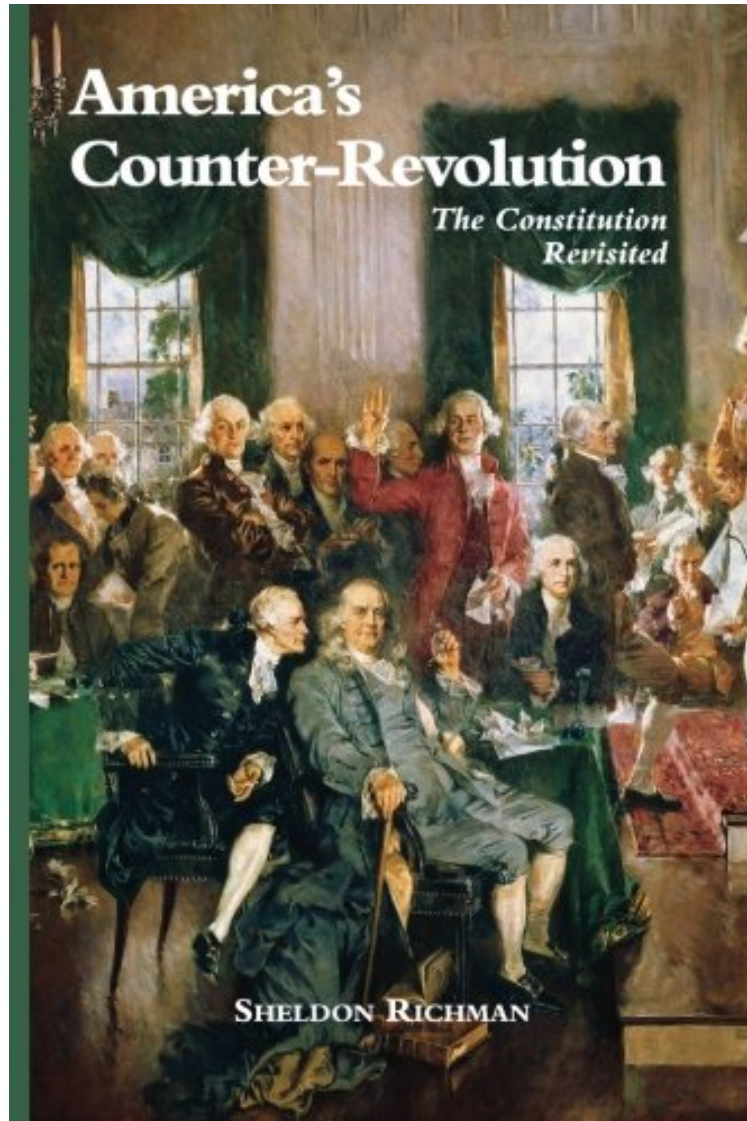


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America's Counter-Revolution: The Constitution Revisited

Sheldon Richman

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Sheldon Richman : America's Counter-Revolution: The Constitution Revisited before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised America's Counter-Revolution: The Constitution Revisited:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. The Constitution as a Counter-RevolutionBy James C. WilsonThe American abolitionist, and pioneering individualist anarchist Lysander Spooner once wrote of the US Constitution this much is certain that it has either authorized such a government as we have had, or has been powerless to prevent it. In either case it is unfit to exist. This short quote in itself is often sufficient to make any self-professed constitutionalist

libertarians examine their position. Yet, reverence for the US Constitution is still common in libertarian circles, in part due to the Ron Paul movement's idealization of said document. Sheldon Richman, on the contrary, argues that it was in fact set up precisely to create a strong centralized government which could freely intervene in foreign affairs and economic activity. As the title suggests, Richman sees the adoption of the Constitution as a counter-revolution, a sort of backlash against the push for freedom that led to the Declaration of Independence and the fight for independence from Britain. Specifically, the new document created a national government with unlimited powers to tax, maintain permanent debt through a central bank, regulate trade and maintain a standing army. In other words, the Constitution gave the federal government the power to engage in the types of statecraft that major powers like Britain were engaged in. Richman frames the debate of that era as being between conservative elites like James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and those who wanted a strong, aristocratic, central government with the potential to form a commercial empire, and decentralists who generally opposed aristocracy and elite rule. He also observes that the Federalists were able to use their wealth and influence to prevent the major publication at the time from publishing anti-federalist writing. Furthermore, a great deal of attention in this book is given to the intentional ambiguity of constitutional language, and with it, the creation of implied powers. Despite the relatively short length of 155 pages, including notes, this book is highly informative. It manages to keep its delivery accessible, making the book a quick, easy read. As such, it is a great introduction to the topic, especially for readers with libertarian leanings.

