

THE JAMES MADISON

Review of Books

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AMERICA



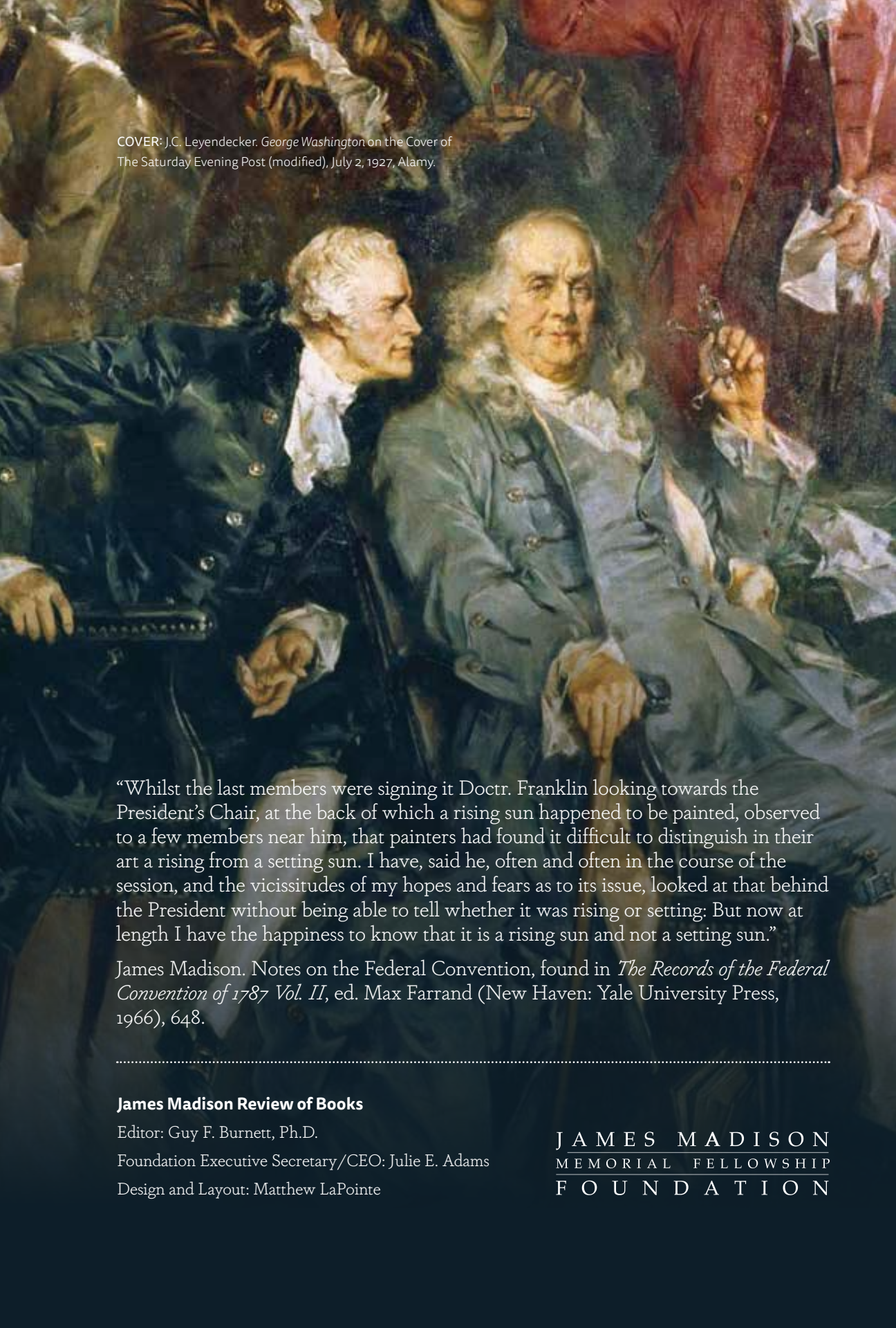
Freedom 250

Lois MacMillan, '23
Jeffrey Rosen's
Classical Virtue

Kevin Hardwick, Ph.D.
*The Path of Constitutional
Interpretation*

Anthony Cherry, '13
Andrew Browning's
Revolutionary Education

AN ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE JAMES MADISON MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP FOUNDATION



COVER: J.C. Leyendecker. *George Washington on the Cover of The Saturday Evening Post* (modified), July 2, 1927, Alamy.

“Whilst the last members were signing it Doctr. Franklin looking towards the President’s Chair, at the back of which a rising sun happened to be painted, observed to a few members near him, that painters had found it difficult to distinguish in their art a rising from a setting sun. I have, said he, often and often in the course of the session, and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the President without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting: But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising sun and not a setting sun.”

James Madison. Notes on the Federal Convention, found in *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 Vol. II*, ed. Max Farrand (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 648.

James Madison Review of Books

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From the Editor

Two hundred fifty years of the great American experiment. It's hard to believe that our nation is now two-and-a-half centuries old. It can be argued that the resurgence of democracy throughout the world began in 1776 with the birth of the United States of America. Democratic governance existed before then, of course, but the American experiment is different. It is not simply democratic governance—but democratic governance with *inalienable* natural rights. Rights untouchable from decisions made by the majority will. Democracy is based on the simple principle that the wisdom of the masses is correct most of the time. However, the Founders, who were keen students of political history, understood that there are limits to the decisions of the majority.

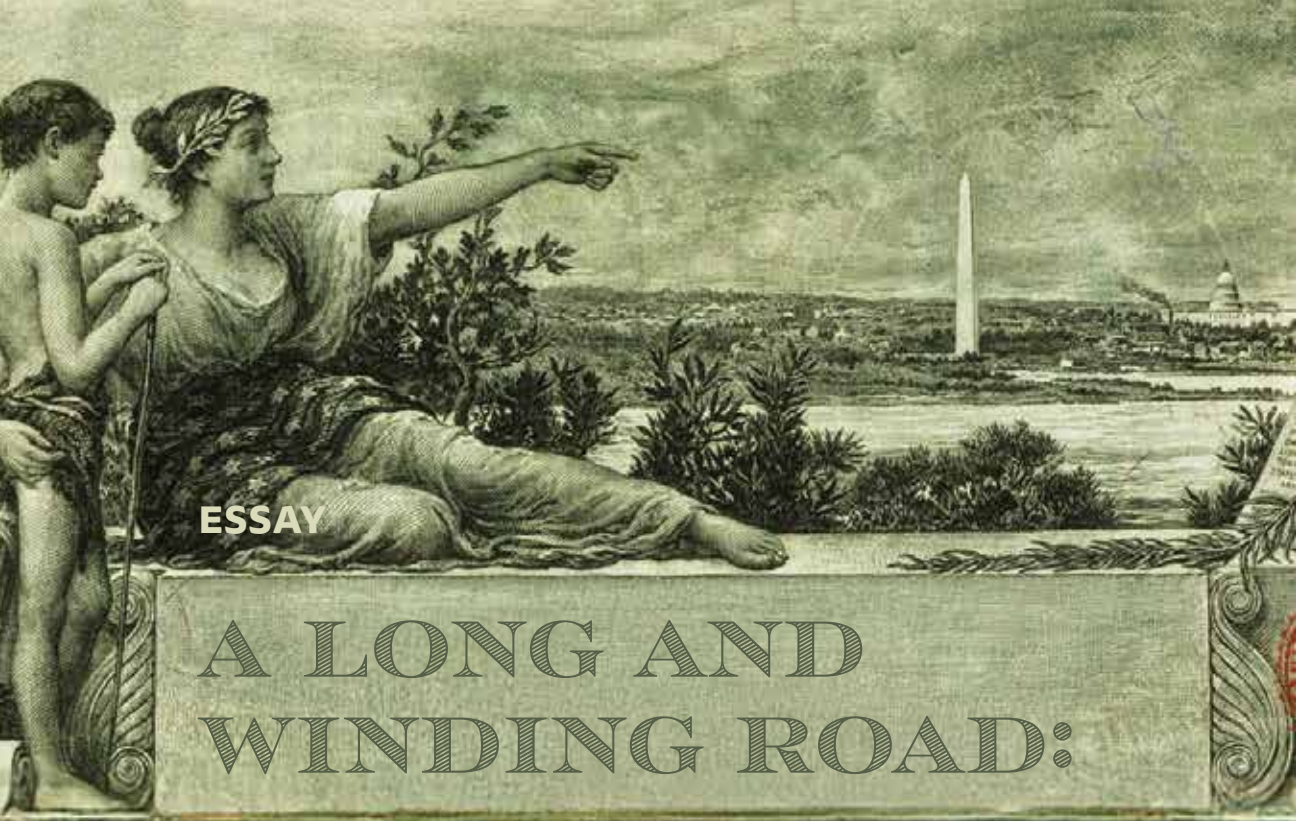
Through education, the Founders understood the problems inherent in democracy—a political system they had never *fully* experienced. They had experience with local and colonial legislatures but always under the watchful eye of the king and his governors. The king was always supposed to be the ultimate protector of natural rights, but when challenged, he showed the colonists that their rights were *alienable* after all.

Education and experience combined to teach the Founders that no matter who governed—whether one person or the majority—natural rights would be vulnerable. In the Declaration of Independence, the Founders laid out the “self-evident truths” that would guide the new republic—including inalienable natural rights promised to all people. One of the most important roles in the life of our republic is handing down, from one generation to the next, the knowledge of those natural rights and democratic principles. Our nation's teachers have done this, and continue to do this, every year stretching back to the founding of our nation.

The James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation is truly excited to be part of the celebration for America's 250th anniversary. We are grateful for the continued success of our nation and its people, and we believe that all Americans should be grateful for the important work that our nation's history, government, and civics teachers accomplish each year for our nation's young citizens.



Guy F. Burnett, Ph.D.
Chief of Staff and Academics



ESSAY

A LONG AND WINDING ROAD:

THE RATIFICATION OF THE 27TH AMENDMENT

By Terrence K. Wright

Everyone, it seems, with an interest in American History, Constitutional law, government, politics, civil liberties, and a wide variety of other arenas, looks to The Constitution as the foundation upon which both American Government and Americans' freedoms stand. It is a document that has stood the test of time. In the 238 years since its ratification, Americans have seen the need to amend the Constitution just twenty-seven times. And the first Ten Amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, came within the first five years of the Constitution's original ratification.

Scholars, jurists, politicians, interest groups, and a whole host of others involved in the great American experiment all seem to have focused on particular amendments which they believe stand above all others in terms of significance.

For free speech advocates, it is the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech; freedom of religion; freedom of the press; and freedom of assembly that makes America stand as a beacon of liberty. For others, it is the Second Amendment, guaranteeing the right to bear arms, which enables Americans to defend their individual liberties in the face of all threats, both foreign and domestic,

ABOVE: U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing Series 1896 \$1 Large-Size Silver Certificate, Educational Series, 1896, Wikimedia Commons.

that secures our freedoms. Still others treasure the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments extending the rights of citizenship to all Americans regardless of race and for ensuring that no individual state can deny the rights and freedoms, truly making the United States “One Nation.”

My favorite Amendment is the Twenty-Seventh Amendment, not because it is the most significant, nor because of its content (although I do like the idea), but because of the history behind its ratification. It is a testament, not just to the staying power of the Constitution, but to the tenacity of a young person who proved that one individual can, indeed, make a difference.

On June 8, 1789, just after the Constitution took effect, James Madison introduced a series of amendments. After differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives were resolved in a conference committee, the House passed a package of twelve amendments on September 24, 1789, with the Senate following suit the next day. Ten of those twelve amendments make up what we know today as the Bill of Rights and were ratified by the required three-quarters of the states in just over two years.

Another amendment, which would have laid out a formula for apportioning the House of Representatives, was never able to attain ratification by the required three-fourths of the states.

The remaining amendment—now known as the Twenty-Seventh Amendment—stated simply that:

No law, varying the compensation for the services of the Senators and Representatives, shall take effect, until an election of Representatives shall have intervened.¹

Put simply, Members of Congress cannot receive a pay raise which they have voted for themselves until the beginning of the next Congress, by which point the entire House of Representatives and a third of the Senate will have faced the voters.

Compared to some of the other amendments, such as the civil liberties amendments, which he introduced at the time, Madison did not view the amendment as a high priority. He said at the time that “I do not believe this [the power to set their

own compensation] is a power which, in the ordinary course of government, is likely to be abused. Perhaps of all the powers granted it is the least likely to abuse; but there is a seeming impropriety in leaving [a] set of men without control to put their hands into the public coffers to take out money to put in their pockets; there is a seeming indecorum in such power...I have gone, therefore so far as to fix it that no law varying the compensation shall operate until there is a change in the Legislature, in which case it cannot be for the particular benefit of those of those who are concerned in determining the value of the service.”²

In effect, while Madison thought it unlikely that members of Congress would abuse the power to set their own compensation, he thought it unseemly to give them the unchecked power to do so. At the same time, he thought that to give the setting of Congressional compensation to the Executive would be to give the President too much leverage over the Legislature. While leaving the compensation question in the hands of Congress, this amendment would provide a level of accountability.

Seven states (Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, Vermont, and Virginia) ratified the Amendment within three years. Kentucky followed on June 27, 1792, just twenty-six days after joining the Union. The momentum then stalled, and the proposed amendment was largely forgotten for 80 years.

But on March 3, 1873, the final day of the 42nd Congress, and the day before President Ulysses S. Grant was to be sworn in for a second term, Congress passed – and the President signed – what was officially known as the “Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Expenses Act”, which, among other things, doubled the Presidential Salary from \$25,000 to \$50,000, and raised Congressional Salaries by fifty percent.

There was justification for the pay raise. Congressional salaries had been stagnant for more than twenty years, and the President’s salary had not been raised since George Washington’s presidency. But the timing of the Act, plus the fact that the salary increases were made retroactive to the beginning of the 42nd Congress and paid out in a lump sum, caused public outcry and a firestorm

And, further, that the States whose Legislatures have so ratified the said proposed Amendment constitute the requisite three fourths of the whole number of States in the United States.

NOW, Therefore, be it known that I, Don W. Wilson, Archivist of the United States, by virtue and in pursuance of Section 106b, Title 1 of the United States Code, do hereby certify that the aforesaid Amendment has been ratified, to all intents and purposes, as a part of the Constitution of the United States.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF,

I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the National Archives and Records Administration to be affixed.

DONE at the City of Washington this 18th day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two.



DON W. WILSON

The foregoing was signed in my presence on this 18 day of May, 1992.

Martha L. G...

Official signed copy of the 27th Amendment by
Don W. Wilson, Archivist of the United States, 1992,
National Archives and Records Administration.

in the press, earning it the moniker, “The Salary Grab Act.”³

Among those outraged was Ohio State Senator Samuel Knox, a Republican representing Belmont and Harrison counties. To protest Congress’ action, Knox reached back into history and submitted Madison’s amendment for ratification by the Ohio legislature. A legislative committee considered the question of whether there was a time limit for state ratification of a Constitutional amendment but was divided on the issue and left the matter unresolved. Ten days after Knox introduced his resolution, Ohio became the eighth state to ratify the amendment. By then, there were 37 states in the Union, leaving the amendment twenty states short of the required three-quarters.

A few Members of Congress returned the bonuses or donated them to charity, but the outrage in part cost the Republicans 96 seats in the House of Representatives in the next election, making Congress competitive for the first time since The Civil War. However, once again, Madison’s amendment faded back into obscurity.

It remained there for more than a century until 1978 when, in the wake of another pay raise the previous year which increased Congressional salaries by nearly 29%, from \$44,600 to \$57,500, the Wyoming Legislature ratified the Amendment. But their action went unnoticed by almost everyone, even some folks who needed to know. More about that later.

Enter Gregory Watson.

Watson was a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin in 1982. Assigned to write a term paper for an American Government class discussing a governmental process, he came across the amendment in a book about constitutional amendments that had never been ratified. As he read through the amendment, he noticed that the language contained no timeline for ratification. From his reading, Watson believed that the Amendment was still open for ratification. He made his case in the paper he submitted for his government class. A teaching assistant gave the paper a “C.” Watson believed he deserved better, and appealed the grade to the professor, who looked it over, and in a subsequent session of the class tossed it back at him, with the curt comment, “No change.”⁴

That got Gregory Watson’s dander up.

With \$6,000 of his own money, he began a letter writing campaign to members of Congress, as well as to legislatures in states that had never ratified the amendment. Senator William Cohen, a Republican from Maine, forwarded the letter to friends in the Maine Legislature, and in March 1983, a bi-partisan group of four legislators introduced a resolution of ratification into both the Maine Senate and House of Representatives. The resolution was passed on April 27, 1983, making Maine the tenth state to ratify the Amendment over an 184-year period. Maine’s actions, combined with Watson’s letter-writing campaign, sparked a resurgence of interest in the amendment in state houses across the country. Colorado followed with ratification a year later.⁵

Gregory Watson published an article in *State Legislatures* magazine about his crusade to get Madison’s amendment ratified. It did not mention Wyoming as among the states which had ratified it.⁶

Wyoming State Representative Mark Sorenson of Big Horn, saw the article, and pointed out that Wyoming had indeed ratified the amendment back in 1978. As it turned out, word of the state’s ratification had somehow never reached the National Archives in Washington, the federal agency responsible for keeping track of such things. Thus apprised, the Archives added Wyoming to the list of states that had ratified the amendment.

As momentum for the Amendment began to build, questions began to arise about the legality of ratification nearly two centuries after its introduction. The Supreme Court of the United States had dealt with similar questions only twice.

In 1921, in *Dillon v. Gloss*, the Court held, in a case related to a bootlegger arrested that day after the 18th Amendment (Prohibition) went into effect, that Congress had the right to require that a Constitutional amendment be ratified within a reasonable designated period of time. The 18th Amendment marked the first time that Congress had included such a clause into the language of an amendment. Dillon argued that the law should be declared invalid because, by including the time frame for ratification, Congress had exceeded its constitutional authority. Associate Justice Willis Van DeVanter, writing for the Court, said that

**The professor...
tossed it back at him,
with the curt com-
ment, "No change."**

Congress had considered the question during the debate over the Amendment and determined that some limitation was warranted. Article V of the Constitution, Van DeVanter noted, "invested Congress with a wide range of power in proposing amendments."⁷

Madison's amendment, passed a hundred and thirty years earlier, contained no such provision. In 1939, in *Coleman v. Miller*, a Kansas case regarding the state's ratification of the proposed Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution, Chief Justice Hughes, writing for a divided Court, wrote that the amendment process was a political question that should be left to Congress. In 1924 (after the decision in *Dillon*) Congress had not chosen to include a deadline for ratification, the amendment was still open to ratification.⁸

The Court ruled that Congress can set a deadline for ratification of a Constitutional Amendment if it so chooses, but it does not have to. If it chooses not to do so, there is no deadline.

With the attention garnered by Gregory Watson's campaign for ratification, and by Maine and Colorado's recent assent, momentum for the ratification of Madison's Amendment rapidly picked up steam. South Dakota; New Hampshire (which had rejected the Amendment in 1790); Arizona; Tennessee; and Oklahoma all ratified in 1985. New Mexico; Arizona; and Utah followed in 1986. By the end of the decade, thirty-two states, just six short of the necessary three-quarters had ratified the amendment.⁹

By early 1992, there was some jockeying by several states to be the state that put the amendment over the top. On May 5, 1992, Missouri adopted the amendment, followed later in the day by Alabama which, as was determined later, gave the amendment the requisite approval by 38, or three-quarters of the states. Michigan, which ratified two days later (just before New Jersey later that same day), was originally thought to have been the 38th state to ratify, until much later when someone discovered that Kentucky had, ratified back in 1792, shortly after achieving statehood.

Perhaps caught up in the popularity of the amendment, Kentucky would again ratify the Amendment in 1996, notwithstanding its original ratification a hundred and four years earlier.

On May 18, 1992, the Archivist of the United States, Don W. Wilson, signed the document certifying that James Madison's amendment was now a part of the Constitution and ordering that it be published in the *Federal Register*.¹⁰

But the story wasn't quite over.

There was an immediate and sharp response to Wilson's action. Some Congressional leaders, including Speaker of the House Tom Foley, called for a legal challenge to the ratification. West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd, who supported the amendment but who prided himself on being a guardian of Congressional authority, nonetheless said that Wilson had deviated from "historic tradition" by not waiting for Congress to weigh in on the validity of the long ratification process.¹¹

Wilson's reply was that in certifying the amendment, he was simply doing what Congress had by statute authorized. The United States Code states that when the National Archives and Records Administration receives notice that a proposed amendment to the Constitution has been ratified by the required three-quarters of the States it shall certify and publish the amendment as a part of the Constitution.

In any event, the handwriting was on the wall. On May 20, both Houses of Congress (the Senate unanimously and the House of Representatives by a vote of 414 to 3) adopted resolutions stating that James Madison's amendment had—albeit over the course of two centuries—met the requirements for valid ratification.¹²

Because I was working as a staff member of the United States Senate, I remember the events of that day and had a sense of pride being immersed in the long road of American history begun by the Founding Fathers more than two centuries before.

The legacy of the story goes so much further than that. It demonstrates that American history

is an ongoing process, even if sometimes a lengthy one. It reminds us that the principles and processes of government established by the Constitution will far outlive any individual lawmaker, no matter how prestigious he or she may be. Most importantly, the story of Gregory Watson and his campaign for ratification proves that one committed individual can, indeed, make a difference.



Terrence K. Wright was appointed and served on the James Madison Foundation's Board of Trustees from 2023-2025, including as its Vice-Chair from 2024-2025. He was also appointed and currently serves as a member of the Delaware Heritage Commission. Prior to these appointments, he served on the staff of Sen. Joseph R. Biden for 27 years.

