrest among the people, epitomised by Shays’ Rebellion, and the Army’s attempt to overthrow the government, compounded the fears of what some called ‘counter-revolutions’ taking place, and a Civil War breaking out to decide on the rights and amend America’s problems that would eventually be settled in the Constitution.

d Evaluate the extent this image accurately portrays the nature of the Ratification Debates between 1787 and 1789. Refer to other historians’ views.

The Ratification Debates of 1787–88 are best surmised by looking at the airing of grievances by the Anti-Federalists. The extract does give the reader a period, first-hand perspective on what a person from Massachusetts would have thought of this new ‘Federal Superstructure’, aided by God himself in its inception, which is, as right-wing historians like Bailyn, Wood and Brogan would point out, ‘unquestionably the crowning act of the Revolution’. Just look at what it accomplished: it appeased the gentry class land owners by giving them the freedom to expand, it created a unified currency system,



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wiped the debts of those who fought for their country and, most of all, put in place what is ostensibly a democratic government that unified the states and is still effective today. While these views are very much valid, it is important to look at more moderate and left-wing historians' views that more or less mirror the arguments by Anti-Federalists during the Debates. For example, the freedom to 'expand' America came at a great cost to a people, as Zinn would point out – where this extract and highly right-wing historians would overlook the very fact that America's 'Manifest Destiny' and expansion west came at the cost of the destruction of the Native American culture and people by way of massacres. Not only that, but the rights that were given to the people only extended so far as white Americans with money. As Countryman and Zinn point out, these 'minority' classes (African-Americans, First Nations Americans, the poor – mostly former soldiers – and women) were given no rights at all, with First Nations Americans being not even considered and any slaves deemed to be 3/5ths a human. While the belief that the Founding Fathers were 'demigods' is more or less an exaggeration of the magnitude of their accomplishment, the very fact that, as Wood points out, these men were 'kept in check' by the Anti-Federalists is important to note. So while Washington would free his slaves at death, and would wipe the debts of all former soldiers, there were still others like Henry who despite his preaching that all men are created equal, would hold slaves until his death. However, the arguments for the people's rights to be included in a document did bear seed and would appease them in the form of the Constitution's brother document, the Bill of Rights. Even the unification of the states had many questioning the true democratic nature of the government. As Countryman states, it could 'not be considered Democratic even by today's standards' and that even though it 'had the people's consent, it did not have their involvement'. This of course referred to the fears that the states, who previously held all the power and required a unanimous vote under the Articles of Confederation for a law to be passed, feared that the government would become an American aristocracy club where only those who met the Property Qualification of \$20 000 could have any say, and even though it did for many years remain like this, the undeniable fact that America required, and is still functioning under the same system today, is a testament to the achievement of the creation of America's 'Federal Superstructure' in the Constitution.
