

Calvin H. Johnson, *Righteous Anger at the Wicked States: The Meaning of the Founders' Constitution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xv + 294. \$75.00 (ISBN 0-521-85232-3).

To fully appreciate what was happening in Revolutionary America, we must understand not only national politics and economics, but state as well. Few historians have mastery over both. With the tremendous avalanche of the papers of the Founding Fathers becoming available in books and on the Internet, more attention is paid to national events than to local or state politics. Thus we see in Calvin Johnson's work, the debate among national elites. He really doesn't see and can't appreciate what the prevailing views are among the people. Johnson has great empathy for James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, James Wilson, and the handful of other revolutionary nationalists of 1787—sometimes I would say too much empathy—the way a biographer falls in love with his subject. He has none for the Antifederalist leaders and more importantly for the bulk of Americans in 1787.

Johnson shares another problem with many historians. James Madison is his guide and his benchmark. Johnson allows Madison to delineate the purpose of the Constitutional Convention. Johnson then tabulates Madison's successes and failures. This is obviously a faulty starting point.

What was the general public's opinion—what were the opinions of various delegates who attended the convention—the opinions of nationalists from both large and small states, and the opinion of those who wanted to strengthen but retain the Confederation? What were the motivations of the delegates from the Southern and the Northern states? Johnson, unfortunately, concentrates solely on Madison's goals even though Madison was an aberration. He had his own perspective that was shared—though not completely—by only a half dozen other delegates and an extremely small minority of the American people. Even Madison's own Virginia delegation didn't support him on all points.

Johnson's overarching thesis—which in many ways echoes Roger H. Brown's *Redeeming the Republic: Federalists, Taxation, and the Origins of the Constitution*, Max Edling's *A Revolution in Favor of Government*, and, to a certain degree, Frederick W. Marks's *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution*—is that the anger at the states for failing to adopt the federal imposts of 1781 and 1783 and for refusing to pay their quotas of Congress's annual requisitions gave rise to the movement for the Constitution. The Constitution, according to Johnson, is primarily a document that empowers Congress to levy and collect taxes especially so that when the inevitable war occurs, the national government will be able to borrow money to finance the huge cost. Thus, as he says, the Constitution was overwhelmingly a tax document. Given Johnson's expertise in tax law, it's not at all surprising that he would embrace this thesis.

Johnson says that Congress could only raise money through its requisitions. That's not true. Congress could and still did borrow money! Its post office was profitable, and it had an overflowing reservoir of public lands ready to be sold. In fact before the requisition of 1787, Congress collected approximately two-thirds of what it asked for even though the country was in the throes of a deep and widespread economic depression. By 1787 federal securities had bottomed out and were

rising in value as European and American investors as well as states themselves began buying federal securities. New York and Pennsylvania both became net creditors of the Confederation government, while other states assumed the interest payments on federal securities owned by their citizens. The impost whether under the Constitution or soon to be enacted (I would argue) under the Confederation would bring in the necessary revenue, especially when international trade burgeoned in the 1790s. Federalists, in fact, argued that, except for emergencies, the tariff revenue would be more than sufficient to finance the federal government.

Johnson stresses the importance of the tax power as the first listed power in the Constitution. At least as important, however, are the very first three words—"We, the People"—which enunciated a complete change from a confederation to a consolidated national government—something a small group of nationalists had desired since 1776—well before any "righteous anger" existed because of the states' failure to pay their requisitions or adopt a federal impost.

Most Americans were not angry with their states. They admired their states for trying to combat the inevitable postwar depression that hit America in the mid-1780s. If there was any animosity by the people toward government, Americans felt contempt for and suspicion of Congress. Their residual fear of the far-off imperial government in London carried over to their loathing for a new, stronger central government resident in Philadelphia or New York City with potentially even stronger—perhaps despotic—powers over the states and their citizens.

It is not that Johnson is wrong in highlighting the tax issue—it was extremely important. It is that everything else in his judgment was unnecessary—the change to a consolidated government, the need for a bill of rights, the need for Congress to regulate commerce, the separation of the three branches of government. The Constitution was not a unilateral tax document. It revolutionized the entire federal government.

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M. Ruth Kelly, *The Olmsted Case: Privateers, Property, and Politics in Pennsylvania, 1778–1810*, Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 2005. Pp. 173. \$39.50 (ISBN 1-57591-092-6).

In *The Olmsted Case*, M. Ruth Kelly has lifted up the fascinating story revolving around Gideon Olmsted's claim to the cargo of a captured ship during the Revolutionary war. The case neither ended swiftly nor neatly, for it was complicated by personal politics, conflicts over federalism, and a significant amount of money. While this case is not unknown—Justice John Marshall uses it as precedent in *McCulloch v. Maryland*—it is hardly studied. Kelly successfully argues that it ought to be for it sheds light on a turbulent period in American legal and political history.

Gideon Olmsted, a determined and ambitious man from Connecticut, joined a local militia during the American Revolution, then worked toward becoming a