

Spring 2010

Book Review: *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State,*

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Recommended Citation

Patricia Morgan, *Book Review: A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State*, *News. Legal Hist. & Rare Book Special Int. Sec. (Am. Ass'n Law Libraries, Chicago, Ill.)*, Spring 2010 at 52, available at <http://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub/716>

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Edling, Max M. *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 336 pp. Paperback reprint of 2003 ed. ISBN13: 978-0-19-537416-2. \$19.95.

Max M. Edling's book, *A Revolution in Favor of Government - Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State*, provides a detailed description of the battle of ideas that shaped the Constitution. Edling discusses strong arguments on both sides of the debate between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists regarding the adoption of the Constitution, which would transfer much of the power to wage war and collect taxes from the states to a national government. The Federalists were in favor of a strong central government, while the Anti-Federalists favored a more decentralized system which would leave more governing power in the hands of the states.

Edling outlines three overlapping audiences for whom he wrote his book: political and intellectual historians or theorists, especially those who study the debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists; students of American political development; and those who wish to study state development during the 18th and 19th centuries. Edling points out that many prior studies have considered such state development in European nations but have generally not done so for the United States.

⁴ 3rd ed. (1942) p. 63.

It is commonly known that the Federalists' position carried the day and the Constitution was adopted, leading to a strong federal government. What is new in Edling's book is a deeper explanation of the divergent positions of the political thinkers of the day, including their historical bases.

The Federalists boasted some of the great thinkers of the day, including Hamilton and Madison. In the current vernacular, they would be the "intellectual elite." Focusing on the ability to provide a common defense against external threats and protecting the western border, the Federalists asserted that a strong central government and standing army were necessary for preserving the new union. Further, the Federalists argued that the ability to tax the citizenry would be integral to the nation and its defense. Edling explains the process by which the State was "built" to satisfy the need for security against outside forces without sacrificing the desire for "small d" democracy and a diffuse government where states were largely in charge of decision making.

The Anti-Federalists are portrayed as somewhat less sophisticated in their thinking. They feared that a strong national government would risk a future of oppression and a government in place by the threat of force. The Anti-Federalists also were concerned about the rights and powers of the states being threatened by a large powerful federal government. The Anti-Federalists had plenty of historical support for their concerns. The nation had just broken away from England and its heavy-handed approach to governance. The imposition of unfair and burdensome taxes, payment of which was enforced by the threat of force from the big government power, was seen as a possible outcome of having a strong national government. Also, the Revolution had been a success without the need for a national standing army, another factor that gave the Anti-Federalists pause about change. Standing armies had been used in European nations as much or more against their own citizenry than against outside threats. Given the nation's geographic isolation from the outside world and the success of the state militias in the past, the Anti-Federalists saw the idea of a national standing army as a threat to popular rule and freedom.

Ultimately, the Constitution was ratified and the national government did take over the military and taxation functions that the states had controlled under the Articles of Confederation. The military presence was minimal, however, in accord with the Federalist's plan. Troops were stationed on the western border of the country to aid in repelling the Indians and for expansion westward. They were not a visible threat to the citizenry. According to Jefferson, the force was, in fact, so small that "their number is as nothing" and that should any actual conflict arise, the militia would be needed (Edling, page 142). The decision for a strong national government did not turn out as the Anti-Federalists had feared.

Edling's book is extremely well-researched. He cites several of the major historical works that have analyzed the creation of the Constitution, including *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, edited by Merrill Jensen, John P. Kaminski, and Gaspare J. Saladino. Edling has included over eighty pages of notes which provide a wealth of sources for additional research on the subject and for a greater depth of coverage in addition to the information in the book.

I recommend Edling's book for students of history and for those looking for a broader perspective on the political issues of today. I found the book to be a timely analogy for the current climate of extreme political discord and destructiveness. It is refreshing and somewhat comforting to see that such disputes are not new to this country and its political processes. Some ideas are so big and so consequential that the passions and beliefs of those who will be affected by them can boil over and/or become so embedded that it becomes difficult to compromise. Also interesting is the seemingly never-ending discussion of "big government" and the fear that it engenders. Ultimately, it seems as though the tension between competing ideologies and strongly held beliefs has, throughout the nation's history, led to a stronger union. Broader support for the ultimate outcomes of such debates often comes about due to the ability of those with differing views to honestly and contentiously argue their positions. One hopes that Edling's book can provide a well-needed

reminder to be understanding for those with different points of view and that honest debate does lead to optimal solutions.

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