

*Political Ideas of the American Revolution: Britannic-American Contributions to the Problem of Imperial Organization, 1765-1775.* Third edition. By Randolph G. Adams. Commentary by Merrill Jensen. (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1958. Pp. vii, 216. Frontispiece, bibliographical notes, index. Paperbound, \$1.50.)

According to the late Randolph G. Adams, from 1763 to 1775 the American colonies contested British policy with constitutional arguments which, despite their diversity, were essentially a demand for definition of colonial status vis-à-vis Great Britain. Behind the verbal fencing of shifting American arguments was a consistent plea for self-government, but self-government within the Empire. England's failure to solve the imperial problem raised by colonial opposition ended in the loss of her American colonies.

By presenting the major contentions of representative thinkers such as John Adams, James Wilson, and Thomas Paine, the author endeavors to show that during pre-Revolutionary debate there began to emerge the concept of government as an instrument of society answerable to law as well as the concept of divided authority or federalism. These principles, Adams believes, are America's contribution to political thought, which form the basis of the American system of government and which also provide the root ideas for both the League of Nations and the British Commonwealth.

Adams has acutely analyzed the constitutional controversy prior to the Revolution, but as S. E. Morison has noted (*English Historical Review*, XXXVIII [January, 1923], 115), he does not place political theory as sharply in its framework of historical fact as he might have. Merrill Jensen's twenty-six page Commentary to this third edition partially compensates for Adam's shortcoming and adds appropriate comments about recent scholarship on political ideas of the Revolution. In some instances, *Political Ideas* reflects its time (first edition, 1922) since certain German theories of government are evaluated rather sternly, while the League is sized up somewhat optimistically. Adams' small volume, however, is a competent and balanced examination of a perennial problem—the relationship between local and central government.

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*We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution.* By Forrest McDonald. Publication of the American History Research Center, Madison, Wis. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Pp. x, 436. Tables, index. \$7.00.)

Forty-five years after the publication of Charles A. Beard's influential monograph, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, Forrest McDonald, the executive secretary of the American History Research Center in Madison, Wisconsin, has written this detailed critique of the theory of the origins of the Constitution which had become since 1913 first a center of controversy and finally the more or less orthodox position of the historical guild.

The author of *We the People* does not directly attack Beard's method of inquiry, as Professor Robert E. Brown has already done so severely and convincingly in his volume, *Charles Beard and the Constitution* (Princeton, 1956). He has undertaken instead to complete Beard's admittedly fragmentary outline and to test its validity by doing the additional and strenuous research required for a thorough re-study of the economic background of the Constitution. Following the Beardian interpretation closely, McDonald has sought out all the evidence available which might establish more clearly the economic interests and predilections of each member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as well as those of each member of the ratifying conventions of all thirteen of the states. This was obviously no small task. Although the book unfortunately lacks a separate bibliography, the author reveals in his voluminous footnotes the depth and extent of his search in both printed and manuscript sources. In addition to the United States Treasury records used by Beard, where McDonald sometimes adopts a different interpretation of the data, he has made fruitful use of such materials as town and county histories, genealogies, contemporary newspapers, census reports, and a host of financial and other manuscript records in state and local archives.

After slightly more than a hundred pages devoted to a descriptive and statistical analysis of the occupational status and economic holdings of the members of the Philadelphia Convention, McDonald turns to a similar study of the state conventions which ratified the Constitution. Here is the heart of his book. He takes up first the five states which manifested little opposition to ratification: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, and Maryland; then the four states with a more balanced division of opinion: Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and New Hampshire; and finally the remaining four states: Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, where ratification was secured only after a protracted struggle. By employing this logical method of organization, he has been able to discover significant distinctions in the motivations, economic and noneconomic, that led to ratification in the various sections of the new nation.

The outcome of McDonald's sober reappraisal is simply that Beard's economic interpretation is not in accordance with the facts. In neither the Philadelphia Convention itself nor in any of these three groups of states does the author find a consistent and clearly defined pattern of economic interests for and against the Constitution. Delegates who favored the new instrument of government did not act as a consolidated economic bloc, as Beard would have us think. Most of them, moreover, were farmers, and personalty interests, far from being the dynamic element in framing and ratifying the Constitution, were fairly evenly distributed between its advocates and opponents.

Despite his negative conclusion, McDonald still believes that an analysis of the economic background is important for an understanding of the origins of the Constitution. Although he has not produced a full-fledged alternative to Beard's thesis, he offers some suggestions toward a broader interpretation which includes certain non-economic factors as well as new insights into the economic conditions of the period. The book's chief limitation—self-imposed by the author—lies in remain-

ing so closely tied to Beard's own system of interpretation. The author is prevented, for example, from investigating the role of ideas in the development of the new government. The reviewer looks forward, however, to the promised sequel, which will undoubtedly make a more positive contribution to the study of the tangled web of motivations and interests behind the framing and ratification of the Constitution of the United States.

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*A Yankee Jeffersonian: Selections from the Diary and Letters of William Lee of Massachusetts, Written from 1796 to 1840.* Edited by Mary Lee Mann. Foreword by Allan Nevins. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958. Pp. xvii, 312. Illustrations, notes, chronology, index. \$5.75.)

William Lee of Massachusetts journeyed to France in 1796 on business and remained until 1816 as a commercial agent at Bordeaux. During this period, he recorded the details of life in France and of the strained relationship between France and the United States during the Napoleonic era. On returning to America, Lee served as auditor of the Treasury for thirteen years and turned his critical pen on Washington society during the administrations of Monroe and John Quincy Adams. Relieved of office in 1829 by President Jackson, Lee continued his correspondence until his death in 1840.

The major figures of France and America people Lee's writing. He knew and wrote about Napoleon, Talleyrand, Jefferson, Monroe, and John Quincy Adams. Included in this volume are several previously unpublished letters of Jefferson, additional information on the personages of the XYZ Affair, and a letter noting the failure of a plan by Lee and others to carry Napoleon to America for asylum. Lee's diary, written from 1796 to 1798, recalls the travels of Arthur Young, while his letters describe the intrigues of Napoleon's court and the reaction which followed the Bourbon Restoration. The letters written in the United States are disappointing, although they contain comments on the election of 1824, the slavery controversy, and the panic of 1837.

The personality of William Lee is fascinating. Contact with France after the Revolution strained his republican principles. "I begin to dislike this liberty and equality," Lee writes. "I think myself superior to a bawd or a pickpocket" (p. 12). But his republicanism triumphed in the end, and Lee remained a Francophile throughout life. His writings also record unwittingly the transformation wrought in a New England puritan by the pleasures of French life. These letters portray their author as a faithful husband, a kind father, and a strange composite of idealism and common sense.

The scholar will regret Miss Mann's decision to correct spelling and punctuation and her omission of portions of the letters which are "too detailed . . . or simply statistical" (p. x). Three memoirs prepared by Lee on the relations between France and the United States are omitted without comment by the editor. Some reference to their content