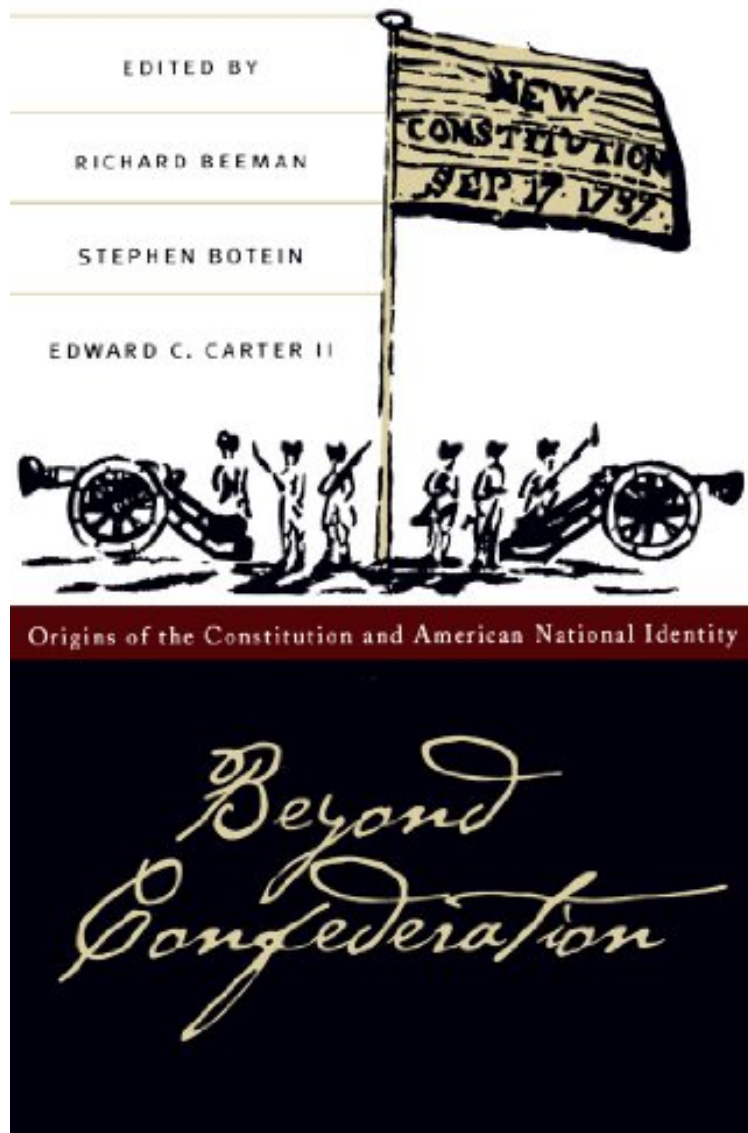


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Richard Beeman

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture and the University of North Carolina Press):

