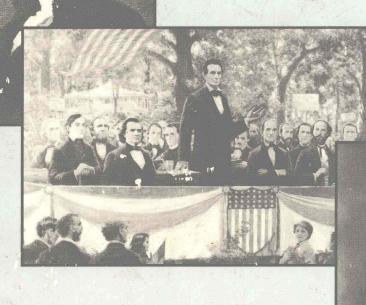
Almerican Government

Origins, Institutions, And Public Policy

Second Edition



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GOVERNMENT

ORIGINS, INSTITUTIONS, & PUBLIC POLICY
Second Edition

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Preface

This textbook combines the traditional and the modern approaches to the study of American politics. The traditional approach emphasizes constitutional law, the formal characteristics of political institutions, and American political thought; the modern approach focuses on political culture, the policymaking process, and political behavior. Few teachers of American politics hold that the distinction between these two approaches is absolute, and almost all would say that students should receive extensive exposure to both. Yet all too often materials available for classroom use reflect the research interests of scholars who concentrate their work in one of these areas. Our aim in this textbook has been to integrate these two approaches so that students can understand the interconnections between political thought and the formal structures of politics on the one hand, and the policymaking process and political behavior on the other.

We employ a mode of analysis that begins by looking at politics from the perspective of the constitution maker or legislator—that is, one who consciously and rationally considers how to found and maintain the basic structure of a political system. We use the term "constitution" in its original and general sense to refer

to the constituent elements that define a political order. In the United States, the Constitution (that is, the written document) is obviously one of these elements, but others include fundamental political beliefs, major laws, and the evolutionary development of institutions. The focus of this book is therefore as much cultural and behavioral as it is legal. The reader is placed in the position of a constitution maker or founder who is called on to analyze past changes from a constitutional perspective and who is asked to apply this same mode of thinking to major contemporary issues. By this method we seek to avoid a passive presentation of the mere facts of American politics and challenge the reader to consider the significance of these facts for efforts to adapt and maintain the constitutional system.

Political development in the United States has never, of course, been solely the product of conscious and rational efforts by constitution makers. Accordingly, we present other factors that have shaped the system's development, including influences deriving from sociological, economic, and technological causes. Where possible, however, we view these factors from the standpoint of the legislator having responsibility for constitutional maintenance. For example, in

treating the increasing influence of the mass media on the electoral process, we not only describe the developments that have taken place but also ask the reader to consider what changes (if any) legislators can and should adopt in response. This approach, we believe, encourages readers to think in terms of political alternatives and to assess the consequences of contemplated reforms.

Learning about politics involves expanding one's capacity to distinguish momentary influences from those that shape the character of a constitution over the long term. Throughout the text, we make use of political theory, comparative politics, and historical development in an effort to escape viewing yesterday's political crisis as the sole basis for political analysis. Our goal is to train readers to perform the mental act of checking day-to-day events against larger forces influencing constitutional change. Thus, although we have made every effort to include the most up-to-date materials, we have deliberately avoided faddish attempts to "peg" the book to the latest political crisis or problem.

Books with a traditional emphasis often glorify the founding generation and engage in the stale exercise of measuring the present system against the standards of the original authors of the Constitution. We have naturally assigned an important place to the nation's founders, both because the founding itself presents the clearest instance of a conscious and full-blown experiment in constitution making and because the founders have included many of America's best political thinkers. Nonetheless, our theme of constitution making implies that a constitution must be adapted to fit the requirements of each generation. No system can be maintained without being reformed to meet new needs and challenges. We have viewed the development of the American system as a process and a dialogue, bounded in large measure by the original principles but constantly facing new questions that the founders either could not have resolved or did not resolve. It is precisely because the task of maintaining the political order falls in some measure to every generation, including our own, that we believe it is essential to think about politics from a constitutional perspective.

While the theme we have adopted may seem distinctive, it lends itself readily to a standard arrangement of the material. Part One presents the overall approach of the book, analyzes the origins of the republic, traces the broad outlines of constitutional development from 1789 to the present, and treats the division of power between the central government and states. Part Two deals with public opinion and with the various links between the public and the formal institutions of government. Much of the material in this section falls into the area of political behavior, but readers will quickly see how political behavior is shaped by constitutional influences. Part Three treats the institutions of the federal government. It includes a chapter on the separation of powers between the president and Congress, an addition made to help students understand the interaction between these two branches. Part Four looks at the policymaking process and analyzes the major substantive areas of public policy. Basic choices in the realm of policy are dealt with in terms of their constitutional significance, and each chapter in this section considers not only what policy choices have been made but also how and by whom they are made. This section enables the reader to consider the effects of the allocation of power on governmental decisions.

