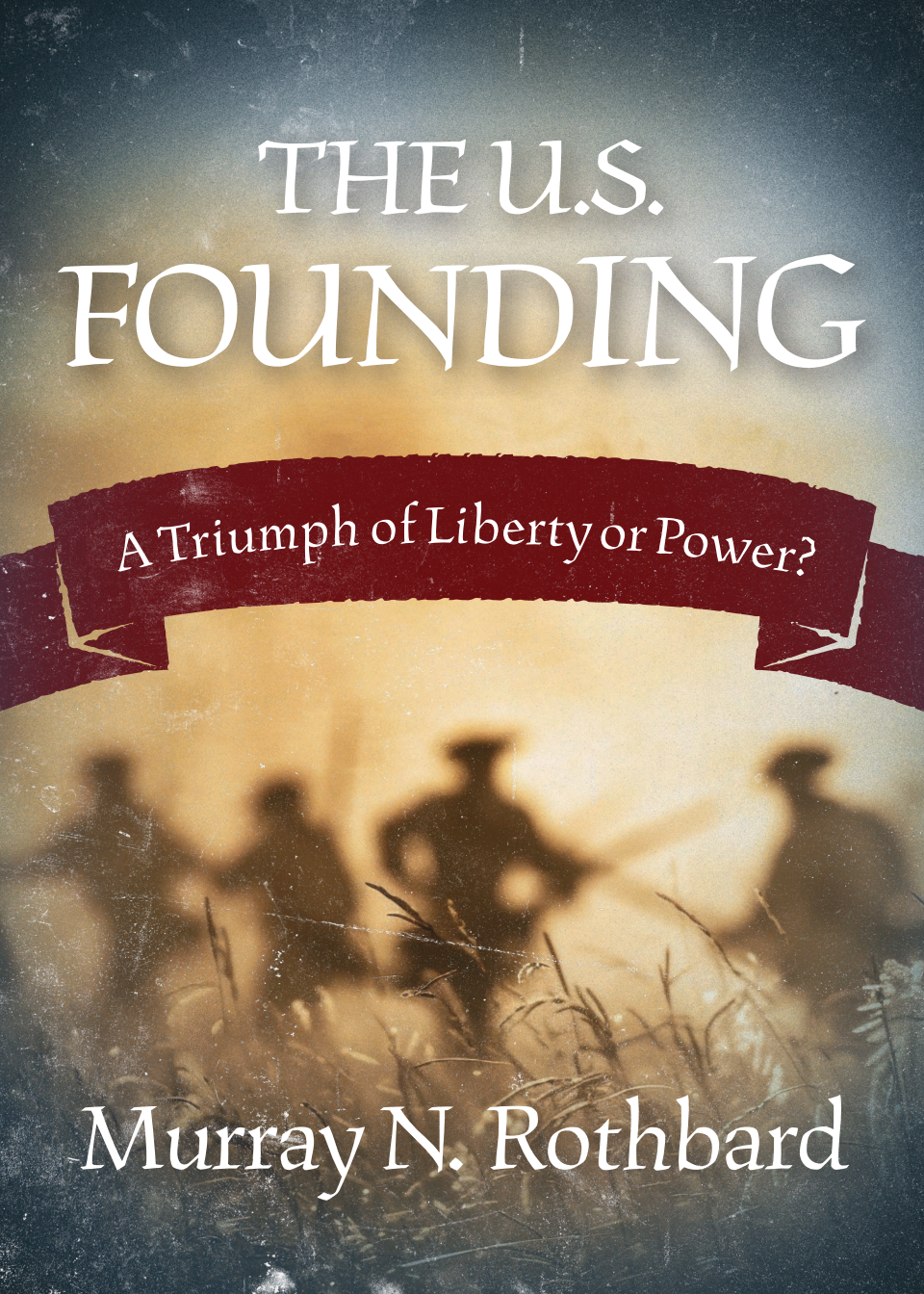
THE U.S.
FOUNDING
A Triumph of Liberty or Power?
Murray N. Rothbard

The U.S. Founding: A Triumph of Liberty or Power? by Murray N. Rothbard, includes two chapters from *Conceived in Liberty*, vol. 4: *The Revolutionary War, 1775–1784* (1979; Mises Institute, 2011), chap. 80, pp. 1555–60, and vol. 5: *The New Republic, 1784–1791* (Mises Institute, 2019), chap. 38, pp. 306–13. Full footnote citations are added for reference acurracy.

