

## The Continuing Revolution

The prosperity enjoyed in the present owes its existence to the progress made in the past. All of the freedoms guaranteed in the United States today originate from the bravery of patriots throughout history, from the leaders of the American Revolution in the eighteenth century to the proponents of the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century. The Framers of the Constitution pioneered the concept of a truly representative government, wherein the public at large would hold tangible political authority. However, much as the United States in the present is indebted to the revolutionaries who first sparked the idea of universal suffrage, so too were the Founders dependent upon an antique past.

The momentous foundation of the United States supplied many novel advancements in the cause of liberty, but a republic was not among them. The idea that a council of representatives should rule finds its origin in the Roman Republic, a state that existed nearly two millennia before the American Revolution. The Framers themselves acknowledged and celebrated the fact that their nation found its ideological foundations in such an august past. To honor their precursors, many of the Founders adopted pseudonyms from Roman history for publishing their essays. Cato, Brutus, and Agrippa, therefore, all played a role in American, as well as Roman, history (Sellers 8-9). Most famously and deliberately selected was the pseudonym used by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison for publishing the Federalist Papers: Publius, an homage to Publius Valerius Publicola, one of the statesmen who founded the Roman Republic and abated public fear that the fledgling nation would devolve back into a monarchy (Meyerson 79). Much as the Roman Republic was defined by the actions of the ancient Publius, so too is the United States predicated upon the advancements made by Hamilton and Madison, the American Publius.

Hamilton and Madison, both preeminent delegates from their respective states of Virginia and New York, argued in their essays that the deficient Articles of Confederation needed to be replaced with a functional charter of government. Hamilton originally planned to draft a shorter series of essays alongside John Jay, but when Jay succumbed to illness, Hamilton and Madison formed their unlikely partnership (Meyerson 87). The two contrasted sharply with each other: Hamilton cut a powerful and handsome figure, and his bombastic nature was well noted by his contemporaries. Madison, on the other hand, was short, slight, and sickly. While diminutive in physical stature, Madison's work ethic and formidable intelligence towered over that of his peers (Meyerson 11-12). The intellectual partnership formed between a banker from New York and a politician from Virginia resulted in the Federalist Papers, the seminal essays that would define the political ideology of the new United States.

Their work was made all the more prodigious by the speed with which it was produced. The pair wrote and published as many as four essays a week for a total of eighty-five between October 1787 and March 1788, a testament to the legendary tenacity of James Madison. The two men published anonymously in order to eliminate any suspicion of individual state interest in their argumentation (Meyerson 2). The Federalist Papers were published shortly after the close of the Constitutional Convention with the express purpose of educating the public on the merits of the proposed charter of government (Peacock 67). In this way, their chosen moniker of Publius, a Latin name translating loosely to "he of the people," served to promote the unity of the populace behind the new Constitution (Chase 156).

The Federalist Papers have come under criticism from some modern scholars who assert that their role in the ratification debates was minimal (Meyerson 136). The essays themselves, though, pursue a higher goal than merely describing the benefits of the proposed Constitution.

They transmit the quintessential ideology of the American Revolution. As George Washington once wrote, the essays of Publius “have thrown new lights upon the science of Government, they have given the rights of man a full and fair discussion” (Washington 672). Madison and Hamilton, both delegates of the Constitutional Convention and among the writers of the final draft, defined the idiosyncratic American identity through their essays. The papers indicate that only civic virtue on the part of both the politicians and the populace could prevent the demise of the nation (Sellers 208). The Founders, much like their Roman counterparts, considered integrity, fidelity, and civility to be the safeguards of liberty (Pangle 585).

As many are wont to claim, though, this very suggestion predicates the great hypocrisy of the Founders; American democracy, disturbingly, was originally far from democratic. Not only did the Founders restrict suffrage to white male landowners, but the same men who argued for a universal, natural, and sacrosanct right to liberty counted other human beings among their own property. Madison, respected as the Father of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, was also a slaveholder, along with almost every other influential Founding Father. This is not to say, though, that America’s foundations are irredeemably lost to the bigotry of the past. The Federalist Papers themselves bear testament to the foresight of Madison and Hamilton, who, in spite of their own personal flaws, advocated for an ideology that eventually grew and surpassed the imperfections of its originators. The American experience has been marked by a continuing revolution that seeks to extend the ideals of the Founders until every American receives equal justice under the law. As Madison himself wrote in Federalist 51, “Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit” (Madison 240).

The American Revolution produced the most seminal advancements towards the cause of justice in human history. Enshrined within the Federalist Papers, which linked the virtue of the Roman Republic with the identity of the United States, were ideals and ideas that would take shape in the form of the liberty, equality, and unity of the present. Hamilton and Madison peered into the past and produced an identity for the new nation greater than those that came before it. However, this progress is rendered meaningless if it is not perpetually advanced. To discount the American Revolution for the imperfections of its actors is to disregard any of the good produced by its advancements. Only in the fulfillment of the responsibility to create a more perfect union through the pursuit of civic virtue can the spark of the Revolution continue to light the way towards justice.