A good companion for this text is Readings in American Government, edited by Mary P. Nichols and David K. Nichols, published by Kendall/Hunt in 1990. Their selection of readings follows closely the ideas discussed in this book and provides excellent primary source materials for a constitutional perspective on American politics.

The present edition of this text is a revision of the original edition published in 1984. All the chapters were revised by James W. Ceaser, with Glen Thurow being chiefly responsible for Chapter 17. In the original edition, James Ceaser, who coordinated the project, wrote what

are currently chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8 and directed the preparation of chapters 9, 13, and 17, drafted respectively by William F. Connelly, Alan Tarr, and David Clinton. Laurence J. O'Toole wrote chapters 4, 14, and 15; Joseph M. Bessette wrote chapters 10, 11, and 12; and Glenn Thurow wrote chapters 3 and 16. Several persons helped extensively in researching and

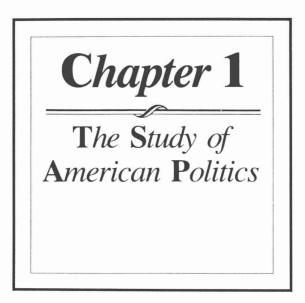
revising materials for this second edition: Randall Strahan, Andrew Busch, Scott Fischer, Brian Menard, James Yoho, Cary Federman, Bruce Larson, Glenn Ellmers, Brad Watson, and John Young. Charts and tables were prepared with the assistance of Blaire Atherton French. The selection of photos was prepared with the assistance of Andrew Busch and John Dinan.

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Part One

The Fundamental Principles



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The political tradition of the United States is a blend of continuity and change. Since the founding of the republic over two centuries ago Americans have looked to their origins as a source of guidance, seeking in the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Constitution (1789), and the Bill of Rights (1791) the fundamentals of their political beliefs. On the occasion of almost every inauguration, presidents speak of the principles of the founding. The great struggles for equality in American history—the antislavery movement, the civil rights movement, and the women's rights movementhave all invoked the "self-evident truths" of the Declaration. In the conflicts over the rightful powers and the proper arrangement of the government, from the great battles over states' rights in the nineteenth century to the recent struggles between the president and Congress over authority in making foreign policy, Americans continually return to the words of the Constitution and seek guidance from the thoughts of the founders.

Yet in looking to their origins, Americans do not always find the same answers. The very documents that provide the foundation for continuity sometimes serve as grounds for controversy, as contending parties claim fidelity to the same principles. New circumstances may also require that the original principles be expressed in new ways. Abraham Lincoln, who began the Gettysburg Address in 1863 by looking back "four score and seven years ago" to the Declaration of Independence, ended by calling for a "new birth of freedom." Franklin Roosevelt, who opened his state of the union address in 1944 by speaking of the Declaration and the Bill of Rights, concluded by calling for a "second Bill of Rights" and a "new basis of security."

A recurrence to original principles is a constant feature of American politics. As one political scientist recently observed: "Other nations often see constitutions come and go every generation, . . . [but] the United States has still had only one Constitution and one system of gov-

ernment based on one set of political ideas."1 Change has taken place in large part through reinterpreting these original elements. The founding generation, amid profound disputes of its own, struck a balance among the nation's fundamental principles. Each succeeding generation has faced the responsibility of maintaining those principles and adjusting that balance anew. It is a responsibility that cannot be escaped. Today is no exception. Beneath the daily contests for influence among our politicians and the struggle for advantage by interest groups, choices must often be made about the meaning of liberty and equality, the role of government in society, the relations among the institutions of the government, and the place and purpose of the United States in the world. These decisions in turn will alter the character of the nation's political system and profoundly shape the future course of American politics.