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The U.S. Founding

A Triumph of Liberty or Power?

Was the American Revolution Radical?

Especially since the early 1950s, America has been concerned with opposing revolutions throughout the world; in the process, it has generated a historiography that denies its own revolutionary past. This neoconservative view of the American Revolution, echoing the reactionary writer in the pay of the Austrian and English governments of the early nineteenth century, Friedrich von Gentz, tries to isolate the American Revolution from all the revolutions in the western world that preceded it and followed it. The American Revolution, this view holds, was unique; it alone of all modern revolutions was not really revolutionary; instead, it was moderate, conservative, dedicated only to preserving existing institutions from British aggrandizement. Furthermore, like all else

in America, it was marvelously harmonious and consensual. Unlike the wicked French and other revolutions in Europe, the American Revolution, then, did not upset or change anything. It was therefore not really a revolution at all; certainly, it was not radical.

Now this view, in the first place, displays an extreme naivete on the nature of revolution. No revolution has ever sprung forth, fully blown and fully armed like Athena, from the brow of existing society; no revolution has ever emerged from a vacuum. No revolution has ever been born out of ideas alone, but only from a long chain of abuses and a long history of preparation, ideological and institutional. And no revolution, even the most radical, from the English Revolution of the seventeenth century to the many Third World revolutions of the twentieth, has ever come into being except in reaction to increased oppression by the existing State apparatus. All revolution is in that sense a reaction against worsening oppression; and in that sense, all revolutions may be called "conservative"; but that would make hash out of the meaning of ideological concepts. If the French and Russian revolutions may be called "conservative" then so might the American. This same process was at work in Bacon's Rebellion of the late seventeenth century and the American Revolution of the late eighteenth. As the Declaration of Independence (a good source for understanding the Revolution) rightly emphasized:

> Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations . . . evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government. . . .

It takes such a long train of abuses to persuade the mass of people to throw off their habitual customs and loyalties and to make revolution; hence the absurdity of singling out the American Revolution as "conservative" in that sense. Indeed, this very breakthrough against existing habits, the very act of revolution, is therefore ipso facto an extraordinarily radical act. All mass revolutions, indeed all revolutions as distinguished from mere coup d'états, by bringing the masses into violent action are therefore per se highly radical events. All revolutions are therefore radical.

But the deep-seated radicalism of the American Revolution goes far beyond this. It was inextricably linked both to the radical revolutions that went before and to the ones, particularly the French, that succeeded it. From the researches of Caroline Robbins and Bernard Bailyn, we have come to see the indispensable linkage of radical ideology in a straight line from the English republican

revolutionaries of the seventeenth century through the commonwealthmen of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the French and to the American revolutionaries. And this ideology of natural rights and individual liberty was to its very marrow revolutionary. As Lord Acton stressed of radical liberalism, in setting up "what ought to be" as a rigorous guidepost for judging "what is," it virtually raised thereby a standard of revolution.

The Americans had always been intractable, rebellious, impatient of oppression, as witness the numerous rebellions of the late seventeenth century; they also had their own individualist and libertarian heritage, their Ann Hutchinsons and Rhode Island quasi anarchists, some directly linked with the left wing of the English Revolution. Now, strengthened and guided by the developed libertarian natural rights ideology of the eighteenth century, and reacting to aggrandizement of the British imperial state in the economic, constitutional, and religious spheres, the Americans, in escalated and radicalized confrontations with Great Britain, had made and won their Revolution. By doing so, this revolution, based on the growing libertarian idea pervading enlightened opinion in Europe, itself gave immeasurable impetus to the liberal revolutionary movement throughout the Old World, for here was a living example of a liberal revolution that had taken its daring chance, against all odds and

against the mightiest state in the world, and had actually succeeded. Here, indeed, was a beacon light to all the oppressed peoples of the world!

