



Liberty's Blueprint: How Madison and Hamilton Wrote the Federalist, Defined the Constitution, and Made Democracy Safe for the World

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Aside from the Constitution itself, there is no more important document in American politics and law than *The Federalist*-the series of essays written by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison to explain the proposed Constitution to the American people and persuade them to ratify it. Today, amid angry debate over what the Constitution means and what the framers' "original intent" was, *The Federalist* is more important than ever, offering the best insight into how the framers thought about the most troubling issues of American government and how the various clauses of the Constitution were meant to be understood. Michael Meyerson's *Liberty's Blueprint* provides a fascinating window into the fleeting, and ultimately doomed, friendship between Hamilton and Madison, as well as a much-needed introduction to understanding how the lessons of *The Federalist* are relevant for resolving contemporary constitutional issues from medical marijuana to the war on terrorism. This book shows that, when properly read, *The Federalist* is not a "conservative" manifesto but a document that rightfully belongs to all Americans across the political spectrum.

Liberty's Blueprint: How Madison and Hamilton Wrote the Federalist, Defined the Constitution, and Made Democracy Safe for the World Details

Date : Published March 4th 2008 by Basic Books (AZ) (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9780465002641

Author : Michael Meyerson

Format : Hardcover 309 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Politics, North American Hi..., American History, Military History, American Revolution

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From Reader Review Liberty's Blueprint: How Madison and Hamilton Wrote the Federalist, Defined the Constitution, and Made Democracy Safe for the World for online ebook

Andrés says

A good description of how Hamilton and Madison came to write the Federalist Papers, as well as the greater historical background for these essays. The writing perhaps does not soar, but the topic itself is sufficiently inspiring to largely make up for that deficiency.

Attempts to show how the Federalist Papers have been used in various constitutional controversies were only somewhat useful. It would have been best if Meyerson had not commented on current controversies or been so fixated on Scalia and Thomas's use of the Federalist Papers in their decisions as it makes Meyerson look more a partisan than a scholar.

Chris says

Excellent book for anyone interested in politics or history. It is nicely divided into two parts: the first part is the history of the Federalist papers and the second part is an analysis of the papers and what makes them still relevant today. As a history and government teacher, I found the book to be informative and extremely readable. There are a couple of chapters (specifically two dealing with Federalist No. 10 and the separation of powers, respectively) that I plan on assigning to my kids in AP Government because he does an excellent job taking Madison's sophisticated thinking and really putting it in modern terms. Great book.

Mark Stolz says

An informative and well written work.

Steven Strothman says

A well written book that enlightens the reader on the formation of the United States. Great detail was taken to show the pains our country went through to develop possibly the most experimental form of government ever developed. It also showed insight on how a political friendship can accomplish great things and quickly change to a feud of enormous proportions. The book lastly provides some lasting lessons of the Federalist Papers and how we can use these papers to better understand our constitution in our world today.

Ryan LeBlanc says

Though I wish it included the actual Federalist Papers, it provides useful context in interpreting them.

Ellen says

Liberty's Blueprint had some interesting information, but felt like I was reading a history text book. The author's focus is on the content of the Federalist papers, and the political events of the time. All that is well and good (and I suspect appealing to people who loved history class), but I personally prefer books that have more focus on the individuals, their thoughts, interpersonal relationships, and so forth. This book had a bit of that thrown in here and there, but not enough for my taste. I kept putting the book down, and might not have finished reading it except that it was for my book club. I have to admit though that history was not one of my favorite subjects in school, although I've thought it **should** and **could** be a lot more interesting with more emphasis on the "characters". In contrast, earlier in 2008 I read "The Nine" which is about the Supreme Court justices in the recent past, and I liked it.

Michael Newton says

I read many books on the Revolution and Constitution. I've read the Federalist Papers and some of the Anti-Federalist Papers. But I still learned so much from this book.

The first 130 pages of this book are simply amazing. Meyerson explains the history of the Constitution and Federalist Papers, focusing especially on the relationship between Hamilton and Madison. Meyerson does a great job describing the character, the events, and their implications.

The latter half of the book is less history and more Meyerson's political and legal opinion. I found myself agreeing with him at points and disagreeing at others. This half was also insightful, but less interesting and more subjective.

Thus, I'd give the first half of the book five stars and the latter half 3 stars, averaging out to 4 stars.

Kevin Bache says

Starting with the genesis and exigence for "The Federalist Papers", the author, Michael Meyerson, a Constitutional Scholar and Professor, places the creation of the noted compilation of essays into its historical context, then proceeds to tell the story of the two men most responsible for their writing--Hamilton and Madison. John Jay, later the first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, also contributed, but his essays numbered far fewer and were cut short by illness.

In telling the partnership of Hamilton and Madison during the essays' writing, Meyerson deftly shows the essential political philosophy the men attempted to convey to not just the opponents of the Constitution but also the public-at-large. Indirectly, Meyerson makes it a tour de force civics lesson in why the Constitution is constructed as it is. He also shows a little known corner of American history: the quite affectionate relationship between two intellectual and political geniuses who would no sooner after the ratification process become the bitterest of rivals of the new Republic. One almost feels sympathy for the two men having once been close then torn apart by politics. Which, no doubt, does not say much for what politics can do to even the most rational of men.