Endnotes

1 U.S. Constitution Amendment XXVII (1992).
2 James Madison. *The Papers of James Madison* (Vol. 12) (Hobson, Rutland, Rachal, Sisson eds.), (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 207.
3 Lee J. Alston, Jeffrey A. Jenkins, Tomas Nonnemacher. "Who Should Govern Congress? Access to Power and the Salary Grab of 1873," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 66, no. 3 (September 2006): 674-706. A variety of newspapers in 1873 referred to the bill as the "The Salary Grab Act". Among these were the *Richmond Independent Telegram*, Richmond, Indiana, June 27, 1873; the *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, Michigan, November 23, 1873; the *Bloomington Pantagraph*, Bloomington, Illinois, December 5, 1873; the *Grange Advance*, Red Wing Minnesota, December 17, 1873; and the *Daily Morning Times*, Santa Barbara, California, December 28, 1873.
4 Scott Bomboy, "How a College Term Paper Led to a Constitutional Amendment," *Constitution Daily Blog*, May 7, 2024, accessed October 10, 2025, <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/how-a-c-grade-college-term-paper-led-to-a-constitutional-amendment>.
5 The Pay Amendment, 138th Congress, 2nd Session, Congressional Record 138, pt. 9: 11656.

6 Bomboy 2024.
7 *Dillon v. Gloss*, 256 U.S. 368 (1921).
8 *Coleman v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 433 (1939). The passage of the *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938*, which included regulations on child labor, diminished interest in the Child Labor Amendment, but it is still out there and could become law upon ratification by ten additional states.
9 *Congressional Record* 138, 11656 (*supra*).
10 "Certification of Twenty-seventh Amendment," *Federal Register* 57, National Archives and Records Administration: 21187. May 19, 1992, accessed October 10, 2025, https://s3.amazonaws.com/INARAprodstorage/opastorage/live/13/5123/1512313/content/arcmedia/Public_Vaults/09616.pdf.
11 Ruth Ann Strickland. "The Twenty-Seventh Amendment and Constitutional Change by Stealth," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec. 1993), 716-722.
12 Sen. Chuck Grassley, "The 27th Amendment to the Constitution," 138th Congress, 2nd Session, *Congressional Record* 138, pt. 9: 11860-1.

BOOK REVIEW

Remembering the Revolution

By Anna Bartel, '21 (CA)



The Memory of '76: The Revolution in American History

By Michael D. Hattem

Yale University Press
352 pgs. | \$15

There are few books as fitting for the nation's upcoming Semiquincentennial as *The Memory of '76: The Revolution in American History*. Author Michael D. Hattem sets himself to the task of tracing how the popular memory of the American Revolution, which he describes as a “contested” national origin myth, has changed over time. He is not the first to examine the subject of Revolutionary memory: the bicentennial ushered in the publication of Michael Kammen's classic history *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* in 1978. In that book, Kammen argued that the Revolution's memory in popular culture had been largely unified around a conservative interpretation of the Revolution as a coming-of-age narrative. However, Hattem claims that the Revolution's memory has been multi-faceted throughout American history and “has often done more to divide Americans than to unite them.”

Since the nation's founding, Americans have defined the Revolution in diverse and contradictory ways, either to justify change or to maintain the status quo. Contemporary politics and culture have shaped the Revolution's varying interpretations over time, with long-running political and cultural divisions playing a central role in the development of a divided memory. Hattem writes from a broad perspective, examining how a multiplicity of interpretations of the nation's founding were created by different people at different times, from the 1790s to the present.

Hattem devotes a large portion of the book to tracking the development of Conservative and Progressive narratives of the Revolution over the course of the Twentieth Century. Conservatives responded to the rapid changes of modern life in the early 1900s by establishing a narrative in which the Founding Fathers' words were accepted as sacred and unassailable. The American Revolution became an unquestioned success story and the maintenance of its principles became paramount in academic and political discourse. To bolster their opposition to government intervention and structural changes, proponents of the Conservative narrative emphasized the concept of limited government as the first principle of the Revolution. Groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution communicated



John Lewis Krimmel, *Independence Day Celebration in Centre Square, Philadelphia (4 July 1819)*, Wikimedia Commons.

this version of the Revolution to immigrants in hopes of combating the influence of Progressivism and Bolshevism. As World War II ended, Hattem notes that proponents emphasized individual liberty and free enterprise, as Founding principles which defined the United States in opposition to communism and the Soviet Union.

Hattem critiques the Conservative interpretation of the Revolution as narrowly focused, unquestioning, and politically-expedient. However, it is worth noting, as Hattem does, that its more celebratory narrative lends itself to popular adaptation which has served the American public. In the wake of Pearl Harbor, Esther Forbes wrote the young-adult novel *Johnny Tremain*, which tells the story of a young colonist who joins the Patriot cause, with the hope that its heroic narrative would bolster the courage of young men going to war. Forbes' novel became an overnight success and was later adapted into a Disney film. As *Johnny Tremain* illustrates, the celebratory nature of the Conservative narrative has played a crucial role in fostering hope in the American experiment in times of crisis.

Meanwhile, in their bid to upend the status

quo, proponents of the Progressive narrative took to criticizing the Founders in the early Twentieth Century. Progressive historians such as Carl Becker and Charles Beard played a significant role in demystifying the Founders by centering their analysis of the Revolution on class conflict and economic self-interest. Progressives concluded that the Constitution, in its then-current form, was insufficient for the modern age and needed to be reimagined as a living document in need of alteration. Hattem makes the case for the continued influence of Beard later in his book when discussing the 1619 Project. Beard argues that the Founders created a constitution shaped by self-interest, but Nikole Hannah-Jones takes the idea further, contending that the colonists' rebellion was motivated by a desire to protect slavery.

At times, Hattem's portrayal of the Progressive narrative emphasizes its tendency towards being overtly critical and politically self-serving due to its focus on the Revolution's shortcomings and calls for systemic change. However, Hattem illustrates how this interpretation has been highly constructive in American history. For example, he highlights the work of marginalized groups



Max Rosenthal, *Interior View of Independence Hall, Philadelphia* (Stayman & Brother, 1856), Library of Congress.

that pushed back against an exclusive narrative of the Revolution focused solely on one group. The arrival of the bicentennial created a cultural moment in which Black Americans and indigenous people were able to bring public awareness to the contributions of diverse groups during the Revolutionary Era, establishing a more inclusive narrative. Hattem illustrates this point with the example of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, whose pioneering work was responsible for the establishment of the Black Heritage Trail and numerous NPS sites related to Black history. The work of such organizations made room for all Americans to see themselves as part of the nation's story.

Americans' memory of the Revolution has changed over time and so too have the materials by which that memory has been expressed. Hattem's greatest strength lies in the diversity of his source material, which includes everything from eulogies to voluntary associations, artwork, musicals, and popular protests. For example, Hattem tells the story of the Freedom Train - a train-based exhibit of historic documents, including the Declaration, the Bill of Rights, and the Emancipation Proclamation, which conducted a whistle-stop tour of the U.S. from 1947-1949, reaching over 35 million Americans. Organized in response to a postwar economic recession, ongoing racial conflict, and the menace of communist infiltration, the



Freedom Train provided Americans across the nation with a collective experience. Attorney General Tom C. Clark believed it would improve citizenship by “reawakening in our people their profound faith in the American historical heritage,” while President Truman hoped it would inspire greater commitment to the nation’s egalitarian principles. This commitment to equality was reflected when cities such as Memphis and Birmingham were bypassed by the Freedom Train when their local governments refused to suspend segregation for the exhibit. In an unexpected turn of events, *The Birmingham World* reported that a large share of the crowd at the Tuscaloosa tour stop was the black and white citizens of Birmingham, who had travelled beyond their city and willingly stood in line together to see the Freedom Train. This cultural moment both supports Hattem’s thesis that the Revolution’s popular memory divided Americans, as well as challenges it, by demonstrating moments of unexpected unity.

As the nation approaches its 250th anniversary, Hattem finds it hard to conceive of a unified, national celebration occurring within the divided reality of the present. While the use of the word division might sound negative, Hattem does not intend it to be. Division implies difference, and while it can denote hostility, continued division over the memory of the American Revolution more accurately implies multiple perspectives, narrative complexity, and continued relevance, all of which are positive accomplishments for historical memory. The “long-standing political tradition,” as Hattem describes it, of arguing over the Revolution means that generations of Americans have found its narrative compelling enough to continue debating its meaning. Hattem illustrates how the popular memory of the Revolution has been the central medium by which Americans have defined their understanding of the present and their “definitions of what it means to be an American.” In these ways, Americans have been unified in their desire to identify with the nation’s origin story. It should come as no surprise that a diverse population living in a democratic society would develop different definitions of the past, present, and future. What is immensely hopeful is that two hundred and fifty years later, the popular memory of the American Revolution continues to provide a common language for the long-standing debate over what America means and what it means to be an American.

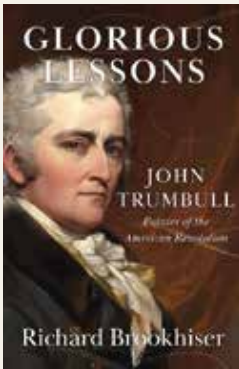


Anna Bartel is the 2021 James Madison Fellow for California. She has the honor of teaching U.S. History and advising the History Day Club at Reedley High School in Reedley, CA.

BOOK REVIEW

Framing the Revolution

By Rob Schulte, '19 (NJ)



**Glorious Lessons: John Trumbull,
Painter of the American Revolution**

By Richard Brookhiser

Yale University Press

276 pgs. | \$12

Around 1760 in Lebanon, Connecticut, a young boy with an eye for drawing and art frolicked with his sisters upstairs in their home. While the house featured a large and ornate front staircase, the children played near a steep back stairwell. The young boy fell down the stairs, was knocked out cold, and awoke with a large bruise over his left eye. Years later, his peers would mock his impaired vision, asking if his paintings had been done by a one-eyed man. What they did not know was that this young artist had gone blind in one eye—whether from the fall or from some other ailment remains unclear. Yet his determination to paint would overcome his disability on the path to becoming one of the most influential painters of the young nation.

The story of this monocular artist is the subject of a new biography by bestselling author Richard Brookhiser titled *Glorious Lessons: John Trumbull, Painter of the American Revolution*. Brookhiser has long been a biographer of the early American period, with works on Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and multiple studies of George Washington. In all his works, he excels at breaking down larger-than-life historical figures into people and stories that connect with a modern audience.

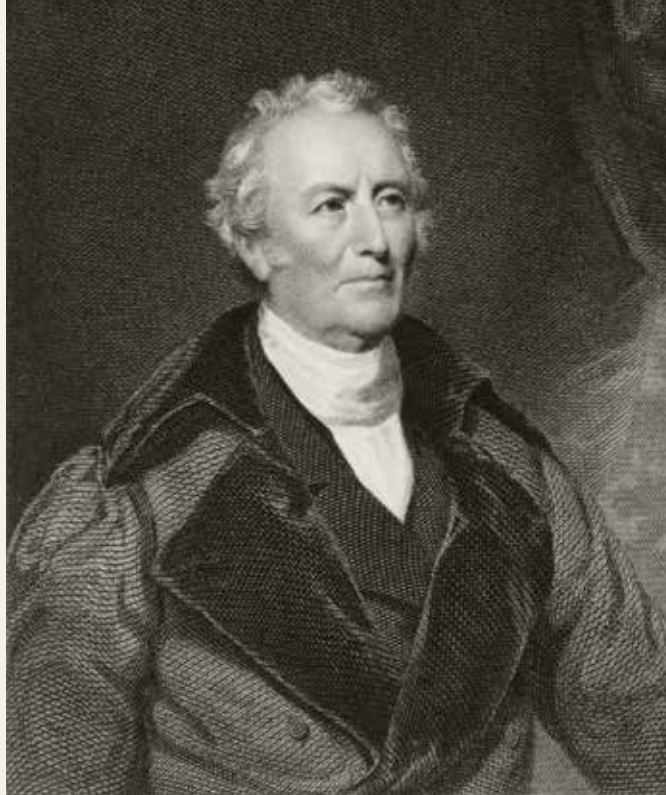
In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Trumbull once wrote that his art was intended “to give the present and future sons of oppression and misfortune, such glorious lessons of their rights, and of the spirit with which they should assert and support them.” The artist understood that while his subjects would eventually be gone, their actions would live on through his paintings. Trumbull is one of the earliest historians of the young nation—his art intended to tell a connected story, not unlike a modern graphic novel. His work was also surprisingly inclusive for its time, offering respectful portrayals of women, Native Americans, African Americans, and even enemies in ways often overlooked in period art.

Trumbull was raised in the crucible of the Revolution. His father was a Patriot governor of Connecticut who never quite approved of his son’s chosen career. However, his young son pursued his passion for art, choosing to attend Harvard University to be closer to painters like John Singleton Copley. When the war broke out, he put his

talents to use, drawing some of the first maps of British defensive fortifications around Boston. Later, his design skills helped strengthen the defenses at Ticonderoga, but delays in promotion led other contemporaries to jump above him in seniority. Only 21 years old, the sensitive Trumbull demanded Congress adjust the date of his last promotion and place him ahead of the others in seniority, but he already knew their response. Trumbull was already on his way home to Connecticut before Congress would receive, and ultimately refuse, his request.

With the Revolution ongoing, the art scene in the United States was in disarray, becoming a dead end for Trumbull. His friend John Temple, who had been trying to reconcile the warring nations, suggested an audacious plan for Trumbull to continue his art training in London. With his military service over and his art training stalled, Trumbull made his way across the Atlantic. With a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin in hand, he began his study under Benjamin West, the acclaimed American-born artist who had moved across the sea before the conflict. There he met Gilbert Stuart, whose friendship endured even after his jest that Trumbull's works looked like those of a one-eyed man (Stuart did not yet know about the disability). Trumbull learned to use art to tell a story under West's tutelage, and he was particularly influenced by West's *The Death of General Wolfe*. Trumbull realized that art could expand into a larger narrative and capture a larger story surrounding an event. He was falsely accused of spying during the war and was put in prison until he eventually secured his release in 1780. He used his newfound freedom to tour France and draw inspiration from the Louvre (then serving as the home of the royal art collection). He finally returned to America with a newfound sense of narrative storytelling that would define his career and the most important paintings of the new nation.

Brookhiser's study opens a window into the little-known history of artistic evolution in the Revolutionary Era. While the book is not strictly art history, it reveals some of the earliest efforts to record the American Revolution. Brookhiser understands the value of art in shaping narrative, adding nuance and purpose to his artist whose



Asher Brown Durand. *John Trumbull* (engraving on paper), 1833, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

work might otherwise only be seen superficially.

For example, Brookhiser highlights not only Washington as one of Trumbull's subjects, but also the stories Washington told during sittings. While painting *General George Washington at Trenton*, we hear how Washington described the dangers of the battle and his desperation in those ten crucial days, stories that the artist believed viewers would later absorb through his paintings.

Brookhiser includes a number of illustrations and a full color insert which is invaluable when paired with his narrative descriptions. Although the author's criticism of Trumbull's art can occasionally be too heavy-handed, it is useful to remember that the criticism is not from an art historian, but from someone who captures the sense of the general viewing public. Trumbull intended his work for a wide audience, accessible to the average viewer, and Brookhiser's descriptions capture this motivation. I frequently found myself searching for high resolution images of the art (suggested links are included in the bibliography) to consider the meaning behind the brushstrokes and how they contribute to the detail of the larger story being told. I found Trumbull's paintings filled with detailed layers that told even more fascinating sto-



John Trumbull. *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777*, ca. 1787-1831, Yale University.





John Trumbull. *The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775* (oil on canvas), 1786, Yale University.

ries than at first glance.

Trumbull's most important contributions to art and history came later in life. In the years following the War of 1812 and the burning of the capital, he saw an opportunity to display his art on a grand scale in the Capitol Rotunda. He believed the Revolution was one of the most important events in world history and his four great canvases—*The Declaration of Independence*, *The Surrender of General Burgoyne*, *The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis*, and *General George Washington Resigning His Commission*—would eventually adorn the Rotunda's walls. Copies of all his works were placed at Yale University to be “exhibited forever for the benefit of poor students.” Both the Rotunda and the Yale collection would serve as models of permanent lessons for future generations on liberty and self-rule available to thousands of visitors each year.

The artist described his historic storytelling as

“the greatest motive I had...of painting has been my wish for commemorating the great events of our country's revolution...to preserve and diffuse the memory of the noblest series of actions which have ever presented themselves in the history of man.”

His paintings were the self-described “glorious lessons” he wrote to Jefferson about. Revolutionary art is, and was, a lesson for future generations to resist oppression and the yoke of tyranny for all time. Other artists painted the faces of history, but Trumbull told the full story with a clear lesson on how to keep the incredible gifts of the nation's founding that he had experienced firsthand. Brookhiser paints a balanced picture of Trumbull who helped America define their Revolution in the moment. Trumbull emerges not just as the “Painter of the Revolution,” but as its first visual historian. Brookhiser's study of Trumbull reminds us that defending our nation's liberty is as relevant today as when Trumbull painted the struggle for it almost 250 years ago.



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BOOK REVIEW

Seven Pillars of Wisdom

By Anne Walker, '19 (VA)

If asked to name historically significant Virginians, most people would likely begin with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. A Constitutional scholar—perhaps a Madison Fellow—might add George Mason or Patrick Henry. Legal scholars would quickly point to Chief Justice John Marshall, while political historians might argue that James Monroe deserves more attention, especially given the enduring influence of the Monroe Doctrine on U.S. foreign policy. Each of these men have been the subject of numerous biographies—Washington alone boasts over 900—but no author until now has attempted to examine all seven in a single volume.

In *Seven Virginians: The Men Who Shaped Our Republic*, John Boles takes on this ambitious challenge, aiming to trace the lives and legacies of these founding figures across the tumultuous birth of the American republic. Boles begins in the 1750s with a young George Washington, sent by Governor Dinwiddie to warn the French out of the Ohio River Valley—a moment that not only foreshadows Washington's military career but also his uneasy relationship with British authority. Washington's early frustrations with the British military hierarchy and his denied commission are recounted with clarity, offering a glimpse into the stirrings of his revolutionary spirit.

The book's opening chapter is its most cohesive, as Boles deftly transitions from Washington to Patrick Henry, the fiery young lawyer championing the common folk, and then to a teenage Jefferson enrolling at William and Mary. George Mason closes the chapter with a blistering response to the Stamp Act in the *Virginia Gazette*. It's the last time these men share a chapter, and from here, the narrative splinters.

Boles proceeds chronologically through the Revolution, touching on Dunmore's Indian Wars, the First Continental Congress, and the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. But as the book progresses, the structure shifts from chronological to thematic, and the cohesion begins to fray. The figures rarely intersect, and while Boles offers occasional comparisons—"unlike Patrick Henry, Jefferson was shy, soft-spoken, and known primarily for his learning, analytical skills, and writing ability"—the transitions between subjects can feel



Seven Virginians: The Men Who Shaped Our Republic

By John B. Boles

University of Virginia Press
408 pgs. | \$20



abrupt. By the midpoint, Washington is dead, Mason is denouncing slavery, and Jefferson is quietly maneuvering toward the presidency—all within a few pages.

This thematic approach is a bold choice, and, at times, it works. Boles succeeds in placing each man within his own political and intellectual “world,” allowing readers to see how their ideas evolved in response to the shifting landscape of the early republic. But the trade-off is a loss of narrative momentum. The book’s structure, while innovative, can be disorienting, especially for readers hoping to track the interplay between these figures over time.

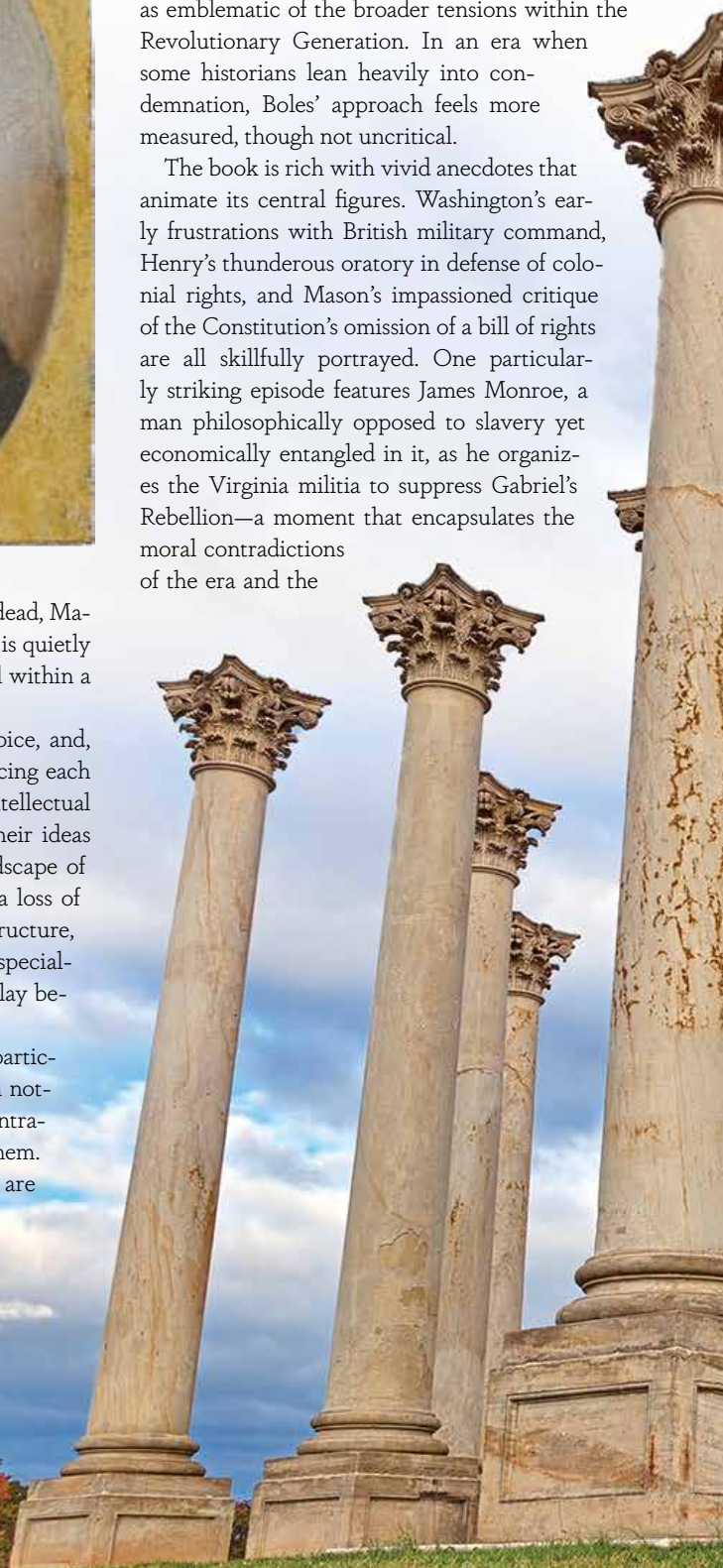
Boles’ apologetics for his subjects—particularly Jefferson and Monroe—are worth noting. Rather than glossing over their contradictions, he attempts to contextualize them. Jefferson’s views on slavery, for instance, are

presented not as moral failings to be excused, but as emblematic of the broader tensions within the Revolutionary Generation. In an era when some historians lean heavily into condemnation, Boles’ approach feels more measured, though not uncritical.