The American Revolution was radical in many other ways as well. It was the first successful war of national liberation against western imperialism. A people's war, waged by the majority of Americans having the courage and the zeal to rise up against constituted "legitimate" government, actually threw off their "sovereign." A revolutionary war led by "fanatics" and zealots rejected the siren calls of compromise and easy adjustment to the existing system. As a people's war, it was victorious to the extent that guerrilla strategy and tactics were employed against the far more heavily armed and better trained British army—a strategy and tactics of protracted conflict resting precisely on mass support. The tactics of harassment, mobility, surprise, and the wearing down and cutting off of supplies finally resulted in the encirclement of the enemy. Considering that the theory of guerrilla revolution had not yet been developed, it was remarkable that the Americans had the courage and initiative to employ it. As it was, all their victories were based on guerrilla-type concepts of revolutionary war, while all the American defeats came from stubborn insistence by such men as Washington on a conventional European type of open military confrontation.

Also, as in any people's war, the American Revolution did inevitably rend society in two. The Revolution was not a peaceful emanation of an American "consensus"; on the contrary, as we have seen, it was a civil war resulting in permanent expulsion of 100,000 Tories from the United States. Tories were hunted, persecuted, their property confiscated, and themselves sometimes killed; what could be more radical than that? Thus, the French Revolution was, as in so many other things, foreshadowed by the American. The inner contradiction of the goal of liberty and the struggle against the Tories during the Revolution showed that revolutions will be tempted to betray their own principles in the heat of battle. The American Revolution also prefigured the misguided use of paper money inflation, and of severe price and wage controls which proved equally unworkable in America and in France. And, as constituted government was either ignored or overthrown, Americans found recourse in new quasi-anarchistic forms of government: spontaneous local committees. Indeed, the new state and eventual federal governments often emerged out of federations and alliances of local and county committees. Here again, "committees of inspection," "committees of public safety," etc., prefigured the French and other revolutionary paths. What this meant, as was most clearly illustrated in Pennsylvania, was the revolutionary innovation of *parallel institutions*, of dual

power, that challenged and eventually simply replaced old and established governmental forms. Nothing in all of this picture of the American Revolution could have been more radical, more truly revolutionary.

But, it may be claimed, this was after all only an external revolution; even if the American Revolution was radical, it was only a radicalism directed against Great Britain. There was no radical upheaval at home, no "internal revolution." Again, this view betrays a highly naive concept of revolution and of wars of national liberation. While the focus of the upheaval was, of course, Great Britain, the inevitable indirect consequence was radical change within the United States. In the first and most obvious place, the success of the Revolution meant inevitably the overturn and displacement of the Tory elites, particularly of those internal oligarchs and members of governors' councils who had been created and propped up by the British government. The freeing of trade and manufacture from British imperial shackles again meant a displacement of Tory favorites from positions of economic privilege. The confiscation of Tory estates, especially in feudalism-ridden New York state, had a sharply democratizing and liberalizing effect on the structure of land tenure in the United States. This process was also greatly advanced by the inevitable dispossession of the vast British proprietary landed estates in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. The freakish acquisition of the territory

west of the Appalachians by the peace treaty also opened vast quantities of virgin land to further liberalize the land structure, provided that the speculative land companies, as it increasingly appeared, would be kept at bay. Revolution also brought an inevitable upsurge of religious liberty with the freeing of many of the states, especially in the South, from the British-imposed Anglican establishment.

With these radical internal processes inevitably launched by the fact of revolution against Great Britain, it is also not surprising that this internal revolutionary course would go further. To the attack on feudalism was added a drive against the remnants of entail and primogeniture; from the ideology of individual liberty—and from British participation in the slave trade—came a general attack on that trade, and, in the North, a successful governmental drive against slavery itself.

Another inevitable corollary of the Revolution, and one easily overlooked, was that the very fact of revolution—aside from Connecticut and Rhode Island where no British government had existed before—necessarily dispossessed existing internal rule. Hence the sudden smashing of that rule inevitably threw government back into a fragmented, local, quasi-anarchistic form. When we consider also that the Revolution was consciously and radically directed against taxes and against central government power, the inevitable thrust of the Revolution for