Though some would find it unnecessary to have to defend the "Papers" and why they are intrinsic in understanding the Constitution and our government, Meyerson does spend a considerable amount of words on doing just that. While I often felt a sense of "Well, duh" in his arguments--on his behalf, by the way--he does cover some arguments against the "Papers" which have a little better solid footing than others...a little better, mind you. One argument has been lingering around since it was first put forth by a Marxist intellectual almost 100 years ago: that is, the Constitution--thereby the "Papers"--is merely on economic policy designed to keep rich white landed gentry on top and all others--the poor, women, and minorities--on the bottom. Though the argument has long been discredited by many, some still point to the part of the Constitution where slavery is implicitly written in and the corresponding essay where Madison--quite awkwardly--defends the 3/5 ratio, using them as examples of why both documents are fatally flawed and out-dated 18th century ideas. Meyerson disposes of these notions objectively and firmly, leaving all but the most ardent Marxist/Progressive readers satisfied with their disposal.

Whereas in the beginning and middle chapters of "Liberty's Blueprint" is often indirectly made a civics lesson by the nature of it being ably written by a Constitutional scholar, the last few chapters are literally a civics lesson. Meyerson chooses select essays for analysis so that even the novice of political philosophy and Constitutional law can understand what the essays are about and why they are so important to even our modern era.

I am listing this next to "A Son of Thunder" as the two best books I've read so far on the people, events, and ideas of the Revolutionary era. I have read many books on the construction of and events surrounding the Constitution's creation, many of which I thought would discuss the deeper philosophical reasoning for why the Constitution looks and acts as it does. Yet, none until this book, which does not so much discuss the document itself as it does the essays arguing for the document, has satisfied this desire to know. Will you come away with a better appreciation for "The Federalist Papers" and the men who wrote them?--yes. But, more importantly, it is our nation's central guiding document which you will appreciate when dates, people, and fill-in-the-blank facts fail to come to mind.

Andrew says

These books, despite their best intentions, are boring, and the last part is like sitting in a law lecture when you're not in law school. What's interesting about this are the personalities, the writing process, the atmosphere that the nascent publication/book-binding and owning industry nurtured, and the idea of the pamphlet, which the author glosses over. His heart is in the right place, but there's much more drama here, and he does NOT play up the amazing contrast of wills that somehow comes together into one name (Publius) and created the most influential public political rhetoric in American history. Instead there's a lot of stuff about the convention that seems to show us that he's read his history. But there's little here that I didn't pick up in my reading for my thesis, so I guess that's why I'm disappointed. I don't know. Maybe someone who likes late 18th Century history and doesn't know much about the PAPERS will love it; but I imagine you, like me, will get turned off when he starts making some pretty liberal claims for a living constitution (a reading he makes by arguing that since Publius writes about "principles," he must be positing that the Constitution is ultimately an ideology, and not an established body of laws).

Still, I'm all for any celebration of The FP, and especially applaud his attempt to get you to read them for yourself. And clearly he likes Madison and Hamilton. Maybe it's just that I don't like these modern historians. They cannot CANNOT divorce themselves from their own current political/legal agendas, and this keeps us from the kind of close reading the FP deserve.

The most interesting fact involves John Jay and the Doctors Riot of 1788(?) - really interesting. Those days were so macabre; I only wish I were alive to see them.

Loren says

Interesting, balanced, and well-written look at the men who wrote the Federalist Papers. Helped me understand the personalities and the context of the constitutional convention and the ratification process. Points out how The Federalist should and should not be used today, and provides good examples in a fair way. Further, you don't have to be an expert on The Federalist to understand the book, and even if you are, there is still likely much of interest here.

Lee says

This is almost two books in one. The first part covers Hamilton and Madison's friendship and collaboration on writing the Federalist, as well as their relationship's eventual dissolution into bitter political and personal antagonism. The second part is an argument for the continuing relevance of the Federalist, both as a resource for a limited "originalist" interpretation of the Constitution and as an embodiment of the political philosophy that underlies it. In general, I found the first part quite interesting as an account both of two very different personalities and of their importance in shaping the debate over the Constitution. The second part, while suggestive, was a bit too thinly argued to be fully persuasive.

Robin Friedman says

A Good Introduction To The Federalist Papers

During the summer of 1787, Alexander Hamilton began a series of essays designed to convince reluctant voters in New York to ratify the newly-proposed United States Constitution. He enlisted the aid of John Jay, who soon became ill and made limited contributions to the series. In the autumn of 1787, Hamilton turned to his old friend, James Madison of Virginia, who was serving in Congress in New York City at the time. Madison agreed to collaborate on the project. The result was the collection of essays known as The Federalist Papers. Although conceived with a specific temporal goal in mind -- the ratification of the Constitution -- The Federalist Papers has become, together with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution itself, a revered statement of the American political experiment. The work remains studied for its defense and explanation of American constitutionalism and for its insights into government and human nature. It has deservedly become a timeless classic.