The book is rich with vivid anecdotes that animate its central figures. Washington’s early frustrations with British military command, Henry’s thunderous oratory in defense of colonial rights, and Mason’s impassioned critique of the Constitution’s omission of a bill of rights are all skillfully portrayed. One particularly striking episode features James Monroe, a man philosophically opposed to slavery yet economically entangled in it, as he organizes the Virginia militia to suppress Gabriel’s Rebellion—a moment that encapsulates the moral contradictions of the era and the

ABOVE: John Trumbull. *Thomas Jefferson*, 1788, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

BACKGROUND: Nicholas Raymond. *Capitol Arboretum Columns* (photograph), 2014, Flickr (Nicholas Raymond).



complex legacies of its leaders.

Boles' previous biography, *Jefferson: Architect of American Liberty*, remains the more accomplished work—600 pages of nuanced, deeply researched narrative that captured the complexity of one man's legacy. Seven Virginians, by contrast, condenses seven lives into just over 300 pages. It's a tall order, and at times the compression leaves the reader wanting more depth, more connection, and more sustained engagement with the title figures.

Still, there's

merit here. For readers seeking an accessible introduction to Virginia's founding statesmen, Boles offers a thoughtful, if occasionally uneven, synthesis. His scholarship is evident—forty-two pages of footnotes and bibliography attest to that—and his prose is lucid and engaging. While the book may not deliver revelatory insights into the tangled roots of American liberty, it does provide a valuable framework for understanding how these seven men helped shape the republic—and how their individual visions sometimes clashed, sometimes converged, and always mattered.

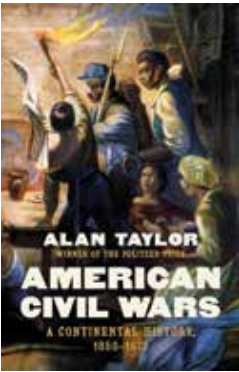


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BOOK REVIEW

A Nation Between Nations

By David M. Chamberlain, '98 (NH)



American Civil Wars: A Continental History, 1850-1873

By Alan Taylor

WW. Norton & Company

534 pgs. | \$21

OPPOSITE: John Calvin Smith. *Map of North America, 1826*, Wikimedia Commons.

The American Civil War is conventionally framed as a rather parochial affair. Apart from perhaps a passing mention of Confederate diplomatic efforts to gain support abroad or to the role that Canada played in harboring runaway slaves, the Civil War is generally understood to be a familial conflict whose course was for the most part unaffected by decisions and developments beyond its own borders. And while historians have produced a vast literature detailing the economic, social, and constitutional transformations wrought by the war within the United States, they have given short shrift to how our sister republics to the north in Canada and to the south in Mexico were shaped by the war. In his sweeping new interpretation of the era, Alan Taylor widens his lens to encompass events across North America in the mid nineteenth century, an approach that allows readers to appreciate that the Civil War was but one part of a larger wave of liberal reform and nation building that swept across the continent.

Taylor is a master stylist adept at using a bird's eye view to sketch the broad trends and impersonal forces playing out across North America. *American Civil Wars* begins with a superb introduction that lays out the social, economic and political conditions that prevailed in the United States, Canada, and Mexico during the antebellum period. Taylor's comparative portrait reveals that distinctive centrifugal forces were at work in all three nations. Mexico's instability was rooted in the profound economic disparity between elite landowners and the peasant class. While Canada was more prosperous and democratically stable than Mexico, it was linguistically and culturally divided between French speaking Catholics and English-speaking Protestants. The United States was unquestionably the economic and demographic powerhouse of the three, but it was riven by an intense regional disagreement over slavery; a dispute that was of great moral and practical concern to its neighbors both of whom had banned slavery.

In the 1990s, Taylor rose to prominence as a historian based on his award-winning local studies of how the egalitarian sentiments unleashed by the American Revolution shaped the lives of people living



Published by
J. DISTURNELL, 103 BROADWAY,
New York,
1850.

on the northern frontier during the early national period. Taylor uses this same microhistorical perspective to great effect in the first three chapters of *American Civil Wars*. By recounting the lives of a handful of figures in tight vignettes, Taylor is able to explain how the histories of the United States, Canada and Mexico were entangled. The lives of the journalist Jane Cazneau, who coined the term manifest destiny, and William Walker, the violent filibuster, are used to show how American expansionism set off alarm bells not just in the northern part of the United States but across North America generally because it was associated with a strategy to expand slavery. Profiles of the extraordinary life of Harriet Tubman and that of the more obscure former slave Josiah Henson are linked to reveal that the massive surge of fugitive slaves to Canada led to increased racism there as well as deep resentment of the United States.

Notwithstanding the international tensions sowed by slavery, Taylor argues that there was one unifying and liberating force developing in North America in the mid-19th century. The cluster of beliefs that are associated with liberalism—equality of opportunity, individual rights, and faith in social mobility—were in the air at the time but also embodied in the lives of the three future transformative leaders of their respective nations. Taylor shows that Abraham Lincoln, John MacDonal, and Benito Juarez were uncannily similar. All three came from modest backgrounds, were largely self-educated, and were committed to a similar ideology of free labor and upward mobility that stood opposed to chattel slavery.

After delighting readers with his revealing biographical sketches, Taylor's work changes smoothly into a more traditional kind of narrative history. In lively and engaging prose, he tells the story of the political crisis of the 1850s, recounts the military history of the war, and describes the contemporaneous and connected events that occurred in Mexico and Canada. In many respects, Taylor's story will be familiar to most history teachers and students of the period and yet he still has a few surprises in store for his readers. He includes, to cite just one example, an important discussion how a series of fires in Dallas and surrounding towns in the summer of 1860 set off a

wave of vigilante violence directed at slaves and whites suspected of corrupting them with abolitionist sentiments. The dozens of people tortured and executed in Texas that summer underscore how fearful the south had become of a looming slave rebellion, especially in the aftermath of John Brown's recent failed attack on Harper's Ferry.

One of the most illuminating and relevant take-aways from *American Civil Wars* is that Canadian fears of being swallowed by their powerful southern neighbor run deep in their history. Readers looking to understand the ongoing uproar north of the border concerning President Trump's comments about incorporating Canada as the 51st state would do well to consider the historical context that Taylor provides. In Taylor's telling, Canadians were troubled by Jacksonian democracy, viewing it as vulgar, violent, deeply racist and a threat to their own sovereignty. As much as Canada abhorred slavery, American expansionism was seen as a more pressing concern and thus southern independence was thought to promise an improvement to their security situation vis-a-vis the United States. American readers may be jarred to learn that after the defeat of the Union army at the First Battle of Bull Run, Canadian Conservatives celebrated by throwing a champagne party thinking that the dissolution of the United States was at hand.

While the Civil War fundamentally reshaped the United States institutionally and socially by strengthening the power of the federal government and through the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments, its impact on Canada was even more profound. One of the central claims of Taylor's book is that the American Civil War accelerated the formation of a unified, cohesive Canadian nation state. Prior to 1867, only modern-day Ontario and Quebec were joined together as a polity. The far north was run by the Hudson Bay Company, the maritimes were each a separate colony and so was British Columbia far to the west on the shores of the Pacific. After the guns fell silent at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865, Canada grew alarmed that a newly unified United States would seek to expand north. These fears only intensified after William Henry Seward purchased Alaska and made aggressive comments that British

Columbia would soon be acquired as well. Only four months later, the maritimes joined the Canadian union followed by Manitoba and British Columbia in a few short years. Modern Canada, in Taylor's provocative analysis, was birthed by fears of resurgent American expansionism.

American Civil Wars makes a persuasive case that Mexico was more directly connected to events within the United States in the mid nineteenth century than is often acknowledged. For starters, Taylor urges readers to jettison the notion that flows of fugitive slaves travelled exclusively north through the Underground Railroad. In fact, approximately 4,000 slaves absconded from Texas in the 1850s and set up free communities along the border with the United States, which were often violently raided by Texas Rangers. Taylor also points out that Mexico's role in helping the Confederacy circumvent the Union naval blockade has also not been adequately recognized. The port of Matamoros played a key role in exporting southern cotton and was also a key entrepot for the munitions the South so desperately needed to continue the war. Finally, just as Canadian nationhood was an outgrowth of Union victory and the reunification of the United States, Taylor presents a compelling argument that Napoleon III's abandonment of his puppet, Emperor Maximilian, and the ascendancy of Benito Juarez's liberal democracy was primarily driven by concerns that the United States would seek to topple Mexico's monarchy now that its own civil war had concluded.

At the start of the American Civil War, the United States was sandwiched between a patchwork of British colonies to the north and a weak state to the south soon to fall prey to French interventionism. But by the early 1870s, there were three well defined nation-states in North America. Not only were their borders durably fixed but each nation was committed to a common vision of liberalism. While the United States had dismantled its reactionary slave system, Canada had evolved from being a British dependency and Mexico had cast off foreign rule. The American Civil War was the crucible that created these three modern states, a story that is often lost when one focuses exclusively on the events which occurred in the United States in the 1860s. Alan Taylor's *American Civil Wars* is a groundbreaking transnational history of North America that makes an enormous contribution to our understanding of nineteenth century state formation and thus deserves a wide readership.

The American Civil War was the crucible that created these three modern states.

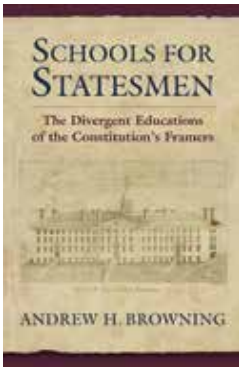


David M. Chamberlain is a 1998 James Madison Fellow for New Hampshire. He currently teaches at Burke Mountain Academy in Vermont. His essays have appeared in Appalachia, Environmental Practice, and the History Teacher, and he also contributes to The History News Network and RealClearHistory.

BOOK REVIEW

Revolutionary Education Reform

By Anthony Cherry, '13 (OK)



Schools for Statesmen: The Divergent Educations of the Constitution's Framers

By Andrew H. Browning

University Press of Kansas
368 pgs. | \$54

OPPOSITE: Missmaretaphotography.
Books from the 18th century (2016),
Wikimedia Commons.

To best understand the ideological crucible of the 1787 Constitutional Convention, one should not look at legislative halls first, but instead at the classrooms and libraries that forged the minds and the visions of the Founding Fathers. In his book, *Schools for Statesmen*, Andrew H. Browning provides an intellectual history that presents a penetrating question that reframes the historiography of the Founding Era: “What had prepared the rising generations of Madison, Hamilton, and Morris to take the lead in designing the lasting frame of government?”

The varied educational backgrounds of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention were not incidental footnotes but were instead critically formative forces that shaped their “understanding of politics, government, and human nature” which in turn guided their ideological positions and ultimately the Constitution. Browning’s historiographical contribution is significant, asserting that the Convention was not, as Gordon Wood and other historians have argued, a counterrevolution by conservative elites, but rather an assembly steered by forward-thinking innovators who had emerged from the distinct educational revolution beginning in the middle of the 18th century. Browning’s scholarship challenges classic histories of the Founding Fathers by focusing on the cultural and intellectual forces that shaped their thinking. As a leading historian of the early American Republic, Browning is distinguished by his meticulous archival research and innovative use of collective biography. Earning an undergraduate degree (B.A.) in philosophy from Princeton in 1971, he would go on to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia and become an important voice in historical debates over the Framers’ motivations by connecting the history of education to political science, demonstrating how their intellectual formation directly influenced the foundational debates and ultimate framework of American governance.

Browning’s sophisticated methodological approach proves to be one of the book’s greatest attributes. Moving beyond traditional political biographies, Browning provides a clever example of collective biography combined with meticulous historical analysis. He carefully reconstructs the divergent intellectual world of the 18th century



by drawing on a wealth of primary and secondary sources. He scrutinizes not only the formal curricula of historic institutions like the College of New Jersey (Princeton), Harvard, and William and Mary, but also the informal networks of private tutors, mentors, and the pervasive role of self-education. This focus is crucial, as Browning notes, because “In the 18th century, the lack of college education was no obstacle to leadership, social, political, or intellectual.” Furthermore, “For the less privileged like the young Franklin, Sherman, and a few, there was the possibility of self-education.” This unique and comprehensive approach allows Browning to delineate the intellectual chasm between the “Old Guard” and the “Revolutionary” schools. He identifies subtle yet significant intellectual affinities, including the disproportionate influence of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy on many of the younger delegates such as James Wilson and Alexander Hamilton.

Browning is able to draw new and provocative correlations between education and ideology by categorizing the Framers based on their intellectual pedigrees and shedding light on the fissures that defined the Convention’s most contentious debates. For instance, he skillfully demonstrates how delegates such as Edmond Randolph and James Blair were steeped in a more classical, Latin-based curriculum from schools like Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary and often held more conservative views on governance than those exposed to more modern, Scottish-influenced moral philosophy. Browning offers a striking counter narrative to other historical interpretations by presenting the Constitution as the product of “forward-thinking innovators” from schools such as Princeton, King’s College, the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh. He highlights a more granular layer to this discourse by tracing the direct institutional sources of that intellectual rad-

icalism to specific colleges and intellectual mentors. Furthermore, the inclusion of the self-taught Framers, such as George Washington and George Mason, adds a crucial layer of nuance, and an extension of the pervasive intellectual culture of the era. Indeed, as Browning argues, “American education was encountering a wave of change.”

As with any study that seeks to establish a single primary cause for a complex historical outcome, many questions still remain for further debate. Browning makes a strong case for the profound influence of education, but the reader is left to ponder the balance of outside influences, such as socioeconomic status, regional loyalties, and prior political experience. Does education fully account for the myriad of pressures on the Framers? This question is ultimately left to the reader. Nevertheless, Browning’s publication is a notable contribution to the historiographies of education history and the Founding Era, offering a fresh and deeply researched perspective that will undoubtedly serve as a foundation for future scholarship. It is an essential read for scholars of early American history, political science, and the history of education. It reminds us that to understand the birth of a nation, we must first understand its teachers and their lessons.



Anthony Cherry is a 2013 James Madison Fellow for Oklahoma and currently teaches at Holland Hall Episcopal School in Tulsa. He has published history articles, curated public forums, and developed innovative curriculum. He is also a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, where he is focused on the American West, War and Society, and Oklahoma’s Progressive Era.



ESSAY

Interpreting the Founding

By Kevin R. Hardwick, Ph.D.

Introduction

This essay originated in an effort to update and expand the excellent historiographic essay by John Patrick Coby described in *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: Constructing the American Republic* (2017) and Alan Gibson's frameworks established in his comprehensive studies *Interpreting the Founding: Guide to the Enduring Debates over the Origins and Foundations of the American Republic* (2006) and *Understanding the Founding: The Crucial Questions* (2007). The persistent reinterpretation of the founding of the United States that Coby and Gibson trace reflects both the complexity of the historical record and the enduring relevance of these events to contemporary American political culture. The founders themselves drew from multiple intellectual traditions while confronting practical governance challenges. They articulated universal principles while compromising with oppressive institutions. They created innovative constitutional structures that empowered some Americans while marginalizing others. No single interpretive framework has proven adequate to capture this multifaceted reality.

This essay traces the major schools of interpretation that have shaped our understanding of the founding from the late nineteenth century through the first decade of the 21st century. It examines how successive generations of historians—equipped with new methodologies, questions, and previously neglected sources—have challenged, shifted away from, and refined earlier interpretations.

BACKGROUND: Thomas Sully, *James Madison*, 1809, National Portrait Gallery.

OPPOSITE: *The foundation of American government*, Henry Hintermeister (1925).



Nineteenth-Century Constitutional Reverence

Constitutional historiography before the 20th century reflected the broader cultural reverence for the founding generation that characterized late nineteenth-century America. This scholarship, while diverse in its explanatory frameworks, shared a fundamental assumption: the Constitution represented the culmination of human wisdom in governmental design. John Fiske's *The Critical Period of American History* (1888) exemplified this celebratory approach, treating the Constitution as the triumphant resolution of what he termed the nation's most perilous moment. Writing from an evolutionary perspective influenced by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, Fiske portrayed the United States as the climax of a historical evolution toward a free democratic republic—a providential culmination of human political development. George Bancroft's *History of the Formation of the United States Constitution* (1884) offered an even more explicitly providential interpretation, attributing American constitutional success to divine guidance over the founders' deliberations. Both historians, despite their different explanatory frameworks, shared the conviction that American constitutional development represented something unprecedented and exceptional in human history.

The so-called "Teutonic school" offered a secular but equally celebratory interpretation, tracing American constitutional principles to ancient Germanic traditions of limited government. Leading British proponents like Edward Augustus Freeman and William Stubbs argued that the

"germ" of democratic institutions lay in ancient Teutonic forests, from where Anglo-Saxon tribes carried these political capacities to England and eventually to America. In the United States, Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins University became the chief advocate of this "germ theory of politics," training a generation of American historians including Woodrow Wilson and Frederick Jackson Turner in the belief that American institutions derived from inherited Anglo-Saxon racial characteristics. Adams' monographs such as *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns* (1881) and *Norman Conquest in America* (1883) systematically traced colonial American political institutions to their supposed Teutonic origins. The Norman Conquest of 1066 had temporarily interrupted this tradition, but centuries of English constitutional development culminating in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had restored Germanic principles of representative government and individual rights. American colonists inherited this tradition and perfected it through constitutional innovation.

This historiographical tradition was deeply intertwined with late nineteenth-century concepts of American exceptionalism. Whether through divine providence (Bancroft), evolutionary destiny (Fiske), or racial inheritance (the Teutonic school), these historians portrayed the American founding as the inevitable culmination of humanity's political development. This exceptionalist framework assumed that American institutions

were not merely different from but superior to European precedents, representing a fundamental breakthrough in the science of government that would eventually be adopted worldwide.

A third historiographical approach emerged alongside these interpretive schools, one that eschewed grand theoretical frameworks in favor of systematic documentary compilation. Rather than representing a single coherent tradition, the practitioners of this “documentary methodology” or “empirical constitutionalism” worked across different institutional settings and time periods, united by their faith that primary sources, properly organized and presented, would reveal historical truth without the need for interpretive overlay. This tradition reached new heights with Max Farrand’s *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (1911) which gathered all available documentary records of the Constitutional Convention into a comprehensive edition. Farrand’s work made it easier to study the workings of the convention by bringing together Madison’s notes, official proceedings, letters by participants, and the various constitutional plans proposed during the Convention.

Charles Warren’s *The Making of the Constitution* (1928) continued this approach by employing a comprehensive, day-by-day reconstruction of the Convention proceedings based on a careful analysis of primary sources. Warren’s meticulous empirical research, drawing extensively from Madison’s notes and other contemporary records, established new standards for documentary rigor while maintaining traditional assumptions about the Framers’ disinterested statesmanship. His work demonstrated documentary methodology as an alternative to theoretical interpretation and continues to be valued by scholars for its factual contributions to understanding the Convention’s deliberations.

What unified this documentary methodology was a shared faith that the sources themselves, properly organized and presented, would reveal historical truth without the need for grand interpretive frameworks. These scholars believed that careful compilation and analysis of primary documents—letters, diaries, official records, contemporary pamphlets—could produce objective historical knowledge that transcended partisan

or ideological bias. Their empirical constitutionalism represented a reaction against both the florid romanticism of earlier narrative historians and represented an American adaptation of Rankean historical methodology emerging from German universities. By focusing on what the founders actually wrote and said, rather than on abstract principles or grand historical forces, they sought to establish constitutional history on a foundation of irrefutable documentary evidence.

For all of their pathbreaking approaches into the origins of the Constitution, all three approaches shared a crucial blind spot: they ignored or minimized conflict during the Founding Era. Economic divisions, sectional tensions, and partisan disagreements either disappeared from their narratives or were dismissed as temporary aberrations that wise statesmanship quickly resolved. The Constitution emerged as the product of consensus rather than compromise, of philosophical agreement rather than political bargaining.

Progressive Era Constitutional History

Charles Austin Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) fundamentally transformed constitutional historiography by challenging both the conclusions and methodological assumptions of nineteenth-century scholarship. Published during the apex of Progressive reform under Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, the work appeared when institutional and economic transformation dominated the political agenda. Progressive intellectuals increasingly questioned whether the venerated Constitution facilitated or hindered democratic progress, creating receptive conditions for Beard’s radical reinterpretation.

Beard belonged to a broader Progressive historical movement that was fundamentally reinterpreting American history through the lens of social and economic conflict. Carl Becker’s *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (1909) argued that economic interests shaped Revolutionary-era politics and that the Revolution involved not only the question of home rule but also “who should rule at home.” His later work, *The Declaration of Independence: A*

Study in the History of Political Ideas (1922), subjected the celebrated document to critical analysis by claiming that its “self-evident truths” reflected specific eighteenth-century philosophical assumptions rather than natural law. J. Franklin Jameson’s *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (1926) extended the Progressive approach by examining how the Revolution transformed American society through changes in land ownership, social structure, and institutional arrangements.