The enduring significance of the original principles in American political development suggests the need to begin the study of American politics by looking at the founding and by observing how the founding principles have been interpreted and perhaps modified by successive generations. The main purpose of this inquiry is not, however, to retrace American history; rather, it is to help the student to think in broad terms about our political system. In studying the founding principles, students must put themselves in the place of the founders and ask the same fundamental questions of how to form or constitute a political order. This approach in turn is the best way to help citizens to deal with the future challenges they will inevitably face in preserving the political system.

THINKING AS A CONSTITUTION MAKER

Imagine, then, that you were asked to create a new form of government for the United States. Where would you begin? What questions would you ask, and what standards would you apply? These are certainly not easy questions. Yet it was exactly these questions that America's

founders posed to themselves in the critical period from the Revolution through the ratification of the Constitution.

The founders were not, of course, the first ever to ask these questions. The study of how to establish and preserve governments was a central concern of political science, a discipline in which many of the founders had been instructed. (By "science," incidentally, the founders did not mean in this case a form of knowledge in which every proposition could be tested and confirmed with mathematical certainty, but a systematic body of thought about political life that could assist constitution makers like themselves in the task of establishing a government.) The help the founders received from previous works of political science was, however, only partial. Not all answers could be found in books.

Each situation in political life has its unique features deriving from the special qualities of its people and history. Creating a government must therefore always fit in some measure the character or "genius" of each people. Furthermore, the form of government the founders were proposing-a republican government in a large nation-was something that had never been attempted before. To critics who dismissed them as visionaries, the founders replied: "why is the experiment of an extended republic to be rejected merely because it may comprise what is new?"2 Like doctors performing a pioneering operation, the founders were devising and applying new ideas in political science, even as they were relying on its basic categories to guide them.

We in this generation do not, of course, face the same responsibility of establishing a new framework of government. Our form of government is something that has been given to us, the product of two centuries of accumulated thought, law, and practice. It originated with certain deliberate acts of constitution making. These acts are not lost in the mists of time, like King Arthur's legends, but remain surprisingly accessible to us. When the leaders of the American Revolution declared independence from

Great Britain in 1776, they presented an official document. The Declaration of Independence, that sets out the reasons for the break and states the principles of legitimate government. Eleven years later, faced with the failure of the nation's first government under the Articles of Confederation, the founders assembled in Philadelphia during a hot summer to devise a new government. We have an extensive record of the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention (James Madison's Notes) and a famous commentary on the Constitution, The Federalist, which was written during the debate over the ratification to explain the aims and purposes of the proposed government. The writings of the opponents of the Constitution, who were known as the Antifederalists, are also available.

The frame of mind of many of the founders is also known to us. The leading proponents of the new government, among whom were George Washington, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, were acutely aware of the importance of the moment and of the unique opportunity that existed. They consciously saw themselves as constitution makers, engaged in an undertaking that was no less momentous than the founding of the great ancient governments of Athens, Sparta, or Rome. The stakes were high, and to fail might spell the doom of self-government not just in the United States, but everywhere, As Alexander Hamilton noted at the Convention, "we were now to decide forever the fate of Republican Government"; a bad plan would mean that it might be "disgraced and lost to mankind forever.",3

The way in which the founders proceeded to establish the new government also marked something of a departure from the past. Most governments until then had been established by leaders using force and making appeals based on mythical and supernatural accounts. The whole process of the American founding was one that relied to a remarkable extent on reason. It provided a kind of test of whether a group of political leaders, taking into account both political theory and practical interests, could agree on

a government and then persuade the public, without the force of arms, of its wisdom. The Federalist begins by observing that it was for Americans "to decide the important question whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force" (Federalist 1).*

The document finally adopted in 1789, known as the "Constitution of the United States of America," continues to serve as the basis of our government today. It is the world's oldest written constitution still in use. Yet in many respects, our form of government today differs from the one created in 1789. Through amendment, interpretation, and the accretion of practice and precedent, the original system has been modified. If the founders were miraculously to return today, they would certainly recognize the outline of their handiwork; but they would no doubt also be surprised at some of its features.

The government of the United States has changed and will continue to change. The question is not whether we become constitution makers-we must-but whether we base our own decisions on "reflection or choice" or allow change to occur by "accident," without the benefit of the kind of systematic thought that went into creating the government. The need to think like constitution makers therefore is nearly as important today as at the founding. Preserving and maintaining a political order, though perhaps a less glorious task than establishing one, requires no less attention and understanding. It demands, in the words of Daniel Webster in 1825, not only that we value the "importance of the achievements of our ancestors," but also that we learn how "to keep alive

similar sentiments and to foster a constant regard for the principles of the Revolution."