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Excellent By SBAn excellent primer challenging the sacred cow of the Constitution. The solution to our problems may not be in "obeying the Constitution", whatever that means. Interpretation mileage may vary as it did from the very beginning. There was no ONE "founding fathers" construction. For the first time, the Constitution gave the general government the power to tax, regulate trade and raise armies. Is this the solution? As a primer, the essays are short and eminently readable. He provides an abundance of sources for those so inclined whose appetite has been whet to pursue the topic deeper.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Misplaced Faith By Beth in Iowa Like everyone else, I too have always seen the Constitution as the document that restrains the federal government from becoming a totalitarian state. Reading Sheldon Richman's book has made it clear to me that this is not the case after all. As someone who has never known much about American History or the Anti-Federalists, reading this book has given me a much better idea about what went on during the writing of the Constitution, and how vital the Anti-Federalists' Bill of Rights has been. The book is short and easy to read, and explains Richman's ideas in clear language written for laymen, not the academic market (although it is meticulously footnoted and attributed). Yes, his own anarcho-capitalist leanings are explicit, particularly in the last few chapters, but he makes it clear that any incremental improvements in liberty are to be welcomed by everyone from traditional Republican conservatives to minarchist libertarians to the most anarcho-capitalist advocates, and welcomes everyone to our common struggle. His book is a good addition to understanding how our common goal will ultimately be won -- hint: it's not through putting our faith in the Constitution.

This book challenges the assumption that the Constitution was a landmark in the struggle for liberty. Instead, Sheldon Richman argues, it was the product of a counter-revolution, a setback for the radicalism represented by America's break with the British empire. Drawing on careful, credible historical scholarship and contemporary political analysis, Richman suggests that this counter-revolution was the work of conservatives who sought a nation of power, consequence, and grandeur. America's Counter-Revolution makes a persuasive case that the Constitution was a victory not for liberty but for the agendas and interests of a militaristic, aristocratic, privilege-seeking ruling class. The Anti-Federalists were right: The pursuit of "national greatness" inevitably diminishes liberty and centralizes government. The U.S. Constitution did both, as Sheldon Richman demonstrates in this powerfully argued anarchist case against the blueprint for empire known as the U.S. Constitution. --Bill Kauffman, author, *Forgotten Founder, Drunken Prophet: The Life of Luther Martin*

The libertarian movement has long suffered from a constitutional fetishism that embraces an ahistorical reverence for the U.S. Constitution. Far too many are unaware of the extent to which the framing and adoption of the Constitution was in fact a setback for the cause of liberty. Sheldon Richman, in a compilation of readable, well-researched, and compelling essays, exposes the historical, theoretical, and strategic errors in the widespread reification of a purely political document. With no single correct interpretation, the Constitution has been predictably unable to halt the growth of the modern welfare-warfare American State. I urge all proponents of a free society to give his book their diligent attention. --Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, Professor, San Jose State University; author, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War*

"No state or government can limit itself through a written constitution, no matter how fine the words or how noble the sentiments they express. It is one of the many virtues of Sheldon Richman's book that it shows how this is true even of the American Constitution, which despite the promises of its designers and the insistence of its defenders down the years, made limited government less and not more likely." --Chandran Kukathas, London School of Economics

Richman delivers an accessible, incisive, and well-grounded argument that the Constitution centralized power and undid some of the Revolution's liberating gains. He rebuts patriotic platitudes but avoids the crude contrarianism so common in libertarian revisionism written for popular consumption. He does not romanticize America's past or overstate his case.

Radical and nuanced, deferential to freedom and historical truth, Richman rises above hagiography or demonization of either the Federalists or anti-Federalists to produce an unsurpassed libertarian exploration of the subject. Anthony Gregory, Independent Institute [A]fter reading this book, you will never think about the U.S. Constitution and Americas founding the same way again. Sheldon Richmans revealing and remarkably well-argued narrative will permanently change your outlook. . . . Richman . . . [is] one of this countrys most treasured thinkers and writers [H]e draws on the most contemporary and important scholarly research, while putting the evidence in prose that is accessible and compelling. Jeffrey A. Tucker, Liberty.me and Foundation for Economic Education

About the Author Sheldon Richman is a senior fellow of the Center for a Stateless Society (c4ss.org), chair of the Centers trustees, and a contributing editor at Antiwar.com. He is the author of three other books: *Separating School and State: How to Liberate Americas Families* (1994); *Your Money or Your Life: Why We Must Abolish the Income Tax* (1999); and *Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State* (2001), published by the Future of Freedom Foundation (fff.org). From 1997 to 2012 he was the editor of *The Freeman*, published by the Foundation for Economic Education (fee.org), following which he edited *Future of Freedom* for the Future of Freedom Foundation. Previously he was an editor at the Cato Institute, the Institute for Humane Studies, and *Inquiry* magazine. Richmans articles on foreign and economic policy, civil liberties, and American and Middle East history have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *the Chicago Tribune*, *the Chicago Sun-Times*, *USA Today*, *Reason*, *Forbes*, *The Independent*, *The American Scholar*, *The American Conservative*, *Cato Policy Report*, *Journal of Economic Development*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, *Middle East Policy*, *Liberty*, and other publications. He is a contributor to the *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Richman is a graduate of Temple University in Philadelphia. He blogs at Free Association (sheldonrichman.com).