Warnings About Power

Compare two objections to the proposed Constitution

USG.C.2.2.B "Compare concerns regarding centralized government as expressed in essays by the Anti-Federalists, such as Brutus Essay 1 and George Mason's concerns regarding the lack of a national bill of rights."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that states a fear both men shared, then circle one distinct concern for Brutus and one for Mason and label them B and M.

Two Warnings in 1787

1. In 1787, delegates in Philadelphia proposed a new Constitution with a stronger national government. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress had struggled to raise money and carry out national decisions. Supporters of the new plan argued that stronger federal powers could help the country act together. Opponents asked a different question: What might happen if those powers were misused? Two opponents, the writer known as Brutus and Virginia delegate George Mason, raised concerns about centralized power. They did not make exactly the same argument. Brutus focused on the reach of national authority across a large republic, while Mason pressed for written protections of individual rights.

2. In his first essay, published in 1787, Brutus warned that the proposed government could gain power at the expense of the states. He pointed to the Necessary and Proper Clause and the Supremacy Clause: federal laws made under the Constitution would prevail over conflicting state laws. He feared that federal officials might interpret their powers broadly, leaving states with too little authority. Brutus also argued that a republic spread over such a large territory would make it hard for representatives to know the people they served. For him, distant lawmakers and expanding federal power threatened the people's ability to control their government.

3. Mason had helped draft Virginia's Declaration of Rights, and he refused to sign the proposed Constitution in 1787. He objected that it contained no national bill of rights. State declarations of rights, he argued, could not adequately protect people from a national government acting under its own powers. Without explicit protections, he feared, federal officials could threaten freedoms such as freedom of the press and trial by jury. Both Mason and Brutus distrusted unchecked national power. Yet their main warnings differed: Brutus stressed the size of the republic and the growth of federal authority, while Mason emphasized the absence of a written list protecting rights against the national government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Brutus and Mason each explain why states might not be able to check national power?

2. Which man's warning depended on the size of the republic? How did the other man's main warning differ?

3. Suppose federal officials tried to silence a newspaper that criticized them. How could each man's warning help explain the danger?

4. What fear did Brutus and Mason share, and what safeguard did Mason seek that Brutus did not emphasize in this passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a federal policy that could have worried both men in 1787. In four sentences, describe the policy, explain how Brutus might object, explain how Mason might object, and identify the concern they would share.

ANSWER KEY

Warnings About Power

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that states a fear both men shared, then circle one distinct concern for Brutus and one for Mason and label them B and M. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Brutus and Mason each explain why states might not be able to check national power?	**Brutus feared that broadly interpreted federal powers and federal law's priority over conflicting state laws would weaken state authority. Mason argued that state declarations of rights could not protect people from a national government using its own powers.**
2	Which man's warning depended on the size of the republic? How did the other man's main warning differ?	**Brutus argued that representatives in a large republic would be too distant to know the people they served. Mason focused on the lack of a national bill of rights.**
3	Suppose federal officials tried to silence a newspaper that criticized them. How could each man's warning help explain the danger?	**Brutus warned that distant officials might expand national power while remaining hard for people to control. Mason warned that, without a national bill of rights, freedom of the press lacked explicit protection.**
4	What fear did Brutus and Mason share, and what safeguard did Mason seek that Brutus did not emphasize in this passage?	**Both feared unchecked national power. Mason sought a national bill of rights with explicit protections for individual freedoms.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A national law forbids public meetings that protest federal taxes. Brutus might warn that distant lawmakers would not understand the communities affected by the ban. Mason might object that the Constitution lacks a national bill of rights explicitly protecting people's freedom to gather. Both would fear that unchecked national power could make it harder for people to challenge their government.

Accept answers that accurately distinguish Brutus's concerns about broad federal power and distant representation from Mason's concern about the lack of a national bill of rights. For Part 3, the invented policy must be plausible, and each objection must connect to a different concern in the passage.