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The Madisons: The Lives and Legacies of James and Dolley Madison

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of the Madisons and important people, places, and events in their lives.
*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

They seemed like an unusual couple from the outset. In 1794, Dolley Payne Todd was widely considered one of Philadelphia's most beautiful belles, an exceptionally pretty 26 year old with dark curly hair, dancing blue eyes, and as much elegance and social grace as anyone. James Madison was 17 years older, already balding, and just barely five feet tall, unattractive physical characteristics in a modern sense. Yet the two were incredibly close and devoted to each other, and the two of them went on to instrumentally shape the course of American history as one of America's greatest Founding Fathers and First Ladies respectively.
The Founding Fathers have become so revered by Americans in the last 200 years that the “Father of the Constitution” himself is often overlooked among the rest of the pantheon. Today James Madison’s legacy mostly pales in comparison to the likes of George Washington, Ben Franklin and his closest colleague, Thomas Jefferson, but Madison’s list of important accomplishments is monumental.
A lifelong statesman, Madison was the youngest delegate at the Continental Congress from 1780-83, and at 36 he was one of the youngest men who headed to Philadelphia for the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Despite his age, he was the Convention’s most influential thinker, and the man most responsible for the final draft of the U.S. Constitution. Along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, Madison was one of the most persuasive advocates for ratifying the Constitution, authoring some of the most famous Federalist Papers, and he drafted the Bill of Rights that was later added to the Constitution. But his work was far from done; along with Thomas Jefferson, Madison was one of the founders and ideological cornerstones of the Democratic-Republican Party that guided the young nation in the first 30 years of the 19th century. That included his own presidency, in which he oversaw the War of 1812.
After the Constitution was ratified, George Washington went about setting all the precedents for the role of the presidency, establishing traditions like the Cabinet. But the role of being the First Lady of the United States was defined by the wife of the 4th president. James Madison may have been the Father of the Constitution, but his wife Dolley all but defined the responsibilities and customs of being the president’s wife. Dolley had served as an informal First Lady for the widowed Thomas Jefferson, but when her husband entered the White House in 1809, Dolley went about furnishing the White House to such an extent that much of the style and items she chose were still in place when Mary Todd Lincoln became the First Lady in 1861. Dolley also became a folk hero of sorts and the center of a colorful legend that had her saving Gilbert Stuart’s priceless painting of George Washington just ahead of the British while her husband was denigrated for fleeing as Washington D.C. was burned. In addition to being instrumental in decorating the White House, Dolley Madison also set the standard for the First Lady’s traditional hosting and ceremonial duties. .
The Madisons chronicles the amazing lives and legacies of James and Dolley, as well as the legends surrounding them. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events in their lives, you will learn about James and Dolley Madison like you never have before, in no time at all.

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