To think like a constitution maker means to ask four basic questions that America's founders confronted:

- 1. What are the ends of society?
- 2. What role should government play in society?
- 3. Who governs, and how are the institutions of government to be organized and power distributed?
- 4. How can the nation provide for its security and promote its interests in the world?

These four questions help us not only to understand the task of constitution making, but also to analyze the character of any political system or constitution. By a constitution (with a small c), we mean the basic form of government, also referred to as a "political order" or "political system." But we prefer "constitution" because it recalls at least the possibility of making or constituting something. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, a "constitution" in its political sense is the "mode in which a state is constituted or organized . . . the arrangement of its parts or elements, as determining its nature and character." Analysis of the four questions stated above provides a key for describing any given constitution. Once we have set forth the ends of society, the role of government, who governs and the way power is distributed, and the nation's basic posture toward security and foreign affairs, we have characterized the essentials of that constitution.

Using the term constitution as the basic unit of analysis risks creating confusion, because Americans identify the word with our written legal document. The issues raised by the four questions posed above, however, go beyond matters that are addressed or fully answered by our Constitution. It is essential, therefore, to keep in mind the distinction between our constitution (with a small c) and our Constitution (with a capital C). Our constitution is made up

^{*}As there are many editions of *The Federalist*, we shall cite the number of the essay from which the reference is taken (for example, *Federalist* 10). *The Federalist* was written in 1787 and 1788 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay.

of a set of dominant beliefs, key laws, and established practices that are more than our Constitution and that may on occasion even deviate from it. Our constitution includes the driving force of certain ideas, the interpretation of these ideas in the context of changing circumstances, the basic traditions that derive from our historical experience, and the development of major institutions that are not directly provided for by the Constitution. The Constitution, for example, says nothing about political parties, even though parties have become integral parts of the current framework of government.

Calling attention to the significance of extra-Constitutional developments, far from minimizing the influence of the Constitution, allows us to see how important it has been in shaping American politics. Those who wrote and amended the Constitution sought to influence decisively the character of the political order. And they succeeded. (By contrast, the written constitutions in some nations are merely public relations documents that have no bearing on how these nations are actually governed.) Because the Constitution establishes the basic outline of our governmental structure, and because Americans believe that it should, the Constitution must be taken very seriously. But no written document can fully contain or define a constitution. Thinking constitutionally, therefore, requires going beyond a legal analysis to consider the fundamental factors that structure a political order.

In this chapter, we shall look at the four basic questions a constitution maker must ask and explore how they have been approached in the United States. The concepts discussed will all be examined in more detail later in the book. The object for the moment is less to master a body of facts than to get a sense of what these questions mean in the context of American politics.

THE ENDS OF SOCIETY

A constitution maker must first consider the broad purposes to which society is devoted and the kinds of human beings it develops. Politics is so important as a human activity because constitutions help shape what people value and how they lead their lives.

This formative dimension of politics can best be seen by looking at a few examples from outside of American politics. Consider, for example, the constitutional changes in Eastern Europe that occurred in the late 1980s. Earlier in the decade, the communist governments in these states allowed only one official view to be heard on the state-owned television or in stateowned newspapers; only one political party was permitted; ownership of almost all property was by the government; the teaching of history and social science was based exclusively on marxist-leninist principles; and the practice of religion was discouraged in some states and forbidden in others. By the beginning of 1990, the whole structure of these societies was transformed as revolutions toppled the repressive governments. Suddenly, the airwaves opened up to different views; opposition parties organized and openly expressed their ideas; elements of private enterprise began to develop; religious services were held publicly for the first time; and old textbooks in history and social studies were abandoned. When these constitutions changed, there were immediate changes in how people led their daily lives and developed as human beings.