a radical transformation toward liberty becomes crystal clear. It is then not surprising that the thirteen revolted colonies were separate and decentralized, and that for several years even the separate state governments could not dare to impose taxes upon the populace. Furthermore, since royal control in the colonies had meant executive, judicial, and upper house control by royal appointees, the libertarian thrust of the Revolution was inevitably against these instruments of oligarchy and in favor of democratic forms responsive to, and easily checked by, the people. It is not a coincidence that the states where this type of internal revolution against oligarchy proceeded the furthest were the ones where the oligarchy was most reluctant to break with Great Britain. Hence, in Pennsylvania, the radical drive for independence meant that the reluctant oligarchy had to be pushed aside, and the process of that pushing led to the most liberal and most democratic constitution of all the states. (A highly liberal and democratic constitution also resulted from Vermont's necessity for rebelling internally against New York and New Hampshire's imperialism over Vermont's land.) On the other hand, Rhode Island and Connecticut, where no internal British rule existed, experienced no such internal cataclysm. Internal revolution was therefore a derivative of the external, but it happened nevertheless. Because of these inevitable internal libertarian effects, the drive for restoration of central government through taxation and mercantilism

had to be a conscious and determined project on the part of conservatives—a drive against the natural consequences of the Revolution.

Since the Revolution was a people's war, the extent of mass participation in the militia and committees led necessarily to a democratizing of suffrage in the new governments. Furthermore, the principle of "no taxation without representation" could readily be applied internally as could British restrictions upon the principle of one man, one vote. While recent researches have shown that colonial suffrage requirements were far more liberal than had been realized, it is still true that suffrage was significantly widened by the Revolution in half the states. This widening was helped everywhere by the depreciation of the monetary unit (and hence of existing property requirements) entailed by the inflation that helped finance the war. Chilton Williamson, the most thorough and judicious of recent historians of American suffrage, has concluded that

> the Revolution probably operated to increase the size of that majority of adult males which had, generally speaking, been able to meet the old property and freehold tests before 1776. . . . The increase in the number of voters was probably not so significant as the fact that the Revolution had made explicit the basic idea that voting had little or nothing to do with real property and that this idea should be reflected accurately in the law. . . . The

> changes in suffrage made during the Revolution were the most important in the entire history of American suffrage reform. In retrospect it is clear that they committed the country to a democratic suffrage.[1]

While many of the state constitutions, under the influence of conservative theorists, turned out to be conservative reactions against initial revolutionary conditions, the very act of making them was radical and revolutionary, for they meant that what the radical and Enlightenment thinkers had said was really true: men did not have to submit blindly to habit, to custom, to irrational "prescription." After violently throwing off their prescribed government, they could sit down and consciously make over their polity by the use of reason. Here was radicalism indeed. Furthermore, in the Bills of Rights, the framers added a significant and consciously libertarian attempt to prevent government from invading the natural rights of the individual, rights which they had learned about from the great English libertarian tradition of the past century.

For all these reasons, for its mass violence, and for its libertarian goals, the American Revolution was ineluctably radical. Not the least demonstration of its radicalism was the impact of this revolution in inspiring and

[1]Chilton Willimson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760–1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 111–12, 115–16.

generating the admittedly radical revolutions in Europe, an international impact that has been most thoroughly studied by Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot. Palmer has eloquently summed up the meaning that the American Revolution had for Europe:

> The American Revolution coincided with the climax of the Age of Enlightenment. It was itself, in some degree, the product of this age. There were many in Europe, as there were in America, who saw in the American Revolution a lesson and an encouragement for mankind. It proved that the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment might be put into practice. It showed, or was assumed to show, that ideas of the rights of man and the social contract, of liberty and equality, of responsible citizenship and popular sovereignty, of religious freedom, freedom of thought and speech, separation of powers and deliberately contrived written constitutions, need not remain in the realm of speculation, among the writers of books; but could be made the actual fabric of public life among real people, in this world, now.[2]

[2]Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America 1760–1800*. Vol. I: *The Challenge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 239–40.

Was the U.S. Constitution Radical?

It was a bloodless *coup d'état* against an unresisting Confederation Congress. The original structure of the new Constitution was now complete. The Federalists, by use of propaganda, chicanery, fraud, malapportionment of delegates, blackmail threats of secession, and even coercive laws, had managed to sustain enough delegates to defy the wishes of the majority of the American people and create a new Constitution. The drive was managed by a corps of brilliant members and representatives of the financial and landed oligarchy. These wealthy merchants and large landowners were joined by the urban artisans of the large cities in their drive to create a strong overriding central government—a supreme government with its own absolute power to tax, regulate commerce, and raise armies. These powers were sought eagerly as a method of handing out special privileges to commercial groups: navigation acts to subsidize shipping, tariffs to protect inefficient artisans stampeded by national depression from foreign manufactured goods, a strong army and navy to pursue an aggressive foreign policy designed to force the opening of West Indies ports, the Mississippi River, and the Northwest. And, to pay for all of these bounties, a central taxing power would be harnessed that could also assume and pay the public debt held by wealthy speculators. But government, by its nature, cannot supply bounties and privileges