These Progressive historians shared a conviction that class conflict (primarily economic and social forces), rather than ideas or individual statesmanship, drove historical change, and that conventional patriotic narratives obscured fundamental conflicts of interest that shaped American development. Progressive approaches to the Constitution drew on German philosopher Karl Marx’s historical materialism. Beard and others argued that economic interests fundamentally shaped political institutions, making ideas epiphenomena of underlying material conditions. Previous historians had treated Founding-era speeches, pamphlets, and constitutional debates as reliable windows into the Founders’ motivations, the Progressive approach argued that these sources revealed only surface rationalizations masking deeper economic calculations.

The empirical research supporting Beard’s thesis proved equally innovative. Through an investigation of Treasury Department records and biographical research into delegates’ financial holdings, Beard attached a quantitative approach to understanding political motivation. His data revealed clear correlations between constitutional support and ownership of “personalty,” that is, liquid wealth including government securities, commercial investments, and manufacturing interests, while opposition came primarily from holders of “realty,” consisting mainly of land and agricultural property. The Constitution’s enhancement of federal powers over taxation, interstate commerce, and contract enforcement directly served personalty interests while constraining state governments’ ability to interfere with creditor rights.

Beard’s analysis extended beyond the Convention itself to encompass the ratification process.

His research suggested that property qualifications, geographic isolation, and limited information restricted meaningful participation to perhaps one-fifth of the adult male population. Rather than reflecting popular sovereignty, constitutional ratification represented the successful mobilization of a narrow economic elite against broader democratic opposition. This finding challenged fundamental assumptions about American democratic legitimacy while providing historical precedent for Progressive Era critiques of concentrated wealth’s political influence.

The broader implications of Beard’s approach revolutionized historical methodology. His economic determinism suggested that impersonal material forces, not individual agency or ideological commitment, drove historical change. Political leaders became unconscious representatives of class interests rather than independent moral actors. The founders’ philosophical arguments about representation, federalism, and individual rights dissolved into strategic positions designed to advance particular economic configurations. This methodological shift encouraged historians to examine the material circumstances of historical actors rather than accepting their stated motivations, while directing attention toward previously neglected social and economic structures.

Beard’s theoretical framework also carried implicit democratic implications. By revealing the Constitution as a product of elite manipulation rather than popular consensus, his work suggested that constitutional reverence served contemporary conservative interests. If the founding documents reflected eighteenth-century class conflict rather than timeless wisdom, then democratic majorities possessed legitimate authority to modify or replace inherited institutional arrangements. This logic provided historical justification for Progressive Era reforms while challenging constitutional originalism’s claims to democratic legitimacy.

Cold War Liberalism and the Republican Challenge

Beard’s interpretation dominated constitutional scholarship for nearly four decades before facing

refutation in the 1950s. Robert Brown's *Charles Beard and the Constitution* (1956) and Forrest McDonald's *We the People* (1958) attempted to demolish Beard's thesis through superior empirical research. They demonstrated that his statistical methods were crude, his categories of personalty and realty artificially rigid, and his data on voting participation inaccurate. Most damaging, they showed that some realty interests (particularly southern slaveholders) supported the Constitution, while some personalty interests (including certain securities holders) opposed it. McDonald's *E Pluribus Unum: The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790* (1965) extended this empirical revision by providing a comprehensive narrative of the Founding Period that emphasized political contingency and practical statecraft over economic determinism.

Not all scholars abandoned the Progressive interpretation, however. Merrill Jensen offered a more sophisticated defense of Progressive themes in *The Articles of Confederation* (1940) and *The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789* (1950). Jensen challenged the Fiske-inspired narrative that the 1780s constituted a 'critical period' of governmental failure requiring constitutional rescue. Instead, he argued that the Articles successfully governed the new nation through military victory and post-war recovery, and that state governments proved responsive to popular will. The Constitution, in Jensen's interpretation, represented not the culmination of the Revolution but a conservative counter-revolution—an effort by nationalist elites to constrain the democratic achievements embodied in the state governments.

Historians of this era also developed an alternative framework that emphasized ideological rather than economic unity among Americans. This "consensus school," led by Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), argued that shared commitment to Lockean liberalism explained both American political development and the Founding Era specifically. Unlike European societies with entrenched aristocracies and permanent underclasses, America's social homogeneity produced intellectual conformity around principles of individual liberty, limited government, and

market economics. This social uniformity created what Hartz called a "singular unphilosophical" political culture. Americans, Hartz argued, rarely questioned their shared liberal assumptions because they encountered no serious alternatives.

Edmund S. Morgan's *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89* (1956) exemplified the consensus approach through a clear, interpretive narrative that portrayed the Revolution and Founding as a relatively unified movement. Morgan presented the constitutional debates as philosophical disagreements among Americans who shared fundamental commitments to limited government and popular sovereignty, minimizing conflicts of interest and class divisions in favor of ideological coherence.

By the 1960s, the consensus interpretation had made Lockean liberalism the dominant framework for understanding the American Founding. Historians like Hartz, Richard Hofstadter, and Daniel Boorstin had successfully argued that Americans shared a unified intellectual tradition rooted in John Locke's political philosophy. The Lockean consensus appeared to explain American exceptionalism: unlike Europeans, Americans had avoided class conflict and ideological divisions because they all subscribed to the same liberal principles from the colonial period forward. The interpretation seemed to account for both the Revolution (Americans defending Lockean rights against British tyranny) and the Constitution (Americans implementing Lockean government based on consent and separation of powers).

In the mid-1960s, skeptical researchers began questioning whether Locke actually shaped American political thought as extensively as was suggested. They scoured the private libraries of prominent Americans, bookseller catalogues, institutional libraries, and library companies to determine how frequently books by Locke were part of collections. Other scholars conducted citation counts, supposing that cited authors provided a truer indication of comprehension and influence than theoretical assumptions. The results showed that while Locke was an important source, he probably was not the most important, and he certainly had competitors.

Topping the list of challengers to Locke were eighteenth-century English Whig authors of the

oppositional Country-republican tradition. Caroline Robbins first revealed their significance in *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (1959). Bernard Bailyn identified them as sources for American revolutionary thought, alongside classical writers, English common lawyers, Puritans, and Enlightenment thinkers, in his masterpiece *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967). Gordon Wood extended the analysis from the Revolution to the Constitution in his monumental *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969), seeing the former as republican and the latter as liberal and Lockean.

J.G.A. Pocock then provided a comprehensive framework in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). Pocock traced a continuous intellectual tradition with roots in ancient political philosophy. This tradition had been recovered during the Italian Renaissance and transplanted to England during the English Civil War and Commonwealth years of the mid-seventeenth century. Though neglected and compromised in the eighteenth century by Hanoverian policies, colonial Americans adopted it in their resistance to English oppression. Scholars gave this tradition various names: classical republicanism, civic humanism, Neo-Harringtonianism (after James Harrington), radical Whiggism, or Country republicanism.

This republican tradition held that civic virtue in the people was the ultimate guarantor of liberty, both private and public. Republican theorists argued that the aggrandizing tendencies of government put liberty at risk, especially when power was concentrated in one place, but that tyranny could be averted if sovereignty were divided and the balance of power were carefully maintained. Furthermore, they believed that corruption could be forestalled by frequent returns to first principles and founding experiences. Republican historians argued that this tradition stood in contrast to liberal theory, which placed rights before duties, excused and encouraged individual acquisitiveness, and relied on institutions to check corruption and vice. According to this interpretation, the republican tradition emphasized civic equality and political participation rather than individual economic pursuits. The republican thesis attract-

ed historians because it offered a more complex and nuanced understanding of eighteenth-century political thought than either economic determinism or liberal consensus had provided.

While the republican interpretation revealed the complexity of eighteenth-century political thought, some observers drew broader implications from this scholarship. Critics suggested that by emphasizing civic virtue and participatory government, these republican-tradition historians were implicitly questioning the adequacy of liberal constitutionalism in their own era. However, leading republican historians like Bailyn and Wood were primarily engaged in intellectual history rather than contemporary political critique. Their goal was to recover forgotten dimensions of eighteenth-century thought, not to argue that the Constitution was fundamentally flawed or antidemocratic. The equation of their work with earlier Progressive critics like James Allen Smith, who had explicitly attacked the Constitution as undemocratic in *The Spirit of American Government* (1907), misrepresented the nature of their scholarly enterprise. Unlike Progressive historians who sought to debunk constitutional mythology for contemporary political purposes, republican historians aimed to understand the full range of political ideas available to the founding generation.

Meanwhile, political theorists working in approaches influenced by classical political philosophy developed their own interpretation of the Constitution's design. Martin Diamond argued in a series of essays, reprinted in *As Far as Republican Principles Will Admit* (1992), that the Constitution, as explained in the Federalist Papers, represented a sophisticated attempt to make democracy workable by moderating its potential excesses. Paul Eidelberg elaborated on this theme in *The Philosophy of the American Constitution* (1968) and *A Discourse on Statesmanship* (1974), applying Aristotelian regime analysis to argue that the Framers consciously incorporated mixed government principles to balance democratic and aristocratic elements. These scholars approached the Constitution as political theorists rather than historians, seeking to understand its enduring principles of constitutional design rather than trace the historical development of eighteenth-century ideas.

Their work represented a different intellectual project from the republican historians, focused on normative questions about good government rather than empirical questions about intellectual influence.

Building on the republican interpretation, several scholars extended this analysis into the early national period. Lance Banning's *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* (1978), Drew McCoy's *The Elusive Republic* (1980), and Stanley Elkins and Erik McKittrick's *The Age of Federalism* (1993) argued that party conflicts in the 1790s could best be understood through republican categories such as liberty versus power, virtue versus corruption, and agriculture versus commerce. These scholars contended that the analytical frameworks of Country-republican thought proved more useful for understanding early party politics than traditional Lockean concepts like natural rights and social contract theory.

Multiple Traditions

By the 1980s, the republican synthesis had achieved considerable influence, but its very success invited closer scrutiny. Critics began to question whether the stark opposition between republicanism and liberalism accurately reflected the complexity of eighteenth-century political thought. If Beard's economic determinism had been found wanting for reducing ideas to mere reflections of material interest, was the republican school perhaps guilty of a different kind of reductionism—forcing diverse thinkers into overly-rigid categories? Moreover, as scholars examined the primary sources more carefully, the supposed antagonism between republican virtue and liberal individualism began to appear less clear-cut than the synthesis suggested. These concerns set the stage for yet another interpretive shift, one that would seek to reconcile rather than oppose the traditions that earlier scholars had placed in conflict.

Instead of the formula that all liberals became republicans in the nineteenth century, the new idea was that all republicans never ceased being liberals. Three arguments provided the foundation for this neoliberal interpretation.

First, the liberalism that had been set against republicanism was an unlovely caricature of the real thing—all atomism, egoism, and money-mania, very much the product of Marxist critiques of capitalism. This distorted version had little to do with the political economy of the Founders, for whom free trade was an egalitarian alternative to mercantilism and monopolies. Nor did it accurately represent Locke himself, in whom scholars found concern for common goods, human virtue, family, friends, and religion, as demonstrated in Joyce Appleby's *Capitalism and the New Social Order* (1984) and Nathan Tarcov's *Locke's Education for Liberty* (1984).

Second, scholars challenged the narrative of a continuous republican tradition stretching from Aristotle to Machiavelli to English commonwealthmen to American Puritans and patriots. This storyline, which cast liberalism as the outlier and enemy, rested on superficial readings of political philosophy texts. Leo Strauss and his followers offered a different framework that divided Western political thought between ancients and moderns. Ancient republicans envisioned soldier-citizens living in small, agrarian republics, while modern republicans imagined rights-bearing citizens in large, commercial republics. Under this interpretation, both Locke and the American Founding belonged squarely in the modern camp, as argued in Thomas Pangle's *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (1988) and Paul Rahe's *Republics Ancient and Modern* (1992).

Third, scholars argued that the republican school confused practical and theoretical political discourse. Republican historians failed to recognize that English Whigs could adopt oppositional rhetoric—opposing placemen, standing armies, and public debt—for tactical reasons without embracing pre-modern republicanism or seeking to resurrect the ancient polis. The authors of *Cato's Letters* exemplified this pragmatic approach. While diverse intellectual traditions certainly informed the American Founding, Locke's natural-rights philosophy provided the organizing framework that gave coherence to the whole, as Michael Zuckert asserted in *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (1994) and *The Natural Rights Republic* (1996).

Forrest McDonald's *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (1985) offered a different kind of synthesis challenging both the republican synthesis and the neoliberal response by demonstrating the sheer eclecticism of Founding-Era political thought. McDonald systematically traced how the Founders drew on multiple intellectual traditions simultaneously: common law, Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, classical political theory, English constitutional history, Protestant theology, and practical experience. Rather than arguing for the dominance of any single tradition or seeking to reconcile competing worldviews, McDonald portrayed the Founders as sophisticated *bricoleurs* who pragmatically combined whatever intellectual resources proved useful for the problems they faced. His work suggested that the search for a dominant paradigm—whether liberal, republican, or some synthesis of the two—fundamentally misunderstood how eighteenth-century Americans actually thought. They were less concerned with philosophical consistency than with practical effectiveness, drawing selectively from diverse sources as circumstances required. Richard Beeman's *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (2004) reinforced McDonald's emphasis on diversity by demonstrating how political culture varied dramatically across colonial regions. New England town meetings, mid-Atlantic pluralism, and southern planter politics created fundamentally different political experiences, making it misleading to speak of a single 'American' political tradition. His regional analysis challenged both the liberal consensus and republican synthesis by revealing that colonists' political assumptions and practices reflected local circumstances as much as shared intellectual traditions.

Several scholars moved beyond the liberal-republican debate by examining how political concepts themselves were constructed and transformed through historical practice. James Kloppenberg offered perhaps the most sophisticated attempt at synthesis, arguing in works like *The Virtues of Liberalism* (1998) that the stark opposition between liberal and republican traditions had been overdrawn. Rather than seeing these as competing worldviews, Kloppenberg traced how democratic deliberation itself shaped political thought, creating hybrid forms that combined individual rights with civic virtue. Edmund Morgan's *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (1988) pursued a different kind of intellectual genealogy, tracing how 'the People' became the foundation of political legitimacy despite being, as Morgan demonstrated, a necessary fiction. Morgan showed how English and American political actors constructed popular sovereignty as a conceptual solution to problems of authority, even though 'the people' could never actually exercise power directly. His work revealed sovereignty as an invented concept that evolved through political practice rather than a philosophical truth discovered by the Founders. Daniel Rodgers similarly demonstrated in *Contested Truths* (1987) how political languages

The results showed that while Locke was an important source, he probably was not the most important, and he certainly had competitors.

evolved through practical use rather than philosophical consistency, showing that Americans drew selectively from multiple traditions as circumstances required. These scholars emphasized the fluid, contextual nature of political thought, arguing that the search for a single, dominant tradition missed how Americans had always combined elements from diverse intellectual sources—an argument that resonated with McDonald's earlier demonstration of founding-era eclecticism.

Gordon Wood's later work, particularly *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991), offered a different kind of synthesis by arguing that the Revolution was genuinely transformative in ways that transcended the liberal-republican debate. Wood contended that the Revolution destroyed America's hierarchical, deferential society and created an egalitarian, democratic, and commercial culture that was far more radical than previously recognized. His *Power and Liberty* (2021) refined this argument, showing how the Revolution's democratic radicalism ultimately vindicated liberal principles while acknowledging the social transformation that republican historians had identified.

Atlantic World Approaches

The roots of what would become the Atlantic World and institutional approach to the American Founding lay in early twentieth-century scholarship that fundamentally reoriented how historians understood the colonial period and the imperial crisis. Beginning with George Louis Beer's *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (1907), a group of scholars centered at Yale University began examining American colonial development from the perspective of British imperial administration rather than as a prelude to inevitable independence. This "imperial school" reached its fullest expression in the work of Charles McLean Andrews, whose monumental *The Colonial Period of American History* (4 vols., 1934-1938) and *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution* (1924) traced how colonial institutions developed within the broader framework of British imperial governance. Andrews argued that understanding

the Revolution required examining British administrative policies, imperial trade regulations, and the constitutional relationship between colonies and metropole, rather than focusing exclusively on American grievances and ideology.

Other scholars expanded the imperial school's institutional focus through comprehensive multi-volume studies of colonial development. Herbert L. Osgood's massive *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (3 vols., 1904-1907) and *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century* (4 vols., 1924-1925) provided comprehensive analysis of colonial institutional development within the British imperial system. Lawrence Henry Gipson extended this approach in his fifteen-volume *The British Empire Before the American Revolution* (1936-1970), which placed the American Revolution within the context of Britain's global imperial conflicts, particularly the Seven Years' War.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the imperial perspective was beginning to be extended into the Revolutionary and Founding Periods themselves. Jack P. Greene's work on colonial constitutional thought, particularly *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (1986) and *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution* (2011), demonstrated how Americans developed sophisticated theories of federal sovereignty within the British Empire before 1776. John Phillip Reid's multi-volume *Constitutional History of the American Revolution* (1986-1993) offered detailed legal analysis of the constitutional debate between Britain and the colonies, showing how competing theories of imperial sovereignty made conflict increasingly inevitable. These scholars revealed that many constitutional innovations traditionally attributed to American originality—including theories of divided sovereignty and federal systems—actually emerged from Americans' attempts to theorize their position within the British imperial constitution.

Parallel to this constitutional analysis, William E. Nelson's four-volume *The Common Law in Colonial America* (2008-2016) provided unprecedented detail on how English common law was received, adapted, and transformed in colonial

settings. Nelson demonstrated that American legal culture developed through complex processes of selection and modification, as colonists adapted English legal principles to New World circumstances while creating distinctly American legal practices. His work revealed how legal institutions and practices—not just constitutional theory—shaped the political culture that would eventually produce the Revolution and Constitution.

These studies of royal authority complemented broader scholarship on trans-Atlantic constitutional development. Mary Sarah Bilder's *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and the Empire* (2004) examined how colonial legal culture developed through constant interaction with British legal institutions, revealing a more integrated and reciprocal relationship than earlier scholars had recognized. Daniel J. Hulsebosch's *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664-1830* (2005) traced how constitutional ideas evolved through the Atlantic world, with American innovations feeding back into broader imperial and international legal developments. Ken MacMillan's *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World* (2006) explored how theories of sovereignty and territorial possession developed in colonial contexts. David Armitage's *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (2007) and Anthony Pagden's *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800* (1995) placed American constitutional developments within comparative imperial frameworks, showing how Americans adapted and transformed European theories of empire, sovereignty, and colonial governance.

State Building and Empire

By the 1990s, building on these imperial foundations, a new generation of constitutional historians began situating the Constitutional Convention within the broader context of Atlantic World state-building and imperial reorganization. Instead of focusing on competing philosophical traditions, scholars examined the Constitution as one response among many to the practical gover-

nance challenges facing eighteenth-century polities. Drawing on the work of British historians like P.G.M. Dickson, whose *The Financial Revolution in England* (1967) traced the development of modern public finance, and John Brewer, whose *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (1989) analyzed the fiscal-military innovations that strengthened the British state after 1688, American historians began to see the Founding in comparative perspective. Earlier studies of Revolutionary War finance, including E. James Ferguson's *The Power of the Purse* (1961) and Roger H. Brown's *Redeeming the Republic* (1993), had demonstrated how Americans' struggles to fund the war and manage debt shaped constitutional debates about federal fiscal authority. The Constitution, from this view, represented not American philosophical exceptionalism but successful institutional adaptation to common problems of territorial expansion, military defense, fiscal capacity, and federal coordination that plagued post-imperial societies throughout the Atlantic world.

John Murrin's studies of "anglicization" showed how colonial political culture became increasingly British even as it developed distinctly American characteristics, while Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (2000) revealed how the Seven Years' War fundamentally reshaped imperial relationships and created the governance challenges that would eventually require constitutional solutions.

A new generation of Constitutional historians then used this imperial framework to reinterpret the Founding documents themselves. Max Edling's *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (2003) argued that the Constitution should be understood primarily as state-building, that is the creation of fiscal-military apparatus necessary for effective governance in an era of European imperial competition. Where previous scholars had debated whether the Constitution embodied liberal or republican principles, Edling demonstrated that the Framers' central concern was creating a government capable of surviving in a dangerous Atlantic world. This fiscal-military interpretation fundamentally challenged both celebratory narra-

tives of philosophical achievement and Progressive critiques focused on economic class conflict, replacing both with an analysis grounded in comparative state formation and geopolitical necessity.

George William Van Cleve's *We Have Not a Government: The Articles of Confederation and the Road to the Constitution* (2017) complemented Edling's institutional analysis by offering a more nuanced assessment of governance under the Articles of Confederation than either Jensen's rehabilitation or traditional narratives of failure. Van Cleve argued that the Articles established a genuine national government with significant powers, but one hampered by structural weaknesses—particularly the requirement for unanimous state consent for amendments and the lack of independent revenue. Rather than portraying the Constitution as either democratic triumph or elite reaction, Van Cleve examined how the practical experience of governing under the Articles revealed specific institutional deficiencies that the Constitution addressed through mechanisms like federal taxation, treaty supremacy, and amendment procedures requiring less than unanimity.

Other scholars in the state-formation school examined how the Constitution addressed specific governance challenges involving interstate relations and territorial expansion. David Hendrickson's *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (2003) emphasized how the Constitution solved interstate conflicts and international relations problems rather than ideological disputes. Alison LaCroix's *The Ideological Origins of American Federalism* (2010) extended this analysis by arguing that the Articles had actually implemented an "American empire" modeled on how colonists in the 1760s had wanted the British Empire to function—as a composite monarchy with divided sovereignty—and that the Constitution refined rather than abandoned this imperial framework. Peter Onuf placed territorial governance at the center of constitutional design in *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (1987), an approach he developed further with Cathy Matson in *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (1990) to show how commercial expansion and territorial acquisition were fundamental

to constitutional thinking.