Iran, over the past generation, offers another instructive example. In 1979, Iran was governed by an authoritarian ruler, the shah, who placed strict limits on the range of permissible political activity. At the same time, the shah's goals included the modernization of the nation's economy and the introduction of many western customs. The daily life of an Iranian urban middle-class person had thus come very much to resemble that of someone similarly situated in London or New York: people could purchase what they wanted, dress as they pleased, and entertain themselves by going to a nightclub, the movies, or the theater. All this changed abruptly in 1979 after a revolution brought to power a group of Islamic fundamentalists led by a religious figure, the Ayatollah Khomeini, whose view of the ends of society was based on establishing a version of the Islamic way of life. Through propaganda and repression, often with the support of the people, the government imposed some striking new laws that banned many forms of music, closed movie theaters, and required women to appear in public with long dresses covering their entire body and much of the head and face. The curriculum of all courses in school in history, government, and law were completely changed to reflect Islamic principles. Almost no major aspect of the daily lives of Iranians was left untouched by the new government.

Efforts to use political authority, as in the Iranian case, directly to form or mold a people, even against its will, are not unusual. History is filled with attempts by constitution makers to shape a particular kind of human being. Indeed, this general understanding of government's role (though not for the same ends as those of Iran) was once the predominant view. The chief model for this kind of constitution, discussed by almost all political theorists, is the ancient Greek city state of Sparta, established by the most renowned of all founders, Lycurgus. The Spartan constitution was designed to create the ideal citizen-soldier. In an effort to produce more perfect physical specimens, Spartan law carefully regulated the training of youth, prescribed the diet of the citizens, and established detailed rules for marriage and sexual relations. To prevent any corruption of the people's morals, they tightly regulated all economic activity and limited all contacts with foreigners. The Spartan constitution was in one sense a great success, as Sparta was able to maintain its independence for hundreds of years and to remain one of the most powerful states of ancient Greece.

In America, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some early New England colonial settlements were virtually theocratic republics. Government was used to promote

Christian virtue and ideals. Connecticut and Massachusetts defined what was orthodox religious belief, required church attendance, forbade premarital sexual relations, and even regulated the length of people's hair. Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel *The Scarlet Letter* provides a striking picture of the rigid code of behavior that these severe societies imposed on their citizens.

Some contemporary political scientists define politics as "who gets what, when, and how," that is, as a contest over physical resources and economic goods. While much ordinary political activity revolves around economic issues, as when Congress must decide whether to add to housing subsidies or to reduce public funding for loans to college students, these daily political concerns should not make us forget the more fundamental role of politics as a way of molding or influencing the overall character and quality of society. It is this aspect that the constitutional perspective always keeps in sight,

Where do we turn to find a statement of America's fundamental ends? It is here that Americans look back to the Declaration and the Constitution and find the basic goals of liberty, self-government, equality, and citizenship. These form a large part of the "core" or "creed" of the American constitution—the beliefs that have united Americans, in the Declaration's words, as "one people" despite the size and diversity of the population. It is to these ends that we now turn.

Liberty

Modern-day Americans no doubt find the idea of using political authority directly to form a people, in the fashion that existed in Sparta, not only unacceptable but difficult even to comprehend. Government, they believe, should not dictate the goals or aims of individuals. The Declaration establishes the legitimate end of society: to secure certain "unalienable rights," which include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." By making the protection of rights

BOX 1.1

THE DEBATE OVER LAWS BANNING OBSCENITY

The continuing differences over the meaning of liberalism are illustrated in the following arguments about the legality and wisdom of laws that would limit materials deemed to be obscene:

Governmental control of ideas or personal preferences is alien to a democracy. . . . The only completely democratic way to control publications which arouse mere thoughts or feelings is through nongovernmental censorship by public opinion (Judge Jerome Frank, concurring in *U.S. v. Roth.* 1956).

The ultimate evils include influences upon the cultural and moral environment of a people and, hence, upon mind and character. . . . By means of laws against the more extreme forms of obscenity, we are reminded, and we remind ourselves, that "We, the People" have an ethical order and moral limits (Harry Clor, Censorship and Freedom of Expression, Public Affairs Conference Center, Kenyon College, 1971, p. 110).

central, the Declaration implies that public authority should for the most part remove itself from imposing a specific end or way of life on its citizens. Citizens may pursue their happiness as they see fit, which leaves the determination of many questions of the best way of life chiefly to the private sphere—to the influence of the family, religious institutions, the "culture" as it develops, and ultimately to each person's individual choice.