without taking them from others, and these others were to be largely the hapless bulk of the nation's citizens, the inland subsistence farmers. In western Massachusetts, taxes to pay a heavy public debt owned by wealthy men in the East had produced Shays' Rebellion. Now, a new super government was emerging and carrying out on a national scale the mercantilist principle of taxation, regulation, and special privilege for the benefit of favored groups ("the few") at the expense of the bulk of producers and consumers in the country ("the many"). And while to acquire sufficient support they had to purchase allies among the mass of the people (e.g., urban artisans), the major concentration of benefits and privileges would undoubtedly accrue to America's aristocracy.

As part of the agreed-to division of the coming spoils, the northern nationalists, though permanently abhorring slavery in a region where it was not viable and was being abolished, rather swiftly moved to protect and even encourage slavery in other regions in order to obtain support of the southern nationalists and thus the Constitution. To these nationalist leaders, abandoning the slave to his fate was a small price to pay for a strong central government to further markets for northern merchants and shippers.

Dispute has long raged among historians as to whether the Constitution was the completion, the fulfillment, of the spirit of the American Revolution, or whether it was a

counterrevolution against that spirit. But surely it is clear that the Constitution was profoundly counterrevolutionary. The American Revolution has, in recent years, been depicted by "revisionist" historians as solely a struggle for independence against Great Britain on behalf of rather abstract principles of constitutional law. But legal principles are seldom passionately held and fought for unless instinctively bound up with conflicts in politico-economic reality. The Americans were not anti-British; on the contrary, the need to declare independence was acknowledged very late and almost reluctantly. The Americans were struggling not primarily for independence but for political-economic liberty against the mercantilism of the British Empire. The struggle was waged against taxes, prohibitions, and regulations—a whole failure of repression that the Americans, upheld by an ideology of liberty, had fought and torn asunder. It was only when independence was clearly necessary to achieve their goals did the American Revolution take final form. In other words, the American Revolution was in essence not so much against Britain as against British Big Government—and specifically against an all-powerful central government and a supreme executive.

In short, the American Revolution was liberal, democratic, and quasi-anarchistic; for decentralization, free markets, and individual liberty; for natural rights of life, liberty, and property; against monarchy, mercantilism, and especially against strong central government. From

the very beginning of that Revolution and even before, wealthy financial oligarchs in New York and Philadelphia, beginning with Benjamin Franklin, had toyed with the idea of a strong central government in America that would grant them mercantilist powers over the people. In the last phase of the war, Robert Morris, the "grandfather of the Constitution," came within an inch of imposing a nationalist-mercantilist regime upon a revolutionary nation fighting for its existence.

The Articles of Confederation were themselves a concession to nationalism as against the original Continental Congress, but basically they had kept the Congress chained to a leash, and so nationalist power was checked. But with the postwar breakup of the liberal Adams-Lee Junto, the aftermath of wartime destruction, and the opportunity provided by the depression of the mid-1780s, the nationalists fished in troubled waters and succeeded in imposing a counterrevolution.

It has also been charged by recent historians that there was really no continuity between the contending forces during the Revolution (radicals versus conservatives) and the opposing camps in the struggle over the Constitution. But, in the first place, the continuity of *ideas* is striking: from the very beginning, it was the dream of the Right, once remaining with the British government became impossible, to remold America into a form as close as

possible to the powerful government of Great Britain. In leadership personnel, the sticking point is that the Right in 1776, the ones most reluctant to break with England (the Morrises, the Dickinsonses, the Jays, the Schulyers—in short, the Philadelphia and New York oligarchy along with the Pendletons and Washingtons in Virginia) were the leaders of the reaction throughout the period and the leaders in the drive for a Constitution. The leaders of the Right in 1776 were also the leaders of the Right in 1789.

