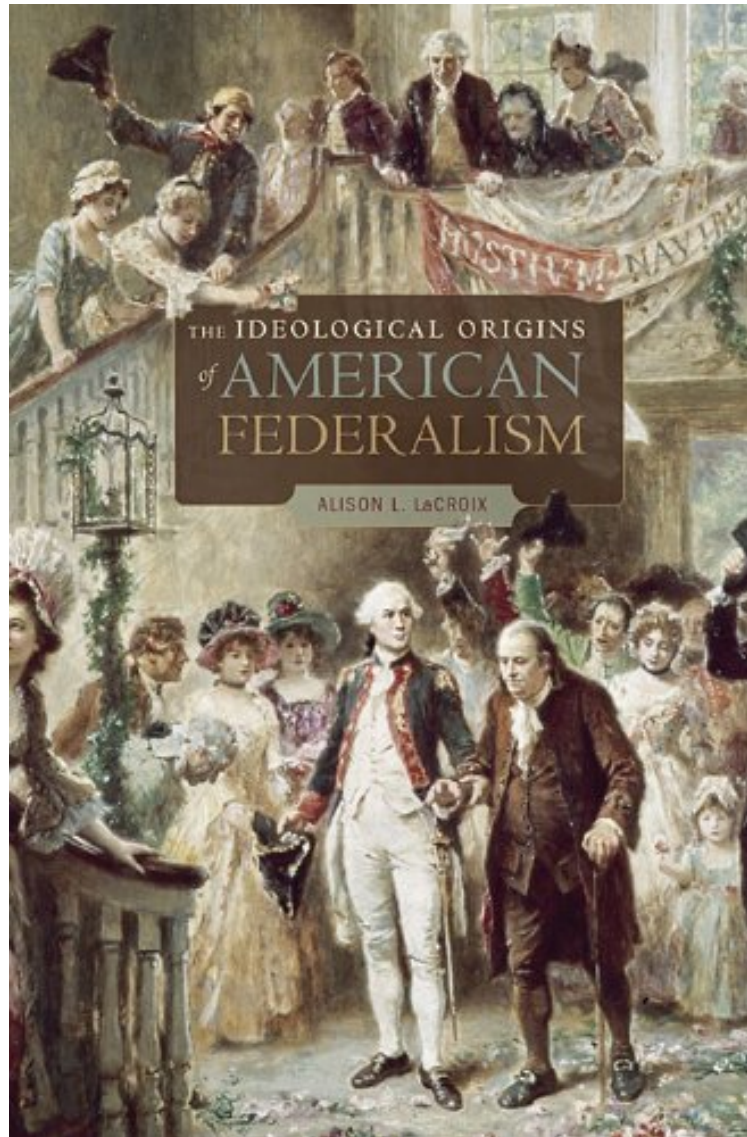


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The Ideological Origins of American Federalism

Alison L. LaCroix

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Federalism is regarded as one of the signal American contributions to modern politics. Its origins are typically traced to the drafting of the Constitution, but the story began decades before the delegates met in Philadelphia. In this groundbreaking book, Alison LaCroix traces the history of American federal thought from its colonial beginnings in scattered provincial responses to British assertions of authority, to its emergence in the late eighteenth century as a normative theory of multilayered government. The core of this new federal ideology was a belief that multiple independent levels of government could legitimately exist within a single polity, and that such an arrangement was not a defect but a virtue. This belief became a foundational principle and aspiration of the American political enterprise. LaCroix thus challenges the traditional account of republican ideology as the single dominant framework for eighteenth-century American political thought. Understanding the emerging federal ideology returns constitutional thought to the central place that it occupied for the founders. Federalism was not a necessary adaptation to make an already designed system work; it was the system. Connecting the colonial, revolutionary, founding, and early national periods in one story reveals the fundamental reconfigurations of legal and political power that accompanied the formation of the United States. The emergence of American federalism should be understood as a critical ideological development of the period, and this book is essential reading for everyone interested in the American story.

LaCroix's great achievement is to show that American federalism has an intellectual pedigree: it was not simply an ad hoc institutional arrangement, a bundle of compromises, or a codification of colonial experience in the British Empire. Instead, revolutionaries theorized their way to federalism. This is an important book that will change the way we think about the American founding. (Peter S. Onuf, University of Virginia) Where did American federalism come from? Although federalism's roots in the institutional practices and structures of the early modern British Empire are well known, we have long needed a history of federalism as a legal and intellectual concept. Thanks to Alison LaCroix's splendid book, that wait is over. (Eliga H. Gould, University of New Hampshire) As LaCroix shows in this engaging treatise, the who-does-what questions