The principle that government must secure certain rights is thus a fundamental end of the American constitution. It should not, however, be interpreted as a generalized right to "do one's own thing." Nor should one imagine that a whole theory of government can be constructed from the idea of rights, according to which government may only act when the exercise of rights by some directly conflicts with the exercise of rights by others. Government in fact does far more than just ban actions that involve a physical interference with the practice of others' rights. (All agree that no one has a right, even in the name of following one's religion, to practice human sacrifice.) Government acts in many areas to secure general benefits, from building highways, to providing insurance for medical care, to providing public education. Government also acts to protect basic community values and on occasion even to prevent individuals from practices harmful to their own well-being. Public authorities outlaw prostitution, ban obscenity, and prevent the sale or use of drugs, such as heroin and cocaine. How much government should do in some of these areas remains controversial, but few argue that regulation of any kind automatically violates the idea of a government that secures rights.

What then does protecting liberty and securing rights mean? For the founders and for most Americans, it has meant the protection of fundamental rights that are either specified or understood to be inherent. The rights specified in the Constitution include the right of free speech, free press, and the free exercise of religion. Rights widely recognized as inherent include the freedom of movement and a freedom to acquire and dispose of property. There are, of course, disputes about the full list of fundamental rights—as, for example, in the current public debate over a proclaimed right to have an abortion. But the main point is clear. A government that exists to secure rights means a government that protects certain rights, but not a legal claim to "do one's own thing." There is no doubt a presumption in our society that government should not usually intervene in areas of personal choice or in spheres being handled well enough

by the interaction of individuals and private groups. But a government that protects rights may nevertheless possess broad powers to act at its discretion in a large number of areas.

The task of protecting certain rights does, however, place important restraints on governmental authority. Government gets out of the business of imposing orthodox views in the moral and philosophic realms. Public authority, whatever its other obligations, secures the setting in which the pursuit of happiness takes place; it does not directly define the content of happiness. And in certain areas of activity, such as economics and property relations, government must assure individuals a wide sphere for private activity and personal choice.

This understanding of the role of government is at the core of what is often called liberalism or liberal government, as that word is used in the term liberal democracy. Liberal here means government that aims to protect rights and which, in that sense, is limited—a different definition, as we shall see, from its use in contemporary politics.6 The groundwork for liberalism was laid in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by important political theorists who had a great influence on America's founders: John Locke (1632–1704), Montesquieu (1689–1775), and Adam Smith (1723-1790). These theorists held that government should desist from the responsibility of saving souls, a task it had often pursued by tyrannical means. Government should also withdraw from directly controlling large parts of the economy, a role it had often exercised to achieve political control. Instead, modern government should ensure a sphere of free action for the individual.

The implications for government of securing liberty was well-stated by a famous nineteenth-century historian of liberty, Lord Acton:

By liberty, I mean the assurance that every man shall be protected in doing what he believes his duty against the influence of authority and majorities, custom and opinion. The state is competent to assign duties and draw the line between good and evil only in its immediate sphere. Beyond the limits of things necessary for its well-being, it can only give indirect help to fight the battle of life by promoting the influences which prevail against temptation—religion, education and the distribution of wealth.⁷

Notice Acton did not say that liberal governments must abandon all consideration of the quality of life or the kinds of human beings society should promote. Rather, he argued that there are now limitations on government's responsibility in this area and on what government may legitimately do to address its concerns.

Certain opponents of the Constitution doubted whether government should relinquish its role in directly forming virtuous citizens. These individuals argued that in a government in which the people would hold the ultimate source of power, strict controls were necessary to build good citizens. If citizens were selfish, popular government would degenerate into a struggle among groups seeking their own narrow ends. The kind of limited government the founders proposed, with its protection for commerce and property, would inevitably encourage "luxuriousness," "corruption," and "voluptuousness." Government should thus ban luxury items, as such commerce would "corrupt our manners." (Today, this would be equivalent to government prohibiting the purchase of sports cars, yachts, and videotape recorders on the grounds that the desire for these items encouraged materialism.)

These opponents of a large commercial republic with limited ends suffered a defeat in the contest over the Constitution. Yet their concerns were not completely dismissed; and it would certainly be a mistake to conclude that the founders or Americans after the founding abandoned all efforts to promote citizenship and cultivate an admirable way of life. Rather, the founders had in mind a different understanding of citizenship and a different view of how government should encourage it. With the ratification of the Constitution, the terms of the debate about defining a good way of life shifted dramatically,