In "Liberty's Blueprint" (2008), Michael Meyerson gives a readable overview of The Federalist Papers, including its authors, creation, and content. Myerson is a Professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law who uses The Federalist Papers to teach courses in Constitutional Law. His students are fortunate to have him as a guide.

"Liberty's Blueprint" is intended for the lay reader. The sections of the book in which Myerson discusses The Federalist Papers and its use or misuse in current judicial decision making seem to me to be a sidetrack to the main purpose of the study. In his Preface, Myerson explains that he had several goals in writing the book.

The first goal was to present the most important teachings of The Federalist Papers to a modern audience and to show how "wise and educated men" were able to engage in "rational political debate" in supporting or in criticizing the proposed Federal constitution. There is a deep sense in Myerson's book of the importance of both wisdom and rationality in conducting political affairs.

A second goal of Myerson's study was to use The Federalist Papers to show how and when the views of the Framers should be used in constitutional interpretation. He engages in discussions of "originalist" and "non-originalist" theories of Constitutional interpretation to arrive at a "partial originalist" position in which the Constitution might be interpreted in an originalist manner with The Federalist Papers as a guide while the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment might require a different manner of interpretation. His treatment of interpretive theory is somewhat out of place in this book and takes away from his study of The Federalist Papers itself.

Myerson's third goal in his book was to "explore the lives of the authors of The Federalist and shed light on the unusual personal bond between Madison and Hamilton." Myerson here succeeds beautifully. The first half of his book is a twin biography of Alexander Hamilton and James Madison and how they came to cooperate in producing their masterwork of political thought. The two Founders were much unlike. Hamilton was born out of wedlock in the Caribbean and rose through his own efforts to become the confidant of George Washington and a power of the commercial interests of the new Nation. He was also a notorious womanizer. James Madison was quiet and diminutive but to the manor born as part of the Virginia aristocracy. Madison was scholarly and intellectual but also a shrewd partisan politician. The two men had become friends well before the Constitutional Convention. They both were somewhat disappointed with the Constitution that resulted but put aside their disagreements with the final product to work aggressively for its ratification. Following the ratification of the Constitution and under the administration of President Washington, Hamilton and Madison's personal friendship disintegrated as the two became bitter political enemies. Hamilton's Federalism and Madison's Republicanism became prototypes of political divisions that continue in the United States. Myerson's story of Hamilton, Madison, and The Federalist Papers makes compelling reading.

The final goal of Myerson's study is to show that the ultimate falling-out of Hamilton and Madison teaches that "it is folly to ignore the wisdom of those with whom one disagrees." Hamilton and Madison each have much to teach. Unlike Hamilton and Madison, contemporary Americans would do well to learn from those with whom they disagree and to work together. Hamilton and Madison did so in The Federalist Papers with results that transcend the enmity that later developed between them.

Besides the story of Hamilton and Madison, Myerson succeeds well when he gives a short, close reading of Madison's Federalist # 10, which has become the most famous essay in the collection. He also offers an excellent concluding chapter on The Federalist Papers and its views on human nature. The authors recognized the frailties of human beings and the passions, emotions, and tendencies towards self-centeredness to which they were subject. They tried to channel these frailties in creating a workable form of government. But they also recognized the possibility of education, virtue and disinterestedness in human endeavor. These qualities too they tried to utilize in both creating and explaining the American experiment in government.

Readers who are new to The Federalist Papers will find Myerson's book an excellent introduction. A good step after reading this book would be to turn to some of the excellent Amazon reader reviews of The Federalist Papers. Then the reader may be inspired to explore this work of American political thought for him or herself.

Bruce says

The first half of this book is a history of the writing of "The Federalist Papers" and the relationship between Hamilton and Madison. While doing so it also provides background on the fight for passage of the Constitution. It is interesting to note that both of them advocated the passage of the Constitution though perhaps for slightly different reasons. Both changed their views to a greater or lesser extent after passage of the Constitution.

The second half is entitled 'Reading the Federalist'. The author goes over some of the Supreme Court decisions and the use and/or misuse of 'the Federalist Papers.' Like religious fundamentalists, several of the Justices pick and choose parts to support their theses, taking them out of context and neglecting to address other parts that contradict their preconceived notions.

The book in it's entirety is an excellent read for any American History Class as well as classes on Law. More importantly, it is an excellent read for anyone wanting to understand some of the pitfalls in interpreting "original intent."

Michael Taylor says

An extremely detailed, yet approachable treatment of the dynamic relationship between James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. The first half of the book deals with their political partnership and the writing of The Federalist. The second half of the book examines how The Federalist can be read and provides examples, both good and bad. This book can be read by just about anyone interested in the creation of the Constitution and what the rationale was for the document by two influential founders. A good read that should lead you to other books, but this is the best treatment of the Madison/Hamilton relationship that I have read.

Ted says

Good read. Two lines from late in the book I found so relevant to today's frustrations that many experience with our political process.

Madison said when speaking of the role of Government and the need for it to represent the people's will..."it is this reason alone, of the public that ought to control & regulate the government"

Also, Madison speaking of those in charge of administering any government..."may forget their obligations to their constituents, and prove unfaithful to their important trust."