Eliga Gould's *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (2012) extended the state-formation analysis into the realm of international law and diplomatic recognition. Gould demonstrated that the Constitution's design also reflected the imperative to gain recognition as a legitimate sovereign power within the European state system. Americans needed a government capable of enforcing treaties, protecting commerce, and meeting international obligations—requirements for achieving standing "among the powers of the earth," as the Declaration proclaimed. American adaptations of European precedents revealed that constitutional innovation emerged partly from the need to establish credibility with European powers who doubted whether the fractious American states could function as a unified nation.

The approach also "denationalized" the Founding, treating it as part of broader Atlantic patterns rather than as a unique American achievement. This comparative perspective revealed how the Constitution borrowed solutions from British, Dutch, and other European precedents while adapting them to American circumstances—a pragmatic exercise in institutional engineering rather than a philosophical revolution.

In the 1990s, a limitation became increasingly apparent as the historical profession itself was being transformed by scholars from previously underrepresented backgrounds who brought new questions and perspectives. These historians asked not only how the Constitution solved problems of governance for some Americans, but also how it perpetuated or created problems for others. Their work would challenge not just the neoliberal consensus about the Founding's philosophical coherence, but also the very assumption that the experiences of the Founders themselves should remain at the center of historical inquiry.

Social History and Inclusion

Once again American political thought flowed in a single, Lockean channel, this time augmented and refreshed by side streams representing alter-

nate, but subordinate, traditions. To this new liberal synthesis, Rogers Smith replied that outside of liberalism lay a wholly non-liberal tradition, which thrived on exclusion, exceptionalism, and ascriptive hierarchies. America the chosen nation, the city on a hill with a manifest destiny to inspire by its purity or to expand by force of its arms, had to be careful about whom to include as citizens. Together with liberty and equality as principles applicable to all, there coexisted the contrary convictions that the African race could be enslaved, that native Indians could be removed from their ancestral lands, that women could be confined to the domestic sphere, and that foreigners could be kept away or (as immigrants) denied voting rights and other privileges of citizenship. Both Federalists and Antifederalists were guilty as Smith demonstrated in *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (1997).

Although the target was different—race, gender, and ethnicity in place of class—the critical tone was unmistakably Progressive. Other historians, who had made recovery of the life experiences of non-Founders the subject of their scholarship, also shared with Progressives a disapproving tone and an interest in social history. Studies of slavery, both those from mid-century and their new-century progeny, revived the Abolitionist crimination that the Constitution was a “covenant with the devil,” a sellout to the slave-power that ruled over the South; or they presented new corroboration of the charge that some Founders engaged in miscegenetic practices, as shown in Paul Finkelman’s *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (1997) and Annette Gordon-Reed’s *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (1997).

George William Van Cleve’s *A Slaveholders’ Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (2010) provided the most systematic analysis of how slaveholding interests shaped constitutional design and early national politics. Van Cleve argued that the Constitution was fundamentally structured to protect slavery through multiple provisions—the three-fifths clause, the fugitive slave clause, the prohibition on export taxes, and the protection of the slave trade until 1808. More controversially, he

contended that these protections were not merely pragmatic compromises necessary to achieve union, but instead reflected the Framers’ deliberate choice to build a political system that would give slaveholders disproportionate power in national government.

Other scholars emphasized how enslaved people and racial politics actively shaped Revolutionary events. Sylvia Frey’s groundbreaking *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (1991) demonstrated how enslaved people actively shaped the Revolutionary War by pursuing freedom through military service, while her work revealed the Revolution as a moment of both liberation and re-enslavement for African Americans. Alan Taylor’s *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772–1832* (2013), which won the Pulitzer Prize, extended this analysis by showing how enslaved Virginians continued to pursue freedom through the War of 1812, exploiting wartime disruptions to escape bondage and revealing how the threat of slave resistance shaped white Virginians’ political and military decisions throughout the early national period. More recently, Robert G. Parkinson’s *Thirteen Clocks* (2021) demonstrated how patriot leaders deliberately exploited racial fears through newspaper coverage to unite the colonies behind independence, arguing that the circulation of stories about slave conspiracies and Native American attacks in the colonial press was central to building support for the break with Britain.

Likewise, the forced removal of Native Americans and the diplomacy that deprived them of their lands came under scrutiny. Colin Calloway’s extensive scholarship showed how indigenous peoples experienced the Founding era as a catastrophic period of displacement and cultural destruction rather than liberation, as demonstrated in *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (1995). Peter Silver’s *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (2007) argued that frontier warfare in Pennsylvania transformed the region’s ethnically diverse European populations into a unified white identity based on shared fear and hatred of Native Americans. This challenge to Eurocentric narratives

gained further momentum with Kathleen DuVal's *Native Nations: A Millennium in North America* (2024), which demonstrated how Indigenous peoples remained powerful actors who shaped continental development throughout the Revolutionary and early Constitutional periods, arguing that the rise of the United States was historically contingent and showing how Native nations like the Cherokees created institutions to assert their sovereignty on the global stage during the Founding era.

Women's history followed a similar pattern. Some scholars emphasized women's public roles, showing how "republican mothers" and parlor hostesses performed essential political work for the state, as Catherine Allgor demonstrated in *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and Government* (2000). Most feminist scholarship, however, focused on women's exclusion and demonstrated how the Revolution brought them little relief, as Linda Kerber showed in *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980).

Woody Holton's *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (1999) argued that Virginia's planter elite were pushed toward independence not primarily by ideological commitments to liberty, but by pressures from below—enslaved people seeking freedom, Native Americans, and indebted farmers. Non-elites were not passive victims but active historical agents whose resistance shaped elite decision-making. His *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (2007) extended this analysis to the 1780s, arguing that the Constitution emerged primarily from elite efforts to protect creditor rights against popular debtor relief legislation. Holton argued that ordinary Americans used state legislatures to secure paper money emissions, tax relief, and stay laws that threatened wealthy creditors' interests, prompting those elites to create a national government that could constrain democratic majorities. Like Beard, Holton emphasized economic self-interest and class conflict; unlike Beard, he combined institutional analysis with attention to popular agency and avoided crude economic determinism. His work demonstrated how social history's "history from below" could lead

back toward Progressive concerns about power, wealth, and democratic constraint.

Finally, some scholars challenged the notion that America was simply a creedal nation held together by shared liberal principles. Some revealed how nativist traditions had persistently competed with liberal ideals throughout American history, while others questioned whether civic nationalism could transcend deeper cultural and ethnic divisions, as Michael Lind explored in *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (1995).

Eventually this accumulating criticism from social historians studying previously marginalized groups generated a complex scholarly debate about the nature of the founding principles themselves. Some scholars argued that the Founding tradition was intrinsically oppressive at its core, viewing Enlightenment liberalism as fundamentally exclusionary and the constitutional framework as designed to perpetuate hierarchies of race, gender, and class. Others contended that despite the Founders' compromises with oppressive institutions like slavery, the founding principles—particularly the equality principle—provided the conceptual framework that made subsequent democratic reforms possible. According to this latter view, women were not excluded from the Declaration's "all men are created equal," but their rights were thought better protected by stable families than by labor in the market or participation in politics. Immigrants were welcomed, provided they exhibited republican virtues and came in manageable numbers. Property restrictions were designed to defend democracy, not curtail it, since the dependent poor might be manipulated by demagogues. Even with these limitations, the electorate was then the widest the world had ever seen, as Thomas West argued in *Vindicating the Founders: Race, Sex, Class, and Justice in the Origins of America* (1997).

Legal and Constitutional Scholarship: Process, Power, and Institutional Design

The turn of the twenty-first century witnessed the emergence of a new interpretive approach that

shifted attention from philosophical traditions and social identities to the mechanics of constitutional creation and implementation. This scholarship, produced largely by legal scholars and historically-minded political scientists, focused on the Constitution as a working document shaped by political calculations, institutional constraints, and practical governance needs rather than abstract principles.

Jack Rakove had pioneered institutional analysis in *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (1979), examining how the Congress functioned as a deliberative body managing war, diplomacy, and governance without clear constitutional authority. His *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (1996) won the Pulitzer Prize for reconstructing how constitutional provisions emerged from the Convention's debates and the ratification struggle. Rakove demonstrated that the 'original intent' invoked in legal interpretation was far more contested than originalist doctrine suggested—the Framers themselves disagreed about constitutional meaning and changed their positions as circumstances evolved. His work challenged both originalist legal theory and celebratory narratives by showing the Constitution as a product of political bargaining among actors with competing visions.

This legal-institutional approach built on a long tradition of specialized studies examining how specific constitutional institutions emerged from the Founding period. Charles C. Thach Jr.'s *The Creation of the Presidency, 1775-1789* (1923, revised 1969) remained the foundational work on executive power, tracing how Americans moved from deep suspicion of executive authority during the Revolution to creating an energetic presidency at Philadelphia. Thach demonstrated that the executive article represented neither pure theory nor pure accident, but rather evolved through practical experimentation under the Articles of Confederation and intense debate at the Convention over how to balance energy with accountability. Forrest McDonald's *The American Presidency: An Intellectual History* (1994) complemented this institutional analysis by tracing the intellectual origins of executive power from classical republics

through Enlightenment political theory to the American founding, showing how the Framers synthesized diverse traditions of executive authority. Ray Raphael's *Mr. President: How and Why the Founders Created a Chief Executive* (2012) provided a complementary analysis of the Convention debates themselves, showing how delegates' shifting positions on executive power reflected competing concerns about energy versus accountability, with the final design emerging from pragmatic compromise rather than coherent theory. Howard Giles Unger's *Mr. President: George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office* (2014) demonstrated how Washington's actions as the first president established crucial precedents that defined the office in ways the Constitution had left unclear, revealing how institutional practice often proved as important as constitutional text in shaping governmental structures.

Several scholars examined how Founding documents emerged through contested political processes rather than philosophical consensus. Pauline Maier's *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (1997) traced how Jefferson's draft underwent significant revision by the Continental Congress and demonstrated how the Declaration's meaning evolved through subsequent interpretation and commemoration, revealing it as a collectively authored document. Richard Beeman's *Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution* (2009) provided a similarly detailed reconstruction of the Constitutional Convention itself. Drawing on extensive archival research and close reading of Madison's notes and other Convention records, Beeman traced the Convention's day-by-day deliberations, revealing how practical compromises on representation, slavery, and executive power emerged from competing state interests, personal conflicts, and exhausting negotiation rather than shared constitutional vision.

Maier's later *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (2010) provided the most comprehensive modern account of how the Constitution was adopted, moving beyond the Federalist Papers to examine ratification debates in every state. Maier demonstrated the contingency of ratification, showing how close-run contests in

key states and the promise of amendments proved essential to adoption. Her work revealed that constitutional meaning was contested from the beginning, with Antifederalist concerns shaping how Americans understood their new frame of government even though Federalists won the ratification battle. The Bill of Rights emerged not as an afterthought but as the price of ratification, fundamentally altering the constitutional settlement.

This legal-institutional approach also encompassed scholars like Akhil Reed Amar, whose *America's Constitution: A Biography* (2005) read the document as a democratizing force despite its elite origins, and Bruce Ackerman, whose multi-volume *We the People* series (1991-2014) analyzed constitutional change through episodes of popular mobilization rather than formal amendment processes. While these scholars disagreed about the Constitution's democratic credentials, they shared a focus on institutional mechanics and legal processes rather than the ideological traditions that had preoccupied earlier generations.

Other scholars working within this legal-institutional framework examined how constitutional meaning developed through specific interpretive debates and political conflicts. Saul Cornell's *The Other Founders* (1999) demonstrated how Antifederalist thought continued to shape constitutional interpretation long after ratification, while his broader work showed how constitutional rights were constructed through historical practice rather than fixed original meaning. Larry Kramer's *The People Themselves* (2004) argued that constitutional interpretation had historically belonged to popular political movements rather than judicial elites, challenging the Supreme Court's claims to interpretive supremacy.

By examining how constitutional meaning developed through political conflict and judicial interpretation, this school implicitly challenged both originalist claims about fixed meaning and liberal assumptions about Progressive constitutional development. The result was a more complex and contingent understanding of constitutional authority—one that emphasized process over principle and acknowledged the persistent tensions between democratic aspiration and institutional design that continue to shape American governance.

Conclusion

The evolution of Founding-era and Constitutional historiography reveals how each generation of scholars has brought new questions, methods, and concerns to these foundational events. From Bancroft's providential nationalism to Beard's economic determinism, from the liberal consensus to the republican synthesis, from social history's inclusion of marginalized voices to the recovery of religious traditions, historians have repeatedly discovered new dimensions of complexity in the American founding.

For students of history, this historiographical journey offers several important lessons. First, historical interpretation is an ongoing conversation rather than a settled body of facts. Second, the questions historians ask are often shaped by the concerns of their own era, making historical knowledge both contingent and cumulative. Third, expanding the scope of historical inquiry—whether through new methodologies, previously neglected sources, or different analytical frameworks—continues to reveal dimensions of the past that earlier scholars missed. The persistent scholarly and popular fascination with the Founding and the Constitution suggests that these events remain vital to contemporary American political culture.



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BOOK REVIEW

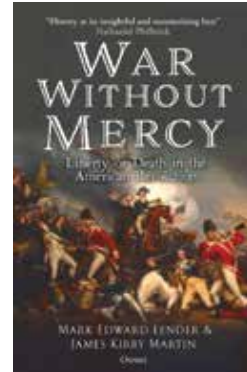
Just Warfare: Civilian and Military Conduct in the American Revolution

By Corey Ely, '17 (OR)

In 1776, New Jersey elected its first state governor, William Livingston. He was, by all accounts, a moderate man. Early in the Revolutionary War, Livingston argued that British loyalists “should be given forgiveness if they swear allegiance” to the patriot cause. Even after British loyalists raided his home, he advocated for impartial trials and bail for non-violent Tories. However, by the war’s end, Livingston had shifted his views dramatically, supporting an expanded definition of treason as well as the death penalty for anyone who opposed the Revolution. Livingston’s transformation reflects a broader pattern among the Americans: as the war progressed, they redefined their understanding of liberty, justice, and survival. Across the colonies, civilians on both sides of the war clashed with neighbors, made alliances with former enemies, and ignored the law to serve their cause.

In *War Without Mercy*, Mark Lender and James Martin have a clear objective: “To further clarify why the conflict became so violent; and, stemming from this better understanding of why, to define the very nature of the war.” They argue that the Revolution was an *existential* struggle, fought not just for independence, but also for the preservation of a way of life. The intensity of the violence reflects the sincere belief that the future was at stake. Violence was strategic and deeply personal.

Lender and Martin rely on the military theory *jus in bello* (justice in war) to establish a baseline of acceptable acts of violence during armed conflict. The authors draw on the works of Hugo Grotius and Emer de Vattel to identify three core tenets of *jus in bello*: distinction, proportionality, and necessity. These tenets explain that violence should be directed only at combatants (distinction), limited to achieving defined military objectives (proportionality), and confined to military targets (necessity). However, the Revolutionary War blurred these boundaries. Civilians engaged in privateering, intim-



War Without Mercy: Liberty or Death in the American Revolution

By Mark Edward Lender and
James Kirby Martin

Osprey Publishing
320 pgs. | \$32



N.C. Wyeth, *Barbara Frietchie* (in *Poems of American Patriotism* by Matthew Brander), 1922, [archive.org](https://www.archive.org).

idation, and espionage. In this context, the term “combatant” became subjective. Regular armies often (though certainly not always) respected the rules of *jus in bello*, but in small and more local conflicts, removed from the formalities of the war, these rules held little weight.

The authors believe the Revolutionary War became increasingly violent because it was an existential conflict that transcended cultural barriers. Both patriots and loyalists believed their way of life was under direct threat. To illustrate this belief, the authors examine the actions of soldiers and civilians across five regions: New Jersey, the West, New York, New London, and the South. In each, they show how the existential nature of the war led civilians to carry out atrocities against one another.

Since the focus is on local skirmishes rather than on major battles, the authors review material at various state historical societies and university repositories. The authors acknowledge the difficulty of determining exact casualty figures because many local conflicts were very frequent, involved few people, and were not consistently documented. Despite incomplete records, the authors utilized a wide array of primary sources and archival material to reconstruct a full picture of the war. Lender and Martin use casualty estimates that serve as proxies for undocumented and sparsely documented conflicts that occurred during the war. Some individual stories remain unresolved, such as how a source would mention a prisoner of war without recording their fate. In those instances, the authors make educated assumptions about the fate of the individual. The authors’ ability to weave these individual stories into a meaningful narrative about the existential and local nature of the war is particularly impressive.

The book’s strength lies in both its distinctive focus and narrative approach. While others have addressed Revolutionary Era atrocities, Lender and Martin highlight local stories to display how the war disrupted daily civilian life. Cycles of rage and retribution humanize the conflict and reveal how political decisions mobilized ordinary citizens to engage in unexpected conflicts with their neighbors. Lender and Martin recount how in Georgia, patriots sought out a loyalist named

Thomas Brown and demanded that he swear allegiance to the Revolution. When he refused to do so, the mob broke his skull, tarred and burned his feet, and scalped him. “Burnfoot Brown,” as he became known, survived. The Georgia Council of Safety responded to this incident, saying, “The said Thomas Brown is now a little remarkable, wears his hair very short, and a handkerchief around his head in order that his intellect...may not be affected.” This was a targeted attack by his acquaintances, and many of these attacks were widely tolerated during the war.

Structuring the book around five distinct theatres also allows the authors to accentuate how the war’s impact varied across regions. In studying the Revolution, students often think of broad categories of participants: Patriots, Loyalists, the British, and Native Americans. However, these labels obscure the diversity of views held by these groups. The book highlights unexpected local alliances. Patriot forces in New York aligned with Oneida and Tuscarora natives to fight against loyalists allied with Iroquois groups. In one instance, 80 loyalists fought under the command of a Mohawk commander, Joseph Brant. The cause of the Revolution, whether to defend or defeat it, meant that traditional barriers of race and culture were sometimes subordinated to the preservation (or destruction) of the patriot cause.

War Without Mercy studies the brutality and the localized nature of the Revolutionary War. It functions as psychological analysis, philosophical inquiry, and engaging narrative. The length and style of the book make it accessible to high school students and casual readers alike, while still offering valuable insights for academic historians. Some material, like Benedict Arnold’s destruction of New London or the Cherry Valley Massacre, may be familiar topics, but their treatment through the lens of *jus in bello* is distinctive. The authors’ “bottom-up” approach and meticulous sourcing offer a fresh perspective on a war often dominated by accounts of Washington, his generals, and their British counterparts.

The intensity of the violence reflects the sincere belief that the future was at stake.

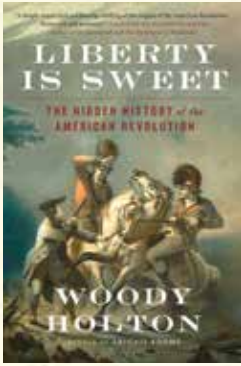


Corey Ely is a 2017 James Madison Fellow for Oregon. He taught at Grants Pass High School for seven years and is currently a Senior Financial Analyst.

BOOK REVIEW

A New Narrative

By Michael Herdina, '22 (MT)



Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution

By Woody Holton

Simon & Schuster
800 pgs. | \$19

OPPOSITE: Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger. American and French soldiers at the siege of Yorktown, 1781, Wikimedia Commons.

Countless volumes have been written about the American Revolution. Woody Holton's *Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution* seeks to reframe the Founding Era of American history. Rather than the patriotic narratives traditionally taught in schools, Professor Woody Holton focuses on the contradictory agendas and underrepresented voices that formed the building blocks of early America. Set against the backdrop of political and economic upheaval and using a range of stories from enslaved peoples seeking freedom, to Native Americans defending their land, to women advocating for political power, Holton's *Liberty is Sweet* reinterprets the scope of the American Revolution by examining more underrepresented groups to provide a more comprehensive picture of the American Revolution.

Published in 2021, *Liberty is Sweet* seeks to go beyond the traditional, time-honored stories and viewpoint of the Founding Fathers such as Adams and Jefferson to tell the stories of lesser-known voices of the Revolutionary Period. A professor of history at the University of South Carolina, Holton applies his talent for skillful interpretation of a wide array of narratives, which earned him a Bancroft Prize and Guggenheim Fellowship, to the monumental task of telling the stories. Using a large variety of sources, he makes the argument that liberty was not just an idea, but is a concept meant to be put into practice, outlining who would benefit from it and at what cost.

Holton makes the argument that the American Revolution was shaped and implemented by ordinary people that resided far from the power centers of the original 13 states. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams gave the nation big picture ideas, but it was the everyday citizen that saw to the implementation of those ideas. Enslaved peoples saw the Revolution as more than a colonial uprising, but as a chance to claim freedom. Consequently, thousands of enslaved African Americans, enticed by promises of freedom, escaped to the British lines.

Holton devotes substantial attention to the Native American nations in this book. He argues that the expansion westward into Native lands by the American colonists is an overlooked cause of the war, and he shows how they were not victims or bystanders, but actors on an international stage. Their calculated choices aligned with the British, the Americans, or neither, and they shaped American

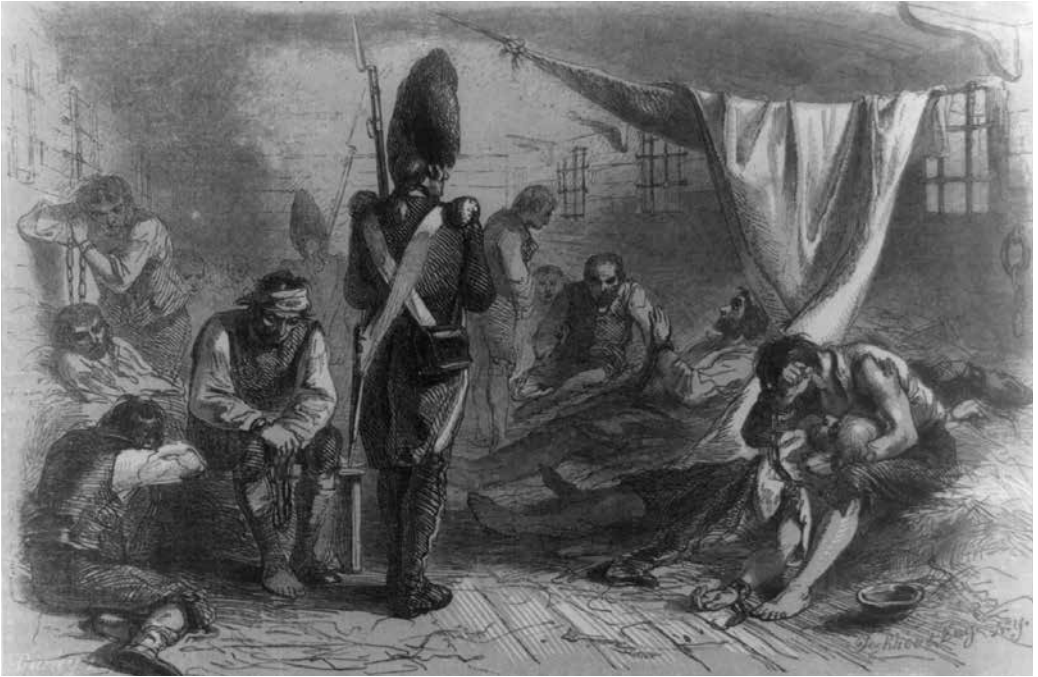
and European views toward Native Americans for years to come. By emphasizing the Native American resistance and variety of alliances, Holton shows how Native Americans such as the Shawnee, Cherokee and Mohawk weighed alliances between British and American forces. While each tribe fought to protect their land, Holton argues that the Revolution was not just a war of independence but also a struggle for the survival of Indigenous peoples as well.