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Supplementary, but interesting aspects of our foundingBy J. GrattanThis book is a collection of essays by noted colonial period historians that analyze several aspects of our constitutional founding. Most of the entries are interesting, yet in such collections the reader is somewhat burdened with the constant shifting of gears. While not all of the essays are appealing, the best pieces are worth one's while. A theme that seems to run through these selections is that the Founders only minimally knew what they were creating. Matters developed much differently over the ensuing decades than was anticipated.Gordon Wood, in "Interests and Disinterestedness," dissects the pretensions of the Federalists in their attempt to incorporate their "virtue" and "disinterest" into the Constitution, while taking steps to restrain the direct political voice of "middling" folk. As the author notes, anti-Federalists saw through their rhetoric, correctly understood the aristocratic implications, and disputed their claims of disinterestedness. In fact, the unruly democracy of the ensuing decades seems to vindicate the strength of the anti-Federalists, despite their lack of success in stopping the ratification.Lance Banning, in "The Practical Sphere of a Republic," emphasizes the learning that took place at the Convention. Madison's nationalism became transformed - a middle ground was achieved. His "practical sphere of a republic" became a "federal system of republics... where the will of the majority would be refined and purified by passing it successively through different filters. Authority would be distributed among two sets of government branches, state and general."Paul Finkelman, in "Slavery and the Constitutional Convention," clearly demonstrates the impact that slavery had in almost every significant issue debated in the Convention. In the end, Southerners gained protections and accommodations for slavery, while conceding little. The three-fifths clause gave the Southern states added power in Congress and well as in the electoral college. Their cash crops for export would not be taxed. And the remainder of the nation was required to deliver up fugitives and come to the aid against any slave insurrections. Objections to these provisions were minimal. The northern states only gained the right to pass commercial legislation by a simple majority. Of course, all of this only delayed a final, ferocious reckoning."The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George Washington," by Jack Rakove, has nothing to do with Washington but is an interesting examination of whether the Constitution was actually structured such that it would serve as a "filtration of talent" for those gaining political office - a desire of the elites at the Convention - and, if so, was that end accomplished. The author first notes that the Constitution imposes no property requirements for holding office or for voting, and, furthermore, leaves to the states the manner of electing Congressmen, be it by district or statewide. The first Congress was largely made up of prominent citizens, but what became evident rather quickly was the impermanency of membership, which undermined the notion of elite, professional legislators. The author says that "there never was a time when the political system operated solely as a filter of talent or when expedient calculations did not enter forthrightly into decisions to enter or leave Congress." Also, the ratification process unleashed popular politics, the effects of which have been with us ever since.Richard Ellis, in "The Persistence of Anti-federalism after 1789, " indicates that anti-federalism did not disappear after the ratification process, but became a strain in the Jefferson-led Republican Party that formed an opposition to Jefferson's and Madison's nationalism. They were united in their opposition to the Federalism of Hamilton and Adams. The anti-Federalist wing remained committed to the so-called "Principles of 1798" and sought a rollback of centralized power when Jefferson was elected. That did not happen and they became known as the Old Republicans. According to the author, the "1820s saw a major revival of democratic, agrarian, and states' right thought. The election of Andrew Jackson was essentially the culmination of that movement and deposed the New Republicans and their interest in expanding the influence of the central government.In the culminating essay, "A Roof without Walls," by John Murrin, the American identification with Britain along with the improbabilities of separating is discussed. Regional discord was such that the author suggests that "American national identity was, in short, an unexpected, impromptu, artificial, and therefore extremely fragile creation of the Revolution." But the Constitution was a transforming event. "The Constitution became a substitute for any deeper kind of national identity." In actuality, the Constitution served to buy time for Americans to become a nation. In the author's words, "Americans erected their constitutional roof before they put up the national walls."The book is a nice supplement for those pursuing a deeper understanding of our constitutional founding and its unanticipated turns.

Beyond Confederation scrutinizes the ideological background of the U.S. Constitution, the rigors of its writing and ratification, and the problems it both faced and provoked immediately after ratification. The essays in this collection question much of the heritage of eighteenth-century constitutional thought and suggest that many of the commonly debated issues have led us away from the truly germane questions. The authors challenge many of the traditional generalizations and the terms and scope of that debate as well.The contributors raise fresh questions about the Constitution as it enters its third century. What happened in Philadelphia in 1787, and what happened in the state ratifying conventions? Why did the states--barely--ratify the Constitution? What were Americans of the 1789s

attempting to achieve? The exploratory conclusions point strongly to an alternative constitutional tradition, some of it unwritten, much of it rooted in state constitutional law; a tradition that not only has redefined the nature and role of the Constitution but also has placed limitations on its efficacy throughout American history. The authors are Lance Banning, Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, Richard D. Brown, Richard E. Ellis, Paul Finkelman, Stanley N. Katz, Ralph Lerner, Drew R. McCoy, John M. Murrin, Jack N. Rakove, Janet A. Riesman, and Gordon S. Wood.

"This excellent collection offers well-written, updated, scholarly interpretations of the constitutional era." *Journal of American History* "A fascinating collection of essays, abundantly illustrating the vigor of current scholarship on the making of the Constitution. Forrest McDonald" "This excellent collection offers well-written, updated, scholarly interpretations of the constitutional era." *Journal of American History* "A fascinating collection of essays, abundantly illustrating the vigor of current scholarship on the making of the Constitution. Forrest McDonald A fascinating collection of essays, abundantly illustrating the vigor of current scholarship on the making of the Constitution.--Forrest McDonald This excellent collection offers well-written, updated, scholarly interpretations of the constitutional era by some of the leading authorities in the field.--*Journal of American History* From the Back Cover The focus of 'Beyond Confederation' is the Constitution of the United States in its own era. The authors scrutinize the ideological background of the Constitution, the rigors of its writing and ratification, and the problems it both faced and provoked immediately after ratification. The essays question much of the heritage of eighteenth-century constitutional thought and suggest that many of the commonly debated issues have led us away from the truly germane questions.