



HOW THE FOUNDERS' DEBATE CONTINUES TODAY

WILL HARRIS

www.Constitutio.com

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Founding Director

Center for the Constitution

James Madison's Montpelier

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As a political community, this country is united by its differences. How to achieve good government? We started out this way. And the debate continues. Constitutional America is configured by a foundational disagreement over how to achieve a common purpose. Leaders in public service are situated precisely at the juncture of this nationally self-characterizing contention.

The controversy in the 1780s over the ratification and, subsequently, over the implementation of the Constitution, was not simply a dispute over the merits of the proposed Plan or the motives of the planners. It was, more importantly, an argument about the most fundamental characteristics of the United States as a polity. Not only does that controversy persist today; it takes the form that the Founders established. Or, rather, what they *founded* was not merely a new order of political life but an enduring structure of debating about it.

“Federalist” and “Antifederalist” — or, perhaps, *federalism versus republicanism*, conceived of broadly as competing political theories — represent not just “pro” and “con” but alternative paradigms of constitutional order that structure our deeper differences as Americans. These are productive differences, because we have been founded in constitution-making conflict, by constitutional ratification conflict, and for constitutional-interpretive conflict. The larger agenda of America’s dual founding has been to defend against the threat of political self-destruction by incorporating a structured discord into the broader constitutional system. This scheme has been set out not just as an array of

competitive governmental institutions and social power centers. At the level of the basic theory that animates this system, there is also a coexistence of competing paradigms of political order.

This conflict cannot be resolved. To do so would bring the entire constitutional system into jeopardy. Because the coexistence of Federalist and Antifederalist ways of thinking defines Constitutional America, it supplies a much more revealing pair of distinctions than the more conventional duality of “liberal” and “conservative” (derived from Great Britain) or of “Left” and “Right” (from continental Europe).

A crucial element of good leadership in political or policy-making contexts is to comprehend the real controversy. Especially, that is, what might be called the *constitutive differences* — those that may define the options for what to do, and the stakes at issue in alternative choices. Of course, the point of good government is actually to accomplish something, not merely to reason clearly about it. Leadership requires both of these. “Constitutional thinking” joins the doing and the reasoning. The Federalist v. Antifederalist debate of the Founders, which has sustained our disputatious experience as a People, opens up this constitutional thinking for our strategic use in public leadership.

This seminar will focus on the following:

1. Thinking *Inside* the Box — Constitutions and Paradigms.
2. Moving the *Outside* In — Founders and Leaders.
3. Differing *Constitutively* — Federalist and Antifederalist.