A major strength of *Liberty is Sweet* focuses on the economic influences of the American Revolution. Issues of inflation, taxation, debt, and land speculation guided how the average person and the elite participated in the conflict. Holton asserts that colonists were not just fighting for liberty, but were responding to material pressures, such as rising prices, land scarcity, and other areas of economic instability. Holton continues that ordinary farmers, merchants and debtors joined protests not merely over taxation but over class inequality and elite economic control. Inflation, wartime profiteering, and the Continental Congress's debts deepened popular resentment and turned the Revolution into a social struggle as well as a political one.

The book also provides a thorough analysis of class tension amongst the colonists. Holton explores how the goals of wealthy merchants and landowners could be at odds with those of the average farmer or the laborers in the cities. As a result of these tensions, conflict erupted between the classes, which themselves split between the sides, lending weight to the assertion that the Revolution was a civil war as well as a war of independence. Holton provides examples of wealthy merchants, planters and land speculators supporting independence by seeing it as a path to greater political and economic independence. However, some small farmers and laborers remained loyal to the Crown—or at least skeptical of the Patriot cause, fearing that independence would empower local elites.

The general theme of the book focuses on the voiceless people of the fledgling United States, but Holton does not totally ignore the Founding Fathers. Rather, he takes a look at the lesser-known aspects of them as they try to reconcile their world with a new order emerging from the chaos of the Revolution. Jefferson and Washington, among many others, are painted with a brush of stark reality. Holton examines contradictory ideologies of





Felix Octavius Carr Darley, *Interior of the old Jersey prison ship, in the Revolutionary War (1855, Cincinnati)*, Library of Congress.

how the rhetoric of “natural rights” and “popular sovereignty” clashed with enduring hierarchies of wealth, gender and class. The Revolution promised liberty but some of its leaders feared a true democratic form of government. However, the critique of the Founding Fathers should not be viewed as an earth-shattering indictment of the Founding generation, but rather as an honest view of the men. The context of the times is always present as these men attempt to find their way through class and social struggles, personal interest, and racial bias in the new world of the United States of America.

Liberty is Sweet provides a wealth of information and stories that teachers can draw upon for their classes. Each story presented provides a clearer understanding of the foundation of America. By utilizing the stories of *Liberty is Sweet*, educators across the country can provide a more thorough analysis of the independence movement to their students. Holton questions the understanding of the past, thus helping students relate to many different people in the American Revolution, along with its ideals and, at times, its injustices.

Holton’s book offers a compelling retelling of the nation’s founding through the voices of those long excluded from traditional narratives. Though

its considerable length—over 700 pages—may intimidate some readers, it stands as a rewarding account of the Revolution’s lesser-known dimensions. The book takes a thematic rather than chronological approach, allowing Holton to delve deeply into specific issues of the era. While this structure makes it challenging to track the broader sequence of events, it enriches the reader’s understanding of how various struggles shaped the Revolution. Holton challenges our collective understanding of the nation’s origins and exposes the complexity beneath the familiar myths of liberty and independence. *Liberty is Sweet* is an essential read for anyone seeking a fuller, more inclusive picture of America’s founding story.



Michael Herdina is a 2022 James Madison Senior Fellow for Montana and is a high school history and government teacher in Conrad, Montana. In addition to being a James Madison Fellow and a father to two children, he serves as the Speech, Drama and Debate coach and theater director.

BOOK REVIEW

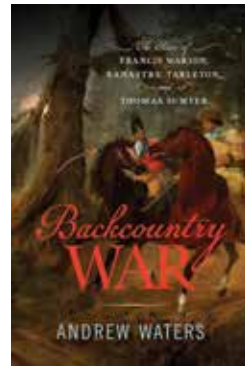
Guerrillas, Gamecocks, and Bloody Ban: Rivalries that Shaped a Revolution

By Cynthia Kyle, '23 (GA)

Andrew Waters's *Backcountry War* transports readers to the rugged landscapes of South Carolina in 1780, a year that marked the turning point of Britain's southern strategy in the American Revolution. Instead of focusing exclusively on large set-piece battles or national figures, he focuses on the South Carolina backcountry and the three men whose reputations—and legacies—were forged there: General Francis Marion, General Thomas Sumter, and General Banastre Tarleton. Waters provides a vivid account of partisan warfare, the challenges of loyalty and survival, and the intimate connection between terrain and tactics. While providing both narrative history and interpretive analysis, *Backcountry War* is a valuable contribution to Revolutionary War scholarship, particularly for readers seeking to understand the complexities of the Southern Campaign.

Backcountry War is divided into four major parts, the first of which provides essential background on the political and social tensions in South Carolina, the geography of the backcountry, and the collapse of organized Patriot resistance after the fall of Charleston in May 1780. In setting the stage, Waters skillfully describes the distinctive features of the region—its rivers, swamps, pine forests, and isolated settlements—that would later shape the nature of the fighting.

The book follows the chronological course of 1780, detailing a succession of skirmishes, ambushes, and battles that pitted a variety of lesser-known operatives, as well as familiar and divergent figures like General Marion, General Sumter, and General Tarleton, against each other and against the broader strategic backdrop of British control in the South. As Waters weaves a narrative connecting the three most influential characters in the southern strategy, sharp differences emerge. By examining all three figures virtually side by side, the



**Backcountry War: The Rise of
Francis Marion, Banastre Tarleton,
and Thomas Sumter**

By Andrew Waters

Westholme Publishing
400 pgs. | \$32



ABOVE: Santillanessophia. *A River in Charleston South Carolina* (photograph), 2022, Wikimedia Commons.
 BELOW: Henry Mitchell. *State Arms of the Union* (Boston: L. Prang & Co., 1876).

reader is given a bird's-eye view of how the interplay of leadership style, personality, and circumstance shaped the course of the Southern War.

Waters is careful to provide a balanced portrayal of his three protagonists. As someone who grew up in the middle of Swamp Fox territory, I am intimately familiar with the lionization of General Francis Marion. Waters, however, avoids legendary hyperbole by presenting an honest portrayal of the Revolutionary Swamp Fox's limitations while depicting the tactical brilliance for which he was so well known and from which his legend grew. General Marion's detailed knowledge of the terrain made him a master of irregular warfare – his operations from Snow's Island demonstrated how geography itself could be transformed into a weapon. Although his unconventional tactics are often portrayed as more of a necessity than a strategy, General Mari-

on emerges as a leader characterized by discipline, restraint, and resourcefulness, whose genius lay not in brute force but in adaptability.

In a similar fashion, Waters is direct about the courage and resilience of the Fighting Gamecock, while acknowledging Sumter's friction with other leaders as well as his impulsiveness, which sometimes teetered on the edge of outright recklessness. For instance, when General Sumter captured British supplies and prisoners from a convoy near Camden, instead of retreating quickly to safety, he lingered along the Catawba River with a large wagon train of captured goods, failing to post adequate sentries or prepare for pursuit. This allowed General Tarleton to surprise his camp and nearly destroy his command. Although he was wounded in the ensuing skirmish, General Sumter returned to command within weeks, leading aggressive assaults at



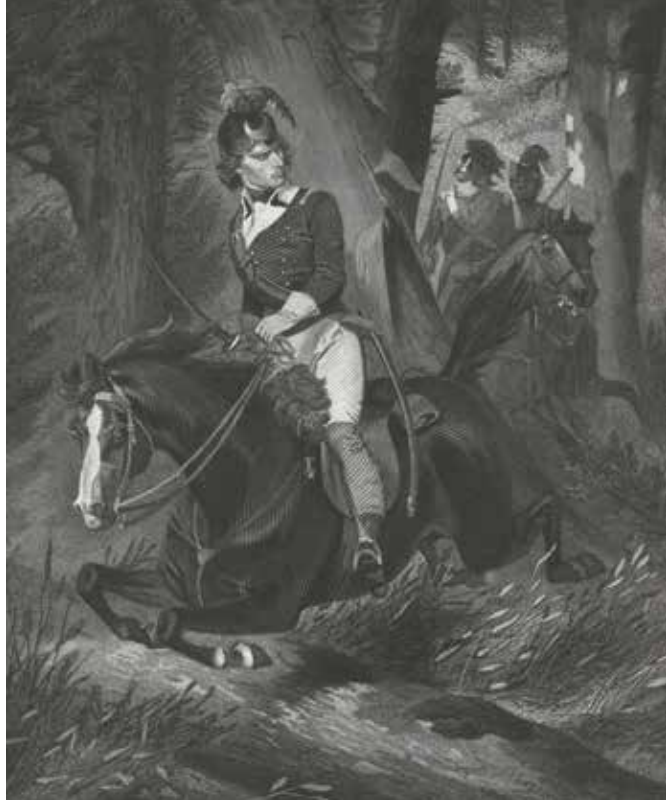
SOUTH CAROLINA

Hanging Rock and Blackstocks Farm. Throughout the narrative, General Sumter, with all of his fire, independence, and unpredictability, stands as a personification of the landscape itself.

General Banastre Tarleton, who is frequently reduced in popular imagination to the “Bloody Ban” caricature of cruelty, is also afforded an even-handed examination. Waters provides a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of General Tarleton as a skilled cavalry officer whose reputation was shaped by both his actions and Patriot propaganda. In *Backcountry War*, General Tarleton epitomizes both professionalism and brutality, gaining notoriety for his relentless pursuit of honor and his reputation for the “fire and sword” cruelty that reflected his calculated belief that terror could compel submission. The alleged massacre of surrendering Patriots at the Waxhaws in May 1780 gave rise to the phrase “Tarleton’s quarter,” meaning no quarters at all for surrendering Patriots. In a letter to General Cornwallis, General Tarleton attempted to justify the “looting, terror, and fire” that had been exacted upon the people of the Pee Dee region of South Carolina in November of 1780. He asserted that “nothing will serve these people but fire and sword...the only treatment I can propose or think of, if I am spared long enough here, is, according to the ancient scripture, saving only the salt which we cannot spare” (Waters, p. 233, 2024). Waters subtly implies that these actions had the opposite effect – galvanizing Patriot resistance and transforming “Bloody Ban” into the very symbol of British oppression in the South.

Engagements at Hanging Rock, Camden, Fishdam Ford, and Blackstocks Farm are not only narrated with clarity but also supported by both large-scale and tactical maps. These maps, a key feature of the book, enable readers to follow troop movements and gain a deeper understanding of how geography both constrained and enabled military action. The narrative concludes by illustrating how the rise of local Patriot resistance undermined Britain’s hopes of mobilizing Loyalists while subduing and pacifying the South, thereby setting the stage for the eventual American victory at Yorktown in 1781.

One of the distinguishing markers of Waters’s



Gen'l Francis Marion, 1880, Wikimedia Commons.

work is the effective way in which he weaves together military, geographic, and human history into a coherent whole. Rather than treating the backcountry merely as a backdrop, it presented as an active force that shaped strategy and outcomes. Swamps provided cover for Marion’s men but also hindered their mobility. Long British supply lines through rugged terrain made communication cumbersome and their forces vulnerable to hit-and-run tactics. Small settlements faced constant pressure to declare loyalty to one side or the other, often at the risk of violent retaliation. The result is a portrait of war in which environment and allegiance were as decisive as the armies themselves.

Though admittedly not the focus of the book, farmers, enslaved people, women, and children are not ignored; their choices about loyalty, survival, and resistance are woven into the story. While these voices appear at the margins, their presence underscores the war’s human cost and its impact on daily life. In this sense, *Backcountry War* offers a reminder that the Revolution was not only a clash of armies but also a civil war fought in fields, homes, and communities.

Perhaps the only difficulty in reading *Backcountry War* is the sometimes-overwhelming level of

detail in the skirmishes and maneuvers. Readers unfamiliar with South Carolina's geography may find themselves disoriented despite the maps. The sheer number of engagements involving small numbers of combatants can sometimes blur together, and nonspecialists may find it challenging to understand all that was happening. However, specialists will appreciate the precision and gain unique insight. General readers may wish for less specificity regarding the minor players and incidental encounters.

The decision to emphasize only the year 1780 gives the book a strong coherence but also leaves readers without a perspective on the scope of the southern campaigns before and after that year. The book may have been strengthened by providing an overview of the broader implications of the southern backcountry to the national strategy or by a conclusion that tied it more directly to the final victory at Yorktown.

Despite these minor shortcomings, *Backcountry War* provides a significant contribution to Revolutionary War scholarship. The southern campaigns have often been overshadowed by events in New England, the Middle Colonies, or Virginia; however, Waters shows that the contest in South Carolina's backcountry was pivotal. By focusing on guerrilla warfare and the diversity of Revolutionary Era experiences within regional and local contexts, the book challenges older narratives that emphasize only conventional battles. It also enriches our understanding of how loyalty, geography, and leadership operated on the ground. The book offers both an engaging story and a trove of detail. For general readers, it offers a fresh perspective on a less familiar theater of the war. For scholars, it fills in gaps and provides rich context to the more storied battles, such as King's Mountain and Cowpens, while raising questions about how best to integrate the experiences of divided civilians and environmental factors into the broader narrative of independence.

Ultimately, *Backcountry War* reminds us that the American Revolution was not won solely by generals in Philadelphia or on fields like Saratoga. It was also fought in swamps, forests, and small communities where men like Marion, Sumter, and Tarleton battled not only each other but the unforgiving demands of terrain, loyalty, and survival. For readers seeking to understand this dimension of the Revolution, *Backcountry War* is a recommended and rewarding choice.



Cynthia Kyle is a 2023 James Madison Fellow for Georgia. She teaches AP US Government and Politics, AP Economics, and serves as the Senior Grade Chair at Mount Paran Christian School in Kenesaw, Georgia.

BOOK REVIEW

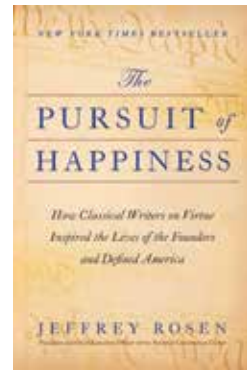
Pursuing Happiness using Classical Virtue

By Lois MacMillan, '21 (OR)

The Covid-19 pandemic has been bemoaned and blamed for the loss of learning in our schools, but one gift that came out of the pandemic is Jeffrey Rosen's *The Pursuit of Happiness: How Classical Writers on Virtue Inspired the Lives of the Founders and Defined America*. Jeffrey Rosen's "quarantine reading project" was to travel "into the minds of the Founders" and read the same books as they did on moral philosophy to explore the original meaning of "the pursuit of happiness." He discovered that the Founders defined the pursuit of happiness as "a lifelong quest for character improvement, where we use our powers of reason to moderate our unproductive emotions so that we can be our best selves and serve others." Rosen uncovered a correlation between Thomas Jefferson's and Benjamin Franklin's reading lists and an "uncanny synchronicity" of their own list of classical virtues that were "key to the pursuit of happiness."

This revelation on virtues came to Rosen in the early mornings of Covid-19 quarantine when he rose at sunrise and disciplined himself with rigorous daily reading like that of Jefferson. Rosen also discovered that other Founders such as George Washington, John Adams, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton repeated in their diaries and correspondence the same classical virtues listed by Jefferson and Franklin. Rosen found himself taking daily notes on his reading in sonnet form and opens each of his chapters with his own sonnet on twelve classical virtues: order, temperance, humility, industry, frugality, sincerity, resolution, moderation, tranquility, cleanliness, justice and silence. Rosen argues that the Founders' belief in twelve classical virtues was necessary for a citizen to transition from self-government to political self-government, and that the virtues of industry, resolution, and silence are needed today to govern the body politic.

In their youth, Jefferson and Adams copied passages from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* for "the pursuit of happiness...neither pines away in distress...nor maudlin in the exuberance of meaningless eagerness." The Founders were obsessed with using every hour of the day. Learning from his father the "lifelong habits of self-improve-



Pursuit of Happiness: How Classical Writers on Virtue Inspired the Lives of the Founders and Defined America

By Jeffrey Rosen

Simon & Schuster

368 pgs. | \$16



Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Consummation of Empire* (oil on canvas), 1836, Wikimedia Commons.

ment through disciplined reading.” Jefferson created a ten-hour-a day reading schedule. Inspired by Seneca’s *Saving on Time* Washington kept a daily diary titled, “where and how my time is spent.” Franklin kept a daily list of thirteen virtues from his reading of classical moral philosophy he deemed most important for self-improvement, marking with a black dot the virtues he failed to honor on that day (he eventually took chastity off his list of virtues). The classical virtue of industry was not defined by hard work, but by working hard to control oneself. Rosen points out that Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero define the virtue of industry as the ability to, “apply our powers of reason to calm and moderate our turbulent and violent passions...by controlling the only thing we can control: namely our thoughts.”

“All moral right arises from what’s true” and it is true that Rosen’s chapter on the virtue of resolution is his strongest chapter. Chapter seven opens in 1783 with Washington in Newburgh preventing a military coup. Rosen notes that Washington was imbued with classical philosophy and Stoic wisdom and it explains his legendary emotional self-control and steady resolution during the chaos of war and the complexity of governing. Washington was resolute to have reason to control his passions. Seneca’s *Morals*, a collection of essays on how to lead a good life, figures prominently

in Washington’s youth and throughout his life. Washington’s famed courage was inspired by Seneca’s essay “On True Courage” where “Fortitude is (properly) the contempt of all hazards according to reason. A brave man...looks upon himself as a citizen and soldier of the world.” Rosen links Washington’s affection for Seneca’s essay “On a Happy Life,” especially where Seneca emphasizes that “Tranquility is a certain equality of mind... for it is the state of human perfection,” to the famous ending of Washington’s Newburgh speech on America’s potential to achieve, “the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.”

Silence is the surprising virtue that Rosen includes from his list of twelve virtues, and he leans heavily on Louis Brandeis’s love of Thomas Jefferson to explain how the classical writers cherished silence. In 2016 Rosen wrote *Louis Brandeis: American Prophet* where he delved deeply into Brandeis’s love of Jefferson, but in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Rosen is not silent in his criticism of Jefferson. Throughout the book, Rosen weaves in Jefferson’s avarice, his enslavement of people, and his “aestheticized shopaholicism” that resulted in the inability to balance his books. However, Rosen unites Jefferson’s and Brandeis’ recognition “of the value of silence—that is, of thinking before you speak.” The ability to restrain oneself and stay si-



lent is a virtue that takes incredible self-discipline. When Jefferson wrote sensitive but critical letters to friends such as Madison and other Founders, he often thought twice and decided not to send them. Rosen stresses the right to silence using Brandeis' opinion in *Olmstead v. United States* where Brandeis insisted that Americans have "the right to be let alone—the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized men." Rosen also connects another Supreme Court justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, to the pursuit of happiness and the virtue of silence. Jefferson, Brandeis, and Ginsburg were grounded in "primary texts from classical, Enlightenment, and American history." Ginsburg practiced the disciplined art of silence through her daily interactions. Often when asked a question, she would have long pauses before she would answer. When asked about her silence, "she replied with a smile, "Well, I try to think before I speak." There is a chuckle from advice given to her by her mother-in-law on her wedding day; "Dear, in every good marriage, it helps to be a little deaf." Rosen ends the chapter on how the Founders would have been disheartened in the heavy use of social media where it contradicts the Stoic wisdom of deliberation and rewards extremism.

Jeffrey Rosen's book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, brings back the importance of virtue and reflects Franklin's maxim that "without Virtue Man can

have no happiness in this World." Rosen laments that he missed the deep reading of classical writers and the joy of encountering "the great works of Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment moral philosophy that offered guidance about how to live a good life." After the 1960s, even a liberal education like Rosen's did not require "classical moral philosophy" for it had "had fallen out of the core curriculum." Rosen concludes his book by expressing that Jefferson's definition of the "pursuit of happiness" that came from the classical writers will come with the joy of reading deeply. Reading deeply and embracing the twelve virtues is key to participating effectively in the body politic. The Founders had their form of vice like our today's iPhone and internet that could be managed if we embraced the virtues of industry, resolution, and silence. Jefferson wrote to Adams that "I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid and I find myself much the happier."



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POETRY

The famous poem “Paul Revere’s Ride” was written in 1860 and published in January 1861 in The Atlantic Monthly, several months before the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1863, it was rereleased in a collection of poems under the heading The Landlord’s Tale. It was also included in an 1866 volume entitled Poetical Works with slight changes. Longfellow urges Americans, especially the pro-Union North, to not forget the American Revolution and the unified nation it brought forth. Before the poem was written, Paul Revere had been largely forgotten. Longfellow’s poem changed all that and made Paul Revere a household name, and his story represents an enduring symbol of the courage of the Revolutionaries who fought for independence in 1776.

