Q84 – Why were the Federalist Papers important?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Federalist Papers helped citizens understand the ideas behind the proposed Constitution. This collection of essays persuasively advocated ratification of the Constitution – and rebutted its many opponents.

The opponents included some patriots who had led the fight for independence – from Boston's Samuel Adams to Virginia's Patrick Henry. Henry said the Constitution was "a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain."
These anti-Federalists thought the new Constitution ceded too much power to the federal government. They feared the strange, new presidency would just replace one king with another. And they wanted a written guarantee of the rights of the people.
The proponents of the Constitution fired back with the Federalist Papers. This war of words was waged in the mass medium of the day: newspapers. In some respects the Anti-Federalists were farsighted. The federal government has taken over many functions once left to the states. And it plays a role in our daily lives – something undreamed of by even the most ardent Federalists.
Nonetheless, we study the Federalist Papers for good reason: They reveal the reasons behind the words of the greatest secular document ever written – the Constitution of the United States.