The difference between the two periods—and the significant break in continuity—was the shift of large numbers of radical leaders during the war into the conservative ranks a decade later. Indeed, one of the prior reasons for the defeat of the Antifederalists, though they commanded a majority of the public, was the decimation that had taken place in radical and liberal leadership during the 1780s. A whole galaxy of ex-radicals, ex-decentralists, and ex-libertarians, found in their old age that they could comfortably live in the new Establishment. The list of such defections is impressive, including John Adams, Sam Adams, John Hancock, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Paine, Alexander McDougall, Isaac Sears, and Christopher Gadsden. Perhaps an explanation of many of the defectors (Sam Adams, Sears, McDougall, Gadsden, and Paine) was the rightward shift of the big-city artisans who provided these men with their political power base.

Conversely, the Left in 1788 was very apt to have been on the Left in the early years of the Revolution. Among those faithful to the liberal cause: Luther Martin, James Warren, Elbridge Gerry, George Clinton, Abraham Yates, generally the Clintonians in New York, the Constitutionalist Party in Pennsylvania fighting against the counterinsurgency of the conservative Republican Party (except for defections like Paine), Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Person of the old radical Regulator movement in North Carolina. An important test of this hypothesis would be to find individuals or groups who were on the Right in 1776 but had shifted sharply leftward by 1788. Prominent men in that category are undoubtedly rare indeed.

If, then, the Constitution was a counterrevolution, what *kind* of a reactionary movement was it? Contrary to the famous "Beard Thesis," it was not at all a struggle between a sound-money "creditor class" against a small-farmer "debtor class" in favor of inflation and paper money. These were categories that Beard impermissibly smuggled from his experience of the monetary struggles of the late nineteenth century. It is impermissible to speak of debtor and creditor "classes," for these are categories that shift from month-to-month and even day-to-day. Consequently, while it is true that paper money is likely to be favored by debtors, the aggressive debtors were far more likely to be wealthy merchants and great planters than rural farmers far removed from the seats of financial and political power.

Wealthy mercantilists have higher credit ratings, can do more with borrowed money, and have much stronger political connections that allow them to secure favorable legislation. In truth, most groups, especially most of the wealthy, favored paper money; the difference came largely in the *ways* in which that money could be emitted and in whether legal-tender laws would accompany them. The oppressive form of debt, against which, for example, the Shaysites rebelled, was not private debt but *public* debt, i.e., against the fastening of a Revolutionary War debt owned by the wealthier classes upon the masses and small farmers who would be taxed to pay for it.

The Constitutional counterrevolution, then, was not a struggle of sound-money men against inflationists or creditors against debtors. Jackson Turner Main's brilliant demonstration that it was a conflict of commercial versus non-commercial factions can be subsumed under a broader truth. It was, as Patrick Henry grasped, a struggle of power and privilege, and to a lesser extent, of aristocracy against democracy. Those familiar categories can also be subsumed in the Liberty versus Power dichotomy, for while aristocracy was the most determined to acquire special privileges, they could not have won without the lures of apparent privileges offered to the urban artisans.

Contrary to Forrest McDonald, the Antifederalists have received a poor historical press, and even the most

supposedly extreme Antifederalist historian dedicated his book on the formation of the Constitution to James Madison. He concluded his book as follows:

> Today, Americans continue to debate, as they have ever since the eighteenth century, about the division of power between the states and the central government, and about the role the latter should play in the economy and social life of the nation. Such debate had validity in an earlier and simpler age, but it is now little more than a romantic exercise. Although the Constitution itself remains what it was, the realities of political life in the twentieth century have created an all-powerful national government in fact.[3]

And Staughton Lynd, though utilizing the commercial/non-commercial view of the struggle, and sympathetic to the individualist-libertarianism of the Antifederalists, concludes that Federalism was right by turning to "'positive, planful government'" to "'promote, guide, and discipline' all economic enterprise towards national goals." All this was justified, and even an aggressive internationalist policy was needed "to protect American economic independence" and secure "national economic development."[4]

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[3]Merrill Jensen, *The Making of the American Constitution* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), p. 151. Forrest McDonald, "The Anti-Federalists, 1781–1789," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46, no. 3 (Spring 1963): 214.

[4]Staughton Lynd, "Reviewed Works: *The Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781–1788* by Jackson T. Main" and "*Alexander Hamilton:*

Professor Cecilia Keyna has derided the Antifederalists as "men of little faith," i.e., little faith in political power.[5] Some recent historians have termed the Federalists "radicals" and liberal reformers, and the Antifederalists "conservatives" because the Federalists favored a sharp change in the *status quo*, while the Antifederalists did not. But to base the concept of radicals versus conservatives solely on the formal fact of change, regardless of context, is to (a) blur the critical difference between revolution and counterrevolution and (b) to arrive at such conceptual absurdities as designating Francisco Franco's rebellion in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s as "radical," while the Spanish Loyalists were "conservative." But the point is that this "little faith" was precisely in the tradition of the American Revolution Bernard Bailyn writes of the revolutionary thinkers:

> Most commonly the discussion of power centered on its essential characteristic of aggressiveness: its endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries. . . . The image most commonly used was that of the act of trespassing. Power, it was said over and over again, has "an encroaching nature"; . . . power is "grasping" and "tenacious" in its nature; "what it seizes it will retain." Sometimes power "is like the ocean, not

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The National Adventure, 1788–1804 by Broadus Mitchell," *Science and Society* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1964), pp. 222–23.

[5]Cecilia M. Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (January 1955): 3–43.

> easily admitting limits to be fixed in it." Sometimes it is "like a cancer, it eats faster and faster every hour." . . . It is everywhere in public life, and everywhere it is threatening, pushing, and grasping; and too often in the end it destroys its benign—necessarily benign—victim.
>
> What gave transcendent importance to the aggressiveness of power was the fact that its natural prey, its necessary victim, was liberty, or law, or right. The public world these writers saw was divided into distinct, contrasting, and innately antagonistic spheres: the sphere of power and the sphere of liberty or right. The one was brutal, ceaselessly active, and heedless; the other was delicate, passive, and sensitive. The one must be resisted, the other defended, and the two must never be confused.[6]

The Federalists, on the other hand, in their faith in quasi-monarchical power, especially with themselves in the driver's seat, are strongly reminiscent of the Tories—another indication of continuity in the ideological struggle and of the Federalist movement as a reaction against the spirit of the American Revolution. Forrest McDonald is the latest historian to treat the adoption of the Constitution as a counterrevolution in restoring Toryism. However, in contrast to earlier historians of a similar view, McDonald extravagantly eulogizes this process. Apparently for McDonald, the American Revolution was the first

[6]Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776*, with the assistance of Jane N. Garrett, vol. 1, 1750–1765 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 38–39.

step down the inevitable road to Bolshevism, a fate from which America was saved only by the "miracle . . . of all ages to come" of the Federalists, "giants" "who spoke in the name of the nation." Happily for McDonald, the giants triumphed instead of those "who, in 1787 and 1788, spoke in the name of the people and of popular 'rights.'"[7]

Overall, it should be evident that the Constitution was a counterrevolutionary reaction to the libertarianism and decentralization embodied in the American Revolution. The Antifederalists, supporting states' rights and critical of a strong national government, were decisively beaten by the Federalists, who wanted such a polity under the guise of democracy in order to enhance their own interests and institute a British-style mercantilism over the country. Most historians have taken the side of the Federalists because they support a strong national government that has the power to tax and regulate, call forth armies and invade other countries, and cripple the power of the states. The enactment of the Constitution in 1788 drastically changed the course of American history from its natural decentralized and libertarian direction to an omnipresent leviathan that fulfilled all of the Antifederalists' fears.

With the ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the new government was now a fact and

[7]Forrest McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979 [1965]), p. 371.

the Antifederalists would never again agitate for another constitutional convention to weaken American national power and return to a more decentralized and restrained polity. From now on American liberals, relying on the Bill of Rights and the Tenth Amendment, would go forth and do battle for Liberty and against Power *within* the framework of the American Constitution as states'-righters and Constitutionalists. Their battle would be a long and gallant one, but ultimately doomed to fail, for by accepting the Constitution, the liberals would only play with dice loaded implacably against them. The Constitution, with its inherently broad powers and elastic clauses, would increasingly support an ever larger and more powerful central government. In the long run, the liberals, though they could and did run a gallant race, were doomed to lose—and lose indeed they did. In a sense, the supposedly unrealistic radicals who would totally reject the Constitution and try to rend it asunder (in different ways and from very different perspectives, e.g., the Whiskey Rebels, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, and the secessionists of the South) would be far more perceptive about the realities and the potentials of the American constitutional system than those liberals working within it.

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