The Landlord’s Tale: Paul Revere’s Ride (1863)

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, “If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm.”
Then he said, “Good night!” and with muffled oar

Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war;
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.

Meanwhile, his friend, through alley and street,
Wanders and watches with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed the tower of the Old North Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry-chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the sombre rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade,—
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,
Where he paused to listen and look down
A moment on the roofs of the town,

BACKGROUND: *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*,
Grant Wood (1931).

And the moonlight flowing over all,
Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
In their night-encampment on the hill,
Wrapped in silence so deep and still
That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
The watchful night-wind, as it went
Creeping along from tent to tent,
And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
A moment only he feels the spell
Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread
Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
On a shadowy something far away,
Where the river widens to meet the bay,--
A line of black that bends and floats
On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
Now he patted his horse's side,
Now gazed at the landscape far and near,
Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,
And turned and tightened his saddle girth;
But mostly he watched with eager search
The belfry-tower of the Old North Church,
As it rose above the graves on the hill,
Lonely and spectral and sombre and still.
And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet:
That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,
The fate of a nation was riding that night;
And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,
Kindled the land into flame with its heat.
He has left the village and mounted the steed,
And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep,
Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
And under the alders, that skirt its edge,
Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge,
Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

It was twelve by the village clock,
When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.
He heard the crowing of the cock,
And the barking of the farmer's dog,
And felt the damp of the river fog,
That rises after the sun goes down.

It was one by the village clock,
When he galloped into Lexington.
He saw the gilded weathercock
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,
Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
As if they already stood aghast
At the bloody work they would look upon.

It was two by the village clock,
When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
He heard the bleating of the flock,
And the twitter of birds among the trees,
And felt the breath of the morning breeze
Blowing over the meadows brown.
And one was safe and asleep in his bed
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
Who that day would be lying dead,
Pierced by a British musket-ball.

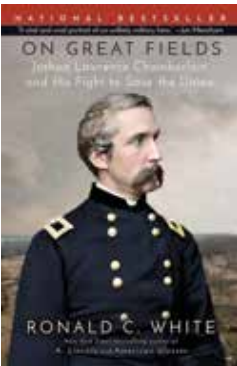
You know the rest. In the books you have read,
How the British Regulars fired and fled,--
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall,
Chasing the red-coats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,--
A cry of defiance and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

BOOK REVIEW

Beyond Little Round Top: The Extraordinary Life of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

By Tony Perry, 20 (MI)



On Great Fields: The Life and Unlikely Heroism of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

By Ronald C. White

Random House

512 pgs. | \$24

Each year, more than a million visitors come to Gettysburg National Military Park, where many climb Little Round Top to learn about Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's heroism on July 2, 1863. His life beyond that rocky hill in Pennsylvania is largely unknown. Ronald C. White's *On Great Fields: The Life and Unlikely Heroism of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain* is a well-researched biography that seeks to fill in the gaps in the story of one of the American Civil War's most celebrated figures. White's book tells the story of Chamberlain's life, from his birth to his death, covering his familial life, academic pursuits, and his political career after the war. This significant biography tells the story of an unlikely military hero whose early life prepared him for the challenges he faced during the American Civil War, as well as the personal and professional struggles that defined him as a great leader.

White argues that Chamberlain's character was developed and forged long before he ever wore a Union uniform. Born in 1828 in rural Maine, the New England values of hard work, intellectual rigor, and moral purpose significantly influenced him. His mother, Sarah Dupee Chamberlain, instilled in him a love of learning that would define his entire life. As White notes, she "filled her son with dreams that stretched far beyond the boundaries of Brewer, Maine." This maternal influence led Chamberlain away from a life as a farmer and toward the classroom, where he honed his skills as a lifelong learner, orator, and teacher.

Education became Chamberlain's pathway to a world beyond Maine. After struggling with a speech impediment in his youth, he overcame this challenge through determined commitment to self-improvement, and, as a result, he enrolled and was accepted



Joshua Chamberlain (colorized photograph), between 1860-1865, Wikimedia Commons (colorized by zuzahin).

at Bowdoin College in 1848. White describes the significance of Chamberlain's educational pursuits by stating that he "discovered at Bowdoin not just knowledge, but a sense of purpose that would carry him through the greatest trials of his life." Bowdoin's curricula exposed Chamberlain to classical languages, rhetoric, and moral philosophy, all of which would influence his approach to leadership for the rest of his life.

While at Bowdoin, Chamberlain encountered influential professors who shaped his intellectual development. Most notably, Calvin Stowe and his famous wife, Harriet Beecher Stowe, helped

him to better understand the moral complexities surrounding slavery. This educational foundation provided Chamberlain with the intellectual framework to understand the Civil War not merely as a political conflict, but as a moral struggle for the nation's very existence.

Central to understanding Chamberlain's character is his relationship with Frances Caroline Adams, whom he married in 1855. White portrays their marriage as a partnership of equals. Fanny, as she was known, was herself highly educated and shared her husband's intellectual interests. However, their relationship faced significant challeng-

es, particularly during Chamberlain's extended military service.

White doesn't romanticize their marriage, acknowledging the strains created by separation and the trauma of war. He writes, "The war that made Chamberlain a hero nearly unmade his marriage." Fanny struggled with his decision to leave his academic post for military service, and the prolonged separations created tensions that would persist long after the war ended. Additionally, Chamberlain's life-threatening injuries, which he received in June 1864 at the Second Battle of Petersburg, caused him pain for the rest of his life, leading to several surgeries and, as White implies, may have added stress to their marital relationship. Their correspondence reveals a complex dynamic between a woman trying to maintain a household and raise children alone, and a man driven by duty to serve his country.

The birth of their children added both joy and challenges to their lives. White demonstrates how Chamberlain's role as a father was frequently interrupted by his public duties, creating lasting effects on his familial relationships. Despite these challenges, the marriage endured because of Joshua and Fanny's mutual respect for one another and their shared values.

One of the most historically notable aspects of Chamberlain's story is his transformation from a mild-mannered college professor into one of the Union Army's most celebrated officers. When he requested leave from Bowdoin to study in Europe, the college trustees granted it on the condition that he not enlist in the army. Chamberlain overcame this restriction by accepting a commission as lieutenant colonel of the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a decision that would define the rest of his life.

White highlights the challenges Chamberlain faced as an inexperienced soldier tasked with leading men who shared his lack of military training. His academic background, which initially appeared to be a liability in the unforgiving atmosphere of the military, ultimately served him well as an officer in the Union Army. His intelligence, dedication, and moral authority earned him respect from those with whom he served. Chamberlain's ability to address challenges analytically and

deal with his fellow soldiers respectfully and fairly endeared him to his men to the extent that they were proud to follow him into battle and be a part of the 20th Maine.

The most well-known incident of Chamberlain's military career occurred at the Battle of Gettysburg on July 2, 1863, when his 20th Maine Regiment held the extreme left flank of the Union line at Little Round Top. Facing repeated Confederate assaults and running low on ammunition, Chamberlain made the desperate decision to order a bayonet charge that broke the Confederate attack and arguably saved the Union army from defeat. White describes the event: "In that instant of decision, the college professor vanished, and the warrior emerged, forever changing not just the battle, but the man himself."

Chamberlain's actions at Little Round Top earned him lasting fame. Still, White emphasizes that his leadership and effectiveness as a battlefield officer should not be based solely on his heroic actions at Gettysburg. Throughout his military service, Chamberlain demonstrated consistent courage, tactical skill, and compassion for his men. He was wounded multiple times, nearly died from a severe abdominal wound at Petersburg, and by war's end had earned the respect of generals and ordinary soldiers alike.

White's biography also emphasizes the importance of Chamberlain's post-war struggles. The transition from battlefield hero to civilian life proved difficult, as it did for many veterans. Chamberlain returned to Maine carrying both physical and psychological scars that would haunt him for the rest of his life. "The war had ended," White says, "but for Chamberlain, the battle for peace had just begun."

As a civilian, Chamberlain served as Maine's governor from 1867 to 1871. The fact that each gubernatorial term was only one year demonstrated his effectiveness as a civic leader and also showed his status as a respected hero in his home state. He confronted challenges that echoed those of the post-Civil War United States, particularly the immense task of reuniting a nation devastated by hundreds of thousands of deaths and left leaderless by the loss of a president who had sought reconciliation.

As Maine's governor, he leveraged his military experience to advocate for veterans' rights and educational reform, while navigating the complex political currents of the post-war era. His academic background served him well in these roles, but he struggled with the mundane aspects of political life after the intensity of military command.

Perhaps most challenging was Chamberlain's relationship with his own fame. The Gettysburg legend, while bringing him recognition and opportunities, also became a burden. White observes that "Chamberlain spent the rest of his life living up to a moment of supreme heroism, a standard that no ordinary day could match." This struggle between public expectations and private reality influenced his later years and contributed to ongoing tensions within his family.

Throughout his life, Chamberlain remained committed to education and championed its positive influence on his life. His return to Bowdoin as president after the war reflected his belief that knowledge and moral instruction were essential to the nation's future. Even during his military service, he continued his scholarly interests. In his later years, he wrote extensively about his war experiences, contributing to the historical record of the conflict.

White's *On Great Fields* presents Chamberlain as a complex, fallible human figure whose heroism emerged not from natural military expertise but from a character influenced through education, tested by adversity, and sustained by moral conviction. The biography reveals how an unlikely hero was shaped by the challenges he faced from childhood struggles with speech to the trauma of combat, the difficulties of marriage, and the burdens of public service.

The book is an excellent history and a compelling biography, demonstrating how individual character can rise to meet extraordinary circumstances. White indicates that Chamberlain's life exemplifies principled leadership, developed and honed through education and tested by adversity, offering both inspiration and instruction for contemporary readers.



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ESSAY

John Witherspoon, “Grandfather” of the Constitution

By Jeffrey H. Morrison, Ph.D.

Seemingly every famous American founder was the “father” of something. George Washington, of course, was the Father of His Country (always with the definite article); John Adams was Father of the U.S. Navy; Thomas Jefferson, by his own epitaph, Father of the University of Virginia; and James Madison, Father of the Constitution (and Bill of Rights). During his formative college years between the ages of 18 and 22, no single individual had a more powerful influence on the mind and character, and the political thinking of Madison than the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, and that makes him, if not a Father, at least a Grandfather of the Constitution.

Among the various characters the nation prepares to recognize for “America 250,” Witherspoon (1723-1794) was literally unique. There was no better embodiment of the intersection between politics, education, and religion during the American Founding than he. Although somewhat neglected, Witherspoon was a “colossus” in his time, as James Hutson of the Library of Congress called him: he was the lone clergyman in the Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation, and then ratified the Constitution, giving him a direct hand in producing three of the four Organic Laws of the United States. All the while, he was president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) during the most seminal quarter-century in American history, serving as lecturer in moral

philosophy, history, and eloquence, and, equally important for the constitutional fate of the future republic, as Madison’s personal tutor for a post-graduate year. In 1774, a year after Madison left Princeton, John Adams, who never suffered fools gladly, called Witherspoon a “clear, sensible” preacher, and “as high a Son of Liberty, as any Man in America.” Washington, Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton (another “Father”—of the Coast Guard), who had wanted to attend Princeton himself, also held him in high regard and sought his advice on national economic strategies while first Secretary of the Treasury.

At the urging of Dr. Benjamin Rush and of George Whitefield, the Anglican evangelist who helped lead the First Great Awakening, Witherspoon had emigrated from Scotland to Princeton in 1768 to become sixth president of the College, succeeding another spearhead of the Awakening, Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758). Under Witherspoon’s leadership from 1768 to 1794, Princeton produced the most impressive generation of political leaders in American history. Among these were 12 members of the Continental Congress; five delegates to the Constitutional Convention; one U.S. president (Madison); a vice president (Aaron Burr), 77 Congressmen (49 U.S. Representatives; 28 U.S. Senators); three Supreme Court Justices; four cabinet members (one Secretary of State; three Attorneys General); eight District Judges; and two foreign ministers. In addition to these national



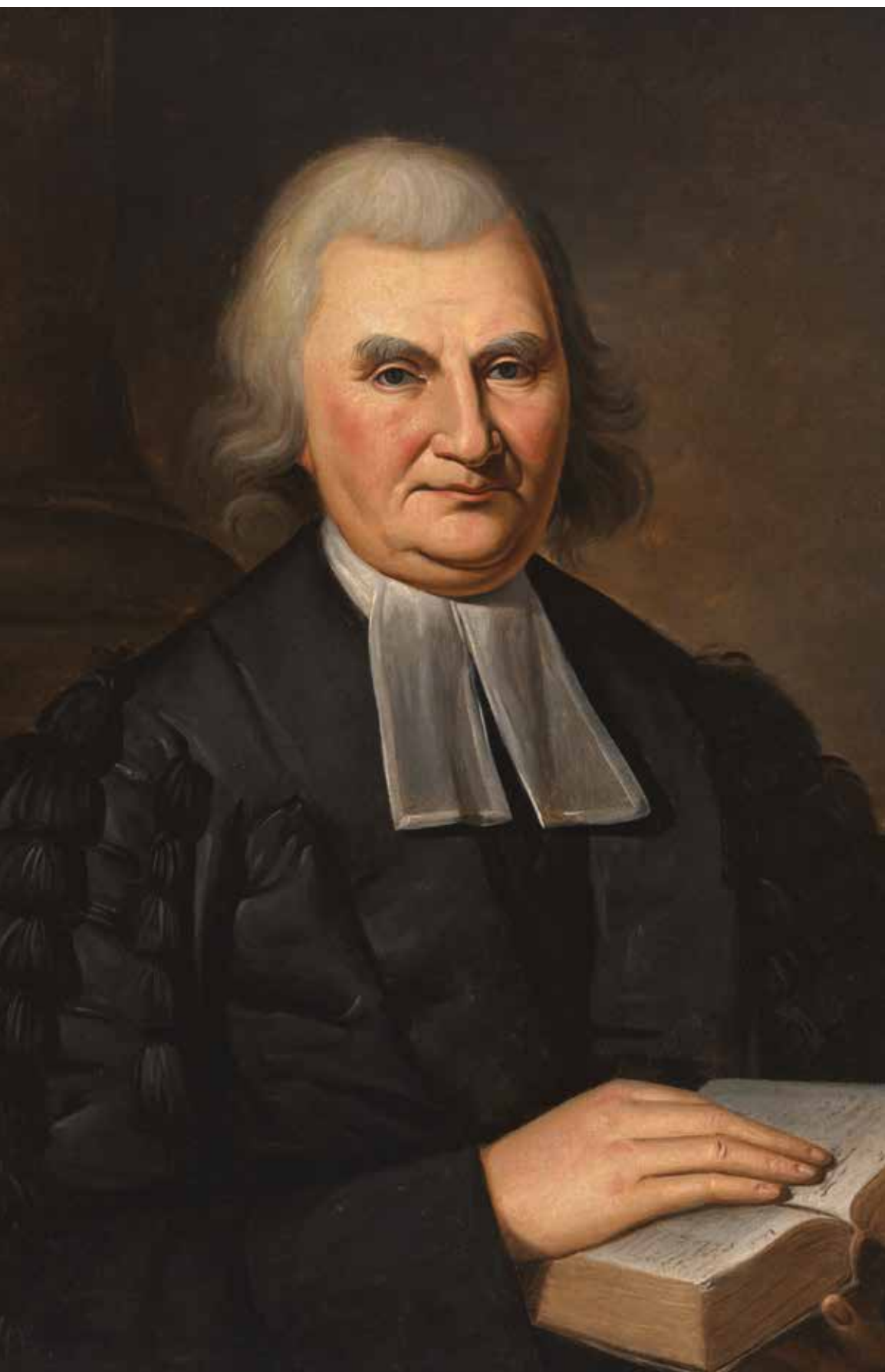
John Bufford. *Princeton University, 1836* (lithograph), 1836, Princeton University Archives, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

office holders, 26 of Witherspoon's graduates became state judges, 17 were members of their state constitutional conventions, and 14 were delegates to the state ratifying conventions. Witherspoon remained at Princeton during the early national period, returning to state politics until his death in 1794, during the second term of George Washington's presidency.

It was primarily as a politician and moral philosopher that Witherspoon impressed himself on the young James Madison. Madison took a post-graduate tutorial in law under the "old Doctor's" direction and then proceeded to carry certain elements

of Witherspoon's political-theological creed into his own public career in the Virginia legislature, at the Constitutional Convention, as co-author of *The Federalist* essays, member of the Virginia ratifying convention, U.S. Congressman and draftsman and sponsor of the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights, advisor to President Washington, Secretary of State under President Jefferson, and finally during two stormy terms as president from 1809-17.

For four years, Madison heard Dr. Witherspoon preach political sermons in the Presbyterian church in Princeton; heard Witherspoon lecture



on moral philosophy (a combination of law, political science, ethics, and philosophy) in the capstone course that he took as an upperclassman; read books and had tutorials under Witherspoon's guidance as a graduate student. He learned about governments ancient and modern, about the benefits of a mixed republican government with checks and balances against tyranny, to be realistic about human nature and what can be expected from government, and to respect religious liberty while at the same time providing space for public worship.

Witherspoon himself seems to have anticipated the extended republic theory of *The Federalist* in 1781, half a dozen years before they were written. In a speech to Congress encouraging a stronger federal union, Witherspoon also lauded religious liberty, and envisioned a sort of forerunner to the European Union in both international and American affairs.

Everybody is able to look back to the time in Europe, when the liberal sentiments that now prevail upon the rights of conscience, would have been looked upon as absurd. It is but little above two hundred years since that enlarged system called the balance of power, took place; and...it is a greater step from the former disunited and hostile situation of kingdoms and states, to their present condition, than it would be from their present condition to a state of more perfect and lasting union. It is not impossible, that in future times all the states on one quarter of the globe, may see it proper by some plan of union, to perpetuate security and peace; and sure I am, a well-planned confederacy among the states of America, may hand down the blessings of peace and public order to many generations.

Madison was sitting as a freshman in the Continental Congress when his old tutor delivered that speech. He was to hear many more from Witherspoon, and serve on a number of committees alongside him. The theory of the extended

American republic, spelled out with most clarity by Madison six years later in *Federalist 14*, is a variation on the federal level of Witherspoon's "balance of power" and "more perfect and lasting union" articulated in his 1781 speech in Congress, and doubtless in informal settings during the Revolutionary and Confederation periods. Add to this Witherspoon's robust teaching on religious liberty and non-establishment, and one can see his influence follow James Madison into the Virginia Assembly in 1775, when he suggested the portentous phrase "the free exercise of religion" in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and his reproducing the same phrase in the First Amendment of the federal Constitution—further securing Witherspoon's place as a Grandfather of the Constitution.



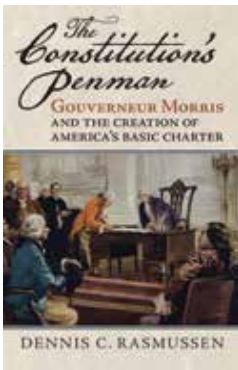
Dr. Jeffrey Morrison is Professor of American Studies at Christopher Newport University and Senior Academic Advisory Consultant at the James Madison Education Fund. He has also been a visiting professor of politics at Princeton University and the University of Virginia and is the author or editor of five prior books on American constitutionalism, including John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic. His latest book, The Political Writings of John Witherspoon is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

OPPOSITE: Rembrandt Peale. *John Witherspoon*, 1794, National Portrait Gallery.

BOOK REVIEW

Gouverneur Morris: The Odd Father of the Constitution

By Stephan Seabury, '23 (UT)



**The Constitution's Penman:
Gouverneur Morris and the Creation
of America's Basic Charter**

By Dennis C. Rasmussen

University Press of Kansas
272 pgs. | \$53

“He scalded an arm and lost a leg, spent the winter at Valley Forge, earned a fortune, attended the convening of the Estates General, made love in a convent, advised a president and a king..., hid friends from the guillotine, planned a great city and an ambitious canal, and capped it all off by marrying a woman whom he loved and fathering a son he adored.”

Syracuse professor of political science Dennis Rasmussen would like to add to this colorful profile of Gouverneur Morris the title “Father of the Constitution,” or at least a share in that moniker with our own James Madison. In his latest book *The Constitution's Penman: Gouverneur Morris and the Creation of America's Basic Charter*, Rasmussen explores the anomalous life of this Founding Father by balancing Morris' cavalier nature with his more serious contributions to the U.S. Constitution.

Rasmussen spends nearly fifty pages just on the personal and public life of Morris separate from his efforts during the Constitutional Convention. Initially, it seemed it would be just another biography of the lurid life of Morris rather than a serious look at his contributions to the Constitution. However, this time spent on his life is not wasted - there are connections made between Morris's personal life and his political impact. For example, Rasmussen argues that although Morris comes from an elite Loyalist New York family, he broke the mold as an early proponent of the Revolutionary War. However, in 1774 Morris directly castigated a democratic anti-British mob and even argued that the nobility should be restored during the French Revolution. Morris was also one of the most outspoken opponents to any pro-slavery compromises at the Convention. Finally, in the late chapters of the book, it is pointed out that an aging Morris actually became disillusioned with the application of the Constitution, even going so far as to float the idea of secession during the war of 1812. This contradictory nature of Morris is constantly on display in Rasmussen's book as the author tries to make the connections between



Portrait of Gouverneur Morris, 1817,
Wikimedia Commons.

Morris' personal background and his political leanings.

This balancing act expands as Rasmussen moves into arguing for Morris being recognized as having a larger role in the creation of the U.S. Constitution. His book highlights that Morris gave more comments and proposed more language changes during the Constitutional Convention than anyone else, including Madison. Rasmussen sometimes runs into contradictions and difficulties as he fully fleshes out his argument. Morris attempted to shape both the House and Senate, but he lost as many times as Madison during those debates. For example, Morris repeatedly argued for a Senate that would be much more aristocratic with members being unpaid, selected by the Executive Branch, and even serving for life. The final version of the Constitution included none of those provisions. While Morris argued for a much stronger executive elected directly by the people, he ended up playing a large role in creation of the Electoral College. The real strength of Rasmussen's argument is based on the various committees Morris served on and clear evidence that the Preamble was written by Morris alone.

