



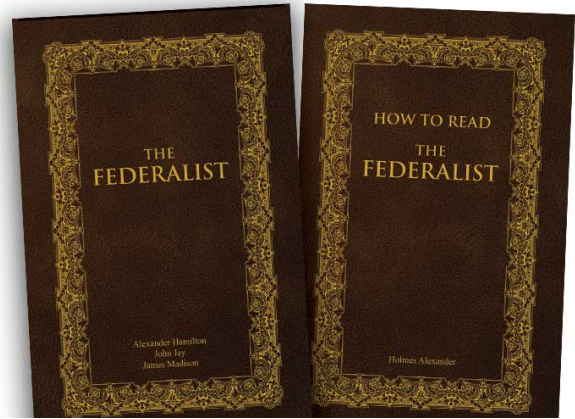
Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 7, 2024

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## The Federalist and a Classic Interpretation Reprinted

Western Islands, the publishing arm of the John Birch Society (the parent company of *The New American*), has reprinted two books that every Americanist should have on his bookshelf. The first is the collection of newspaper articles written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison known collectively as *The Federalist Papers*, or simply [The Federalist](#). These essays were written anonymously (at the time) by three of the strongest advocates for the U.S. Constitution in order to inspire the average New Yorker to support its ratification in that key state.



While only nine of the 13 states were needed for ratification, it is unlikely that the newly formed government could have been successful without ratification by Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York. As such, Hamilton enlisted the collaboration of fellow New Yorker John Jay and Virginian James Madison (who has been dubbed “the Father of the Constitution” because of his immense contributions to the document). The three men wrote their essays under the assumed name “Publius” so as to keep the focus on their expositions of the Constitution’s meaning, to improve its chances of ratification.

This reprint has the added bonus of including George Washington’s 1796 “Farewell Address” and Thomas Jefferson’s “Kentucky Resolutions” of 1798, both of which need to be read by every American patriot who values the continued success of our form of government.

It is not realistic to review all 85 essays included in *The Federalist*, but a summary of nine of these timeless articles should make it very clear that the Framers were certainly establishing not “a democracy,” but rather a constitutional republic, in which liberty and law trump majority rule.

### ***The Federalist***

In *Federalist* 15, Hamilton argued that the Articles of Confederation, America’s first constitution, in effect since 1781, had proven “insufficient,” asserting that “there are material imperfections in our national system, and that something is necessary to be done to rescue us from impending anarchy.” He noted American military posts on the frontier that were in the possession of the British — forts the British had pledged to abandon at the end of the War for Independence — and also lamented that Spain excluded Americans from “a free participation in the navigation of the Mississippi.”

In *Federalist* 24, Hamilton addressed the concern that the building of an army strong enough to drive the British from the Old Northwest and to compel the Spanish to allow the American navigation of the Mississippi River (then the western boundary of the Republic) might lead to a national standing army that could then threaten the rights of the states. To this objection, Hamilton explained that “the whole power of raising armies was lodged in the *legislature*, not in the *executive*.” Additionally, he cited a constitutional restriction on the appropriation of money for support of an army for a period longer than



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two years, noting that the Articles of Confederation had no such injunction.

In *Federalist* 29, Hamilton added another example of restraint upon the military power of the national government — the militias found in the several states. He insisted that any national army could “never be formidable to the liberties of the people while there is a large body of citizens, little if at all inferior to them in discipline and the use of arms, who stand ready to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens.”

While it might be argued that the military power of the federal government in today’s world exceeds the combined might of the states, it is quite clear that the Constitution Hamilton, Jay, and Madison were supporting did not provide for this imbalance.

James Madison made the case in *Federalist* 41 that the Constitution did not make the states inferior to the general government. He noted that the “sum” of power delegated to the federal government was limited by the Constitution, and “the particular structure of the government” restricted it by distributing that power “among its several branches.” This is what we call the principle of *separation of powers*.

In *Federalist* 43, Madison explained why the convention defined *treason* in the Constitution, the only crime actually defined in the document. He wrote that “artificial” treasons have been used in history to punish competing factions — factions that Madison declared to be the “natural offspring of free government.”

He offered assurances in *Federalist* 45 that the states would remain the most important players in the federal system created by the Constitution, because “without the intervention of the state legislatures, the president of the United States cannot be elected at all.” This was, first, because the state legislatures had the sole power to name the electors who would, in turn, choose the president. Secondly, Madison insisted, “the Senate will be elected absolutely and exclusively by the state legislatures.”

Of course, both of these provisions have since been eliminated, or nearly so. Today, the state legislatures enact the laws governing the selection of the presidential electors, but they no longer choose the electors, and the 17th Amendment to the Constitution stripped the state legislatures of the power to choose U.S. senators. It is clear that these two changes upset the balance of power that Madison and his fellow Framers had placed into the Constitution.

Finally, Madison wrote, “The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the state governments are numerous and indefinite.” Again, this has not turned out as Madison envisioned, but it was clearly his intent that most decisions affecting individuals would be made at the state and local level, not at the seat of the federal government.

In *Federalist* 62, Madison discussed the provision of the Constitution in which every state, regardless of population, would have an equal representation in the Senate, with two members each: “The equal vote allowed to each state is at once a constitutional recognition of the portion of sovereignty remaining in the individual states and an instrument for preserving that residuary sovereignty.” He added, “No law or resolution can now be passed without the concurrence first of a majority of the people, and then of a majority of the states.”



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This is an illustration of Madison's flexibility when he saw the benefit of an idea, as he was originally in favor of a two-house legislative body, but with the larger states (such as his own Virginia) having more representatives in both houses because of a larger population. He had strongly argued at the convention that it would be wrong for a larger state's population to have to pay more of the government's bills, without having a corresponding larger say in questions of taxation.

In *Federalist* 68, Hamilton defended the choosing of the president of the United States via electors chosen for that purpose by each state. "The mode of the appointment of the chief magistrate of the United States is almost the only part of the system of any consequence which has escaped without severe censure." He praised the provision that these electors are "chosen in each state," and are to "assemble and vote in the state in which they are chosen." This "detached and divided situation will expose them much less to heats and ferments which might be communicated from them to the people than if they were all to be convened at one time, in one place."



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Finally, in another example of the separation of powers written into the Constitution, Hamilton discussed in *Federalist* 75 the making of formal agreements — treaties — with foreign governments. While the president negotiates the terms of any treaty, his work must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate — the representatives of the states.

## ***How to Read the Federalist***

Unfortunately, the wise words of the authors of *The Federalist* are seldom read today. But a man who did read the words and attempted to summarize these principles in a much smaller form was Holmes Alexander, who wrote [How to Read the Federalist](#) in the 1950s.

In 12 insightful essays, Alexander offers a summary, with applications for our day, of the writings of Hamilton, Jay, and Madison. He condemns those who are not "passionately in love with their country" and have instead turned to a "devotion for One World." He states that much of America's decline began with the unfortunate decision to become directly involved in the First World War, which was itself "a perversion and dilution of patriotism."

"Today we are subject to treaty laws we never passed, to wars of other people's making, to taxes in support of alien and often hostile governments," Alexander writes. (So much so, I might add, that today,



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the debate is not usually over whether the American taxpayers should support other countries, but rather the amount that we should give to them.)

This desire to involve ourselves in the affairs and wars of other countries is contrary to the sentiments expressed by Madison in *Federalist* 45, in which he said the powers “reserved to the several states will extend to all the objects which, in the ordinary course of affairs, concern the lives, liberties, and properties of the people, and the internal order, improvement, and prosperity of the state.” Alexander quotes Madison in *Federalist* 14, when he assured his New York readers that the general government’s “jurisdiction is limited to certain enumerated objects.”

Alexander examines the phrase “pursuit of happiness” from the Declaration of Independence. By this, he argues, the Founders meant the pursuit of *money*, and he cites Madison to prove it. In *Federalist* 44, Madison wrote, “Laws impairing the obligation of contracts are contrary to the first principles of the social compact.”

The pursuit of happiness involves “the right to choose a profession, a career, or a business,” Alexander adds, “and to make the most of it within the limits of decency.”

Unfortunately, Alexander continues, it has been “planted in our minds” that “private wealth is spawned in wickedness.” Today, private property is often confiscated, American wealth and military strength are transferred to nations abroad, and politicians destroy the American character by “political inducement of self-pity.”

A central part of the problem is that our “world statesmen” have a “habit of rising above their oaths of office to serve, or to save, some charming little nation or noble old empire which is not, however, their lawful charge,” Alexander writes.

He also calls out those who would sacrifice American sovereignty on the altar of “free trade,” explaining that “Tariff walls, like the armed forces, are part of the American defense system,” and that there is a need for tariff protection “against cheap foreign labor.”

What is behind this idolizing of “free trade?” Alexander asserts, “Free trade is a doctrine for the economic uplift of have-not nations.... It is an international share-the-wealth proposition.”

In fact, he argues, “It’s doubtful if all the traitors from Benedict Arnold through the Rosenbergs did more to destroy the country than those oath-breakers who have subverted the equal rights of men to gain and retain what their talents deserve.”

Quoting Hamilton in *Federalist* 12, Alexander argues that tariffs — taxes on foreign goods — should still be our main source of federal revenue. “Hamilton had in mind,” Alexander writes, “that overseas merchants would be quite willing to pay a sort of admission tax in order to enter the American market.” He further argues, “For state sovereignty, it was necessary that the states have prior access to the home sources of taxation.” In other words, the federal government takes so much money from the people in taxation, it starves the state governments into dependency upon the federal government.

A principal reason that Americans have abandoned morally correct, limited government is that our people have left their first love — a nation “under God.” Alexander explains that “our sacred documents were written in the light of Christian belief,” but this was not because government commanded obedience to a particular religious viewpoint. In *Federalist* 1, Hamilton wrote, “For in politics, as in religion, it is equally absurd to aim at making proselytes by fire and sword. Heresies in either can rarely



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be cured by persecution.”

In words that are even more applicable to our day, Alexander writes, “Also, there’s a good deal of evidence that the tear-down of religion was part of a larger conspiracy. We had the era of debunkery in which our heroes were systematically smeared as slave-breeders, non-believers, money-chasers and frauds. The destruction of veneration for American traditions seems far too calculated to be accidental.”

Perhaps a major reason for these attacks upon our Founding Fathers is to distract us from their superior understanding of human nature and the recognition of this fact in our Constitution. Jefferson said that we should not place our trust in human beings, but rather should bind them down with the chains of that Constitution. Alexander says that “one of the main ingredients of freedom is distrust. One of the essentials of self-government is suspicion. This is what Jefferson meant by writing: Free government is founded in jealousy.”

As Madison wrote in *Federalist* 51, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”

While men will naturally resist giving power to a person who openly admits he wants office so he can exercise control over his fellow human beings, they far too often succumb to appeals that we must give up power in an “emergency.” Alexander laments, “Emergency-only legislation became emergency-always.”

Hamilton warned in *Federalist* 8: “Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct.... To be more safe, [nations] at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.” This, Alexander argues, often translates into fear of economic insecurity, and the surrendering of liberties to the government in order to remove that fear.

Alexander ends his work with a quote from Hamilton in response to those who would argue that the Constitution is not perfect. In *Federalist* 85, Hamilton wrote, “I never expect to see a perfect work from imperfect man.... The compacts which are to embrace thirteen distinct states in a common bond of amity and union must as necessarily be a compromise of as many dissimilar interests.”

For all of their differences, the Founders such as Washington, Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson agreed on some fundamentals — we need government, but we need government to be limited, and the best way to do that is with a constitution, detailing the powers government will have.

Three of the Founders explained all of this in *The Federalist*, and Holmes Alexander offers us an excellent interpretation and application of that historic classic in his own classic, *How to Read the Federalist*. A fine addition to this reprinted edition of the Alexander classic is the foreword, penned by Dennis Behreandt, publisher of *The New American*. Behreandt explores some of the more recent events that have occurred in America, “matters [that] have progressed to a level of severity that could not have been imagined by Alexander and his contemporaries,” which Behreandt describes as “a toxic and noxious combination of stupidity and depravity.”



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