
Reframing the Constitution: An Imperative for Modern America. By LELAND BALDWIN. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: American Bibliographical Center, Clio Press, 1971. Pp. 142. cloth $15.00, paper $5.50.)

With the bicentennial but three years away much will be written and more said about the events which took place during those hot, humid, and suspense-filled days at Philadelphia in 1776. These were days which were followed hard on by the Revolution and then the final Continental Congress when the Constitution was written. To students of political science, to all who are steeped in our history, and to the interested reading public, the two works here reviewed offer pertinent observations on both documents refined in the crucible of freedom at Philadelphia.

The first volume, The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality, is the result of the first Library of Congress Symposium and made possible through a grant from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation in Washington, D. C. At this meeting many distinguished historians and political scientists discussed some of the sources of ideas which helped to develop the American revolutionary mentality.
two hundred years ago. The dust jacket of this volume quotes one of the participants: "The American Revolution occurred in a period of extraordinary innovations in the realm of political ideas and institutions. Nor did these ideas emerge *in vacuo*. Some have traced them to biblical and classical times, others to the Commonwealth of Cromwell's day, or to the Whig theorists of the Revolution of 1688 or to the emerging republican thought of English radicals in the generation before the American Revolution. If the ideas of the Enlightenment were contagious then the Founding Fathers came down with heavy doses of the disease."

This quote sets the theme for this interesting collection of papers. The ten distinguished historians who participated in the symposium wrote of their notion of the sources of the ideas that led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence and eventually the Constitution. The specific subject matter covered in this symposium numbers the following important and pertinent topics:

America and the Enlightenment
European Republicanism in a Century and a Half before 1776
Fascination of Republican Virtue amongst the Known and the Unknown
Corruption and Power in Provincial America
Royal and Republican Corruption
Beginnings of American Republicanism
Preconditions for American Republicanism
Loyalist Critique of the Revolution
Men with Two Countries.

The format of the meeting called for the presentation of a paper on a specific subject, followed by a critique of that paper by another scholar equally noted for knowledge in the same area of history or political science.

Two hundred years is a long time, not in the total chronicle of history, but in the recollection of man's mind. To recall the ideals, principles, and philosophy which contributed to the great American experiment in government is a worthwhile endeavor. This record of the deliberations of the scholars gathered at the Library of Congress on May 5 and 6, 1972, is such an endeavor and warrants the consideration of anyone interested in research into our political origins.

The record ought to be read with the oft-quoted observation of Dr. Benjamin Rush in mind: "There is nothing more common than to
confound the terms of the American Revolution with those of the American War. The American War is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, but the first act of the great drama is closed.” Incidentally it is interesting to note that quotation at the beginning of an article signed, “Nestor,” in the August 26, 1786, edition of the Pittsburgh Gazette on the shelves of the library of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. That year was the first year of publication of the Gazette (the first newspaper west of the Alleghenies).

As regards Leland Baldwin’s book, Reframing the Constitution, let me begin by saying that it is not an easy task to rewrite the Constitution of the United States. But that is what Baldwin sets out to do in this volume. Baldwin, emeritus professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh and author of three of the books in the now famous Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey Series, made possible by a grant from the Buhl Foundation, is not the first scholar to speculate about the need for a new Constitution. Most certainly, however, he does the job more completely than any others.

He does away with the fifty states and in their place creates sixteen districts delineated on a geographical and economic basis. He eliminates the Supreme Court, abolishes jury trials, changes the legislative branch from bicameral to unicameral by wiping out the Senate as a legislative body, and models the new House of Representatives after the British House of Commons. Very clearly he limits the power of the presidency and provides for a chief justice to head the new Senate, appoint the members of the federal judiciary and become, in effect, the ceremonial head of the nation. In short, Baldwin’s rewriting is a bold and comprehensive effort. No justice to its comprehensiveness can be done in a review as short as this. The volume must be read.

His brief review of the motivating forces and ideas which produced our philosophy of government is well done despite, for this reviewer, too much emphasis on the influence of Locke and Rousseau and practically no references to many others who exercised an equal or, perhaps, greater influence. A mere passing mention of Richard Hooker, for example, will not suffice in a work such as he has produced. The stress on the motivation provided by the Puritan ethic is too great in light of recent scholarship which notes strong influences other than that in the formation and development of the American system.
His analysis of the fifty states and the need for the sixteen new districts is good. It must be granted that those who assembled in Philadelphia would never have drawn the map of the United States as they did were they faced with the economic facts of today. They took cognizance of thirteen existing sovereignties, while today they would recognize districts constituted along the lines of natural boundaries, population centers, and communities of interest. It is to his great credit that Baldwin sees this need for change.

Many of the points raised by Baldwin are excellent. It is difficult to argue against the need for more centralization of local government; the fact that Congress and the executive branch have been at odds at times over our history; that there is a decline in party responsibility; that in a nuclear age with transportation and communications compressed as they are there ought to be some limitations on the president's power to wage war; that perhaps there ought to be some restraint on the use of excess judicial power by the Supreme Court. It is true to say our Constitution has its defects, but, even so, there is built into it enough flexibility to make it work today in the complex civilization in which we live.

The notion of the theory of separation of powers is not seen in a rational manner today. All in all the system of checks and balances has worked well and, given the peculiarities of human nature, ought to work as well in the years to come. The document of 1787 has its defects; it has ambiguities but it has served its purpose well over the years of our history. Perhaps what is needed is not a new document but a better understanding on the part of all citizenry and elected officials alike of the principles which brought it into existence and have made it work so well for 186 years.

As a stimulating exercise in historical reading and in anticipation of the forthcoming bicentennial, this book by a scholar who has meant so much to Pittsburgh and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania makes interesting and provocative reading.

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Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was born in Wales and educated at Trinity College, Oxford. A lecturer of world renown, he