Rasmussen believes Morris certainly did not "write" the Constitution but instead should be recognized for the final organization of the document along with some important linguistic changes. Morris

Morris gave more comments and proposed more language changes during the Constitutional Convention than anyone else, including Madison.

implies more than this in a letter from 1814 in response to questions about the Convention, by stating: “That instrument [i.e., the Constitution] was written by the fingers, which write this letter.” In 1830, Madison is more nuanced in his own letter to Morris’ first biographer and historian, Jared Sparks, by giving credit for the final organization of the Constitution to Morris, while hinting that Morris took some of his own liberties:

...the finish (Rasmussen’s emphasis) given to the style and arrangement of the Constitution, fairly belongs to the pen of Mr. Morris...[the] subsequent resolutions accurately penned, and falling easily in their proper places was a good preparation for the symmetry and phraseology of the Instrument: but there was sufficient room for the talents and taste stamped by the author (Morris) on the face of it.

This distinction is at times difficult for Rasmussen, and there are sections where he argues a little too loudly for Morris, but he also admits the lack of clear records of the committee work done during the Convention. Rasmussen’s review of the source materials of the Convention and immediately afterwards establishes that Morris drove the majority of linguistic changes from Madison’s Virginia Plan.

Rasmussen bases his main arguments on the well-known Farrand’s *Records of the Federal Convention, and the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* by James Madison, a Member. A third and more nuanced source which Rasmussen leans heavily upon is the research done by William Treanor. Treanor, Dean of Georgetown Law, wrote a 2021 article entitled *The case of the Dishonest Scriver: Gouverneur Morris and the Creation of the Federalist Constitution*. Some scholars argue that the ‘dishonest’ part is a false premise as Morris worked within a committee, whose own work was scrutinized by the Convention as whole. This critique aside, Treanor’s well researched article reviewed all the subtle linguistic changes that Morris made while serving on both the Committee of Style and Committee of Detail and many of these changes were accepted in the final draft.

The Committee of Detail was created in late July 1787 and wrote the first full draft of the Constitution. Its principal goal was to consolidate all the various agreed upon resolutions into a single document. The Committee of Style, on the other hand, was also referred to as the “Committee of Revision” and was given the task of polishing the language of the Constitution just prior to the end of the Convention. Morris served on both committees and Rasmussen argues he was more of a ‘reviser’ than simply a member clarifying grammar.

It was in the Committee of Detail that the first instance in which a preamble was discussed and drafted by James Wilson, but that original draft is markedly different from what we have today. The final Committee of Style’s draft included Morris’ preamble - not Wilson’s. Using letters from Madison and Morris, along with other sources in the book, Rasmussen argues that most of the committee work was done by Morris, thus allowing him to make subtle and not so subtle changes to the final wording and arrangement.

The Constitution’s Penman makes an engaging argument for Morris to be the Father of the Constitution. The book walks the reader through the usual and entertaining experiences of Morris, but it also shows that Morris certainly played an active role in the Convention debates. However, neither Morris nor Madison worked alone, and both experienced setbacks and complete losses during the debates. Rasmussen compellingly argues that Morris and Madison may have to share joint custody of the title Father of the Constitution, but future readers will have to make that final judgment for themselves.



Stephan Seabury is a 2023 James Madison Fellow for Utah and recently earned a master’s degree in Constitutional Government, Civics, and Law from Utah Valley University. He is an award-winning teacher at Providence Hall High teaching various US History and AP government courses.

BOOK REVIEW

Washington's Dilemma

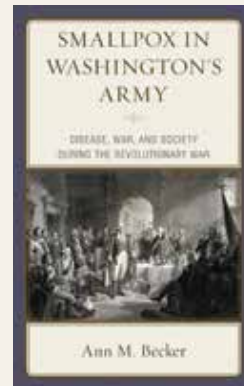
Ray Tyler, '14 (SC)

During World War II, approximately 12,000 Americans earned conscientious objector status but still served in non-combat roles to support the war effort. Some conscientious objectors worked in hospitals, some maintained national forests, and some volunteered as subjects in medical experiments the U.S. Army hoped would lead to better prevention and treatment of lice infestations, malaria, pneumonia, and other ailments. Larry Miller was one of the volunteer guinea pigs. Stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, in the spring of 1944, Miller volunteered to be one of 50 patients subjected to an atypical pneumonia infection for which the Army was looking for a cure. Miller spent several weeks in a luxury hotel in Pinehurst, NC, with pneumonia. He spent an additional seven weeks at home, regaining his strength.

Ann M. Becker's meticulously researched book, *Smallpox in Washington's Army: Disease, War, and Society in the Revolutionary War*, demonstrates that the U.S. Army's focus on disease prevention and treatment did not begin in World War II with volunteer corps officers. It began with General George Washington's army camped on the hills outside Boston in the summer and fall of 1775. Becker masterfully takes her readers on a fascinating journey into the fears of the 18th-century. The patient would get sick! But the vast majority experienced mild infections.

Washington was appointed Commander of the Continental Army in June 1775, arrived in Cambridge on July 3rd, and discovered his army was a "mixed multitude of people under minimal discipline, order or government." Smallpox was spreading through Boston and its surroundings and rumors spread that the British under General William Howe were engaged in germ warfare and were sending sick soldiers and smallpox-pus-coated goods into the American lines. The rumors were believable because the Americans had seen the British employ such tactics during the French and Indian War.

Washington himself was a survivor of smallpox. He accompanied his half-brother Laurence to the Caribbean as a young man, where he contracted the disease. Washington attended a dinner in the Caribbean "with some reluctance" where he was exposed to the disease.



**Smallpox in Washington's Army:
Disease, War, and Society in the
Revolutionary War**

By Ann M. Becker

Rowman & Littlefield
280 pgs. | \$40

Two weeks later he was sick and remained ill, according to Becker for twenty-six days. Some medical historians believe it was that experience that left him sterile. His wife, Martha, had given birth to children in her first marriage, but she and George had none of their own. Smallpox might have made Washington sterile. In 1760, Washington worked to stop the spread of smallpox on his Bullskin Plantation. There, he “settled things on the best footing” he could “to prevent the Small Pox from spreading.” Inoculation offered a way of immunizing oneself against a terrible affliction. However, the technology at the time required the inoculation administrator to inject a tiny amount of live virus into the patient. Interestingly, Washington chose to inoculate his enslaved people on his farms, a decision that foreshadowed his thinking about how best to protect his soldiers in the revolutionary army.

Smallpox was a dreaded disease in the 18th century. The first symptoms were fever, chills, and headaches, followed by the rapid spread of pustules over the entire body. It was fatal for over 15% of its victims. Those who did not die were often scarred and disfigured for life. If a patient recovered, that patient was immune for life. Lifetime immunity led to experiments with inoculations. If inoculation induced a mild case, victims might recover, become immune, and no longer be contagious. Mass immunity would limit and control the devastating effects of smallpox.

Inoculation worked. Only 1% of the inoculated soldiers in Washington’s Army died from smallpox, versus 16% who contracted the disease naturally. The problem with inoculation was the recuperation period. The inoculated patient needed rest, care, and isolation. They remained contagious for up to three weeks after receiving the smallpox inoculation. During the recuperation period, soldiers were “unfit for duty” even though they looked and felt perfectly healthy. Some people would self-inoculate or secretly pay a doctor to perform the service and not endure quarantine. Becker points out that this behavior could not, and did not, stop the spread of the disease.

Washington studied this problem from the summer of 1775 through the long and arduous year of 1776. Smallpox factored into his decision not to attack Boston in 1775 when he had the city under siege. The disease devastated the armies of Generals Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery in their attempts to capture Quebec that same year. Smallpox, Washington wrote to Patrick Henry in April 1775, “is more destructive to an Army in the Natural way than the Enemy’s swords.”

“This illustrates Washington’s dilemma,” writes Becker. “Inoculation worked in preventing an individual from contracting the disease, but the act of inoculation and the subsequent infection allowed the disease to spread if care was not taken to quarantine and isolate those inoculated and contagious.” Washington could either choose to inoculate the entire Army, establish procedures for isolating those under inoculation and risk an enemy attack when his army weak-

ened, or he could inoculate in an all-or-nothing attempt to move past the issue and confront the British less encumbered by illness.

Washington took the gamble. He began a massive inoculation effort, kept it secret, and, as much as possible, inoculated the civilian population near his encampments. It was a courageous decision, not unlike his decision to cross the Delaware River on Christmas night of 1776. One act preserved the strength of his Army: the other, its spirit. Among the many strengths of Becker's book is her gentle critique of military historians who downplay or ignore the role that the physical health of the Army plays in a commander's strategy and tactics. She argues that most military historians ignore the issue – but medical historians do not. Another is the use of medical historians' interpretations. Becker focuses heavily on the role smallpox played in Washington's thinking. She was wise to use the medical historians' interpretations.

If there is a fault in the book, it's a minor one. Becker often repeats the way smallpox progresses through the body, how inoculation works, and the danger of inoculating in the 18th century without quarantine. Perhaps a better approach would have been to summarize the details early in the book and refer the reader to the summary in later chapters.

Smallpox in Washington's Army was published in 2023, three years after COVID-19 spread worldwide and killed millions of people. Covid is a vivid memory for today's high school and college students and a comparison of how civil authority responded to a smallpox outbreak in the 18th century versus responses during the Covid pandemic would make for some fascinating class discussions. Questions about leadership, medicine, and human nature—all woven together—might help students understand the difficulties of the world they are inheriting. Becker's book reminds us that the outcome of the American Revolution was not inevitable. Calculated risks by Washington and countless others paid off. As we approach our nation's 250th anniversary we shall celebrate the courage of the risk-takers.



N.C. Wyeth. *Washington* (in *Poems of American Patriotism* by Matthew Brander), 1922, archive.org.

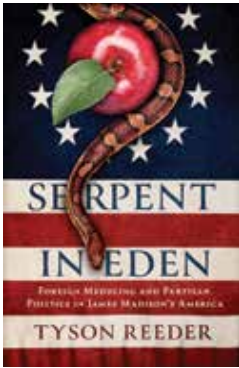


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BOOK REVIEW

Entangling Ties in the Early American Republic

By Dr. Rosemarie Zagari, Ph.D.



Serpent in Eden: Foreign Meddling and Partisan Politics in James Madison's America

By Tyson Reeder

Oxford University Press

420 pgs. | \$23

OPPOSITE: Howard Pyle. *Banquet to Edmond-Charles Genet in South Carolina*, 1897, Alamy.

Tyson Reeder's *Serpent in Eden* could almost be a novel or a Netflix miniseries. There is so much subterfuge, so many betrayals, and so much corruption that it often reads more like fiction than history. But it is history—and an excellent history at that.

Serpent in Eden represents a major reassessment of fundamental questions of early US history, including the career of James Madison, the development of the first political parties, and the country's geopolitical status in the early modern world. Reeder's signal intervention is to document the extent to which foreigners sought to undermine the new nation by interfering in America's domestic politics. From the American Revolution through the War of 1812, a weak and disunited country faced grave challenges to its existence on the frontier as well as on the high seas. The biggest problems, however, may have come from within. Throughout the period, foreign agents, diplomats, and spies repeatedly inserted themselves into conflicts between the two emerging parties, the Federalists and the Republicans. "Foreign meddling," as Reeder calls it, nearly threatened to scuttle the whole enterprise.

Three aspects of Reeder's argument are particularly interesting and significant. The first is Reeder's ability to tease out new aspects of the international dimensions of party conflict. Historians have long recognized the importance of events in Europe in shaping the emergence of party development in the young United States. As is well-known, first the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic Wars intensified hostilities between the Republicans, who sympathized with France, and the Federalists, who favored Great Britain. Each side believed that the other was betraying the true legacy of the Revolution.

Reeder's book, however, moves well beyond this understanding. According to Reeder, the contest for control of the North American continent entered a new phase during the first decades of the new nation's existence. During this period, the United States itself became an imperial power, vying with France, Spain, and Great Britain



To foreigners schooled in rebellion and reaction, Americans' periodic elections represented nothing less than the regularized "lawful overthrow" of the country's elected leaders.

to dominate the North American continent. More than domination, however, the European powers also sought to undermine, cripple, or dismember the young United States. Native Americans also played a key role in the contest. Far from being passive pawns, native peoples capitalized on American weakness in an effort to preserve their own tribal identities. This is where foreign policy and partisan politics converged. Foreign affairs, and sometimes direct foreign meddling, profoundly shaped the dynamics of almost every major foreign policy conflict occurring between the Federalists and the Republicans. Instead of being separate and distinct, international issues permeated domestic politics in the early American republic.

Reeder's second theme involves the ways in which foreigners appealed to the American people in an effort to get them to take sides on foreign affairs, and hence stoked internal divisions and conflicts. Through newspapers, books, and political activism, foreigners exploited what they saw as the inherent ambiguities in the American constitutional system. Whereas in monarchies, the King's authority was sovereign and absolute, in the United States sovereignty was divided among many parties, "including the president, Congress, state legislatures, state governors, and ultimately the people" themselves. Foreign spies, emissaries, and diplomats used these ambiguities to justify bypassing American governmental officials and taking their causes directly to the American people. The case of the Citizen Genet in 1794, who tried to arouse popular support for revolutionary France, and of Carlos Martinez de Yrujo, who disrupted negotiations for Spanish West Florida in 1804 and 1805, were, according to Reeder, but two examples of unwarranted foreign influence or meddling. He provides many others.

These actions exacerbated partisan divisions:

"By pitting Americans against each other, foreign agents exposed unresolved tensions about where sovereignty lay in a republic...Given that the US government exposed its representatives to lawful overthrow every election cycle, foreign agents reasoned that they could legitimately incite the people against their government leaders."

To foreigners schooled in rebellion and reaction, Americans' periodic elections represented nothing less than the regularized "lawful overthrow" of the country's elected leaders. When appealing to popular sentiment, foreigners claimed that they were asking the people to intervene in their role as popular sovereigns—even if their actions explicitly contradicted the government's official foreign policy. This is truly a remarkable claim, a willful misreading of the meaning of popular democracy. It is not surprising, then, that vitriolic internal conflicts were the inevitable result.

A final major theme of Reeder's book is the extent to which foreign individuals and nations took advantage of internal divisions between

OPPOSITE: Thomas Cole. *Home in the Woods*, 1847, Wikimedia Commons.

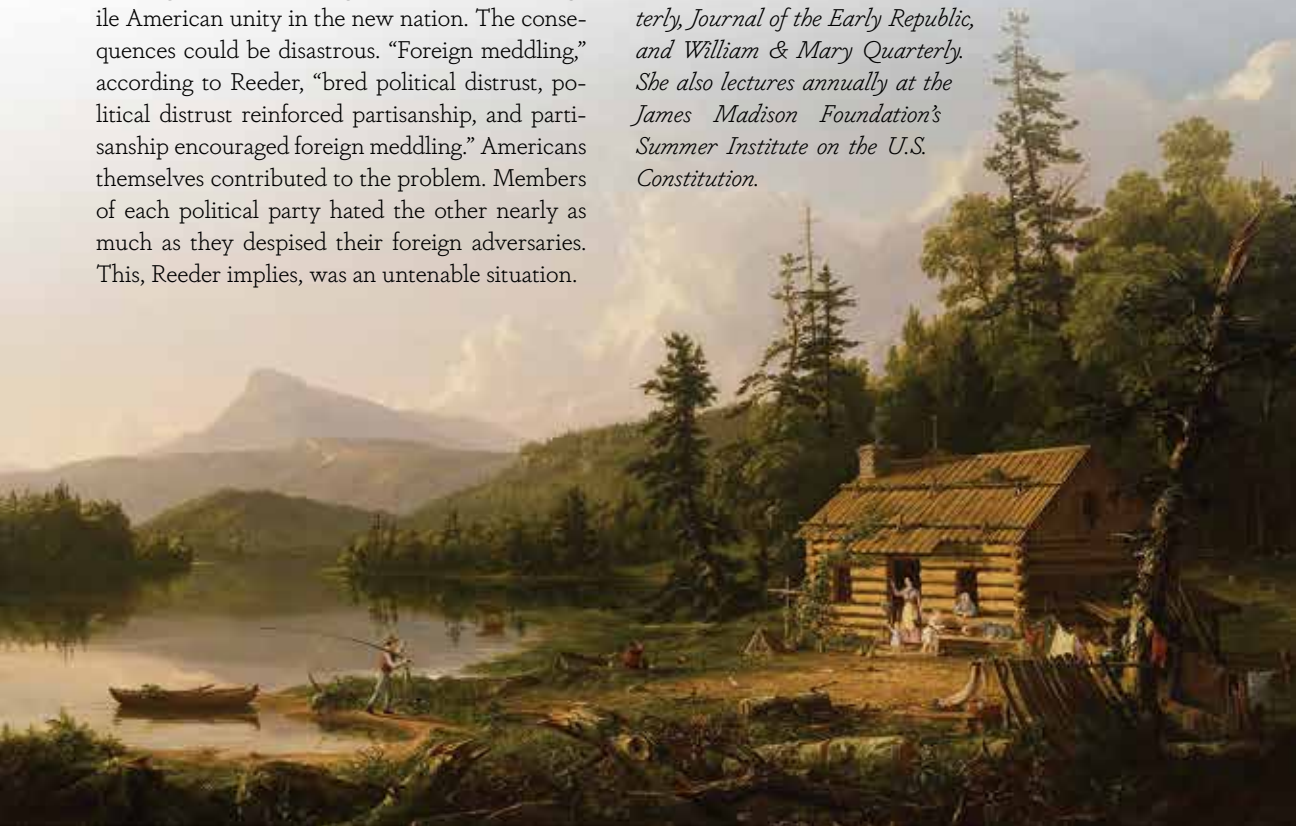
Federalist and Republicans to further their own interests. Quoting Alexander Hamilton, Reeder notes: “Foreign influence is truly the GRECIAN HORSE to a republic. We cannot be too careful to exclude its entrance.” Yet early Americans were clearly unable to stop the advent of foreign influence and meddling. By 1811, for example, Republicans were itching to go to war against Great Britain. Their Federalist opponents, however, were fiercely opposed to war. Foreigners entered the fray. In 1812, a French intermediary approached American officials, claiming to possess inflammatory documents that would implicate the Federalists in a conspiracy with Great Britain to dissolve the union. Publication would force the Federalists to agree to war. Blinded by partisan prejudice, President James Madison and Secretary of State James Monroe paid \$50,000 from the US Treasury to purchase the documents—sight unseen. Once they received the documents, Madison and Monroe discovered that they had been swindled. There was no hint of a Federalist conspiracy or an imminent threat to the union. A foreign agent, however, had succeeded in bilking the American people of fifty thousand dollars—all because of a partisan vendetta.

Exploiting Americans’ internal divisions proved to be a good way for foreigners to undermine fragile American unity in the new nation. The consequences could be disastrous. “Foreign meddling,” according to Reeder, “bred political distrust, political distrust reinforced partisanship, and partisanship encouraged foreign meddling.” Americans themselves contributed to the problem. Members of each political party hated the other nearly as much as they despised their foreign adversaries. This, Reeder implies, was an untenable situation.

In the end, Reeder warns us that the past is also prologue. The United States, he says, “remains vulnerable [today] to foreign powers that aggravate political discord. Foreign meddling—perceived and actual—continues to stem from and increase party hostility and polarization.” *The Serpent in Eden*, then, is a cautionary tale. Our country has never been a pristine Eden, free from external threats of interference; the corrupting serpent of foreign influence was present from the beginning; and partisan Americans, like Adam and Eve, willfully chomped on the apple of foreign influence, imperiling the American experiment at a tenuous time in its history. It is up to us, Reeder suggests, to help contain the damage today.



Rosemarie Zagarrri is Distinguished Professor of History at George Mason University. She has published four books, including her most recent *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Her articles have appeared in leading scholarly journals such as the *Journal of American History*, *American Quarterly*, *Journal of the Early Republic*, and *William & Mary Quarterly*. She also lectures annually at the James Madison Foundation’s Summer Institute on the U.S. Constitution.





Le dernier mot

There have been many biographies of James Madison and there will continue to be so long as we revere the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. While each biography has its strength and place in the literature, one multi-volume set still stands out as among the very best. To be sure, it was written long before search engines made the work easier and since then many more letters and papers have been uncovered and published. The University of Virginia's Papers of James Madison Project shows just how many more papers have been discovered and published over the past several decades.

Author and journalist Irving Brant set out to write a biography of James Madison who he believed was largely ignored at a time when there was a resurgence of interest in the American Founders. He wrote in the preface to the first volume, "Among all the men who shaped the present government of the United States of America, the one who did the most is known the least." What followed was a six-volume exploration of the life of Madison, beginning with his young life up through his final years in retirement. If you can find copies of them, pick them up right away. The writing is superb, but it also gives an intimate look into the mind and heart of the namesake of our Foundation.

It is fitting that the U.S. Mint created a quarter design featuring James Madison and the Constitution for the Seminquincentennial. I hope the coin inspires more Americans – especially James Madison Fellows and teachers everywhere – to renew their study of Madison as well as each of the Founders who contributed to America's independence. As you study them, I hope you find the people behind the names, and that you can understand them as they understood themselves. Although writing specifically about James Madison, Brant's closing words in his preface apply to all of the Founders:

"If the reader finds that instead of encountering a detached intellect he is facing a person with human qualities of mind and emotion, he may be sure that he sees the Madison who was known to his associates. If it appears that these human qualities flowered in a far richer soil of national feeling than has been assumed in later periods of negation, that too is but a relearning of what once was known. *It should not make us love our country less to know that it was loved by those who founded it.*"

SUBMISSIONS

The James Madison Review of Books encourages James Madison Fellows, teachers, academics, researchers, and the Constitutionally-minded public, to submit ideas for book reviews, essays, art, and poetry.

Book reviews should be focused on a book published within the last five years on the subjects of the U.S. Constitution, the Colonial Era, the Founding Era, the Civil War, or other political and historical topics centered around the Constitution.

Please contact the editor, Dr. Guy F. Burnett, at gburnett@jamesmadison.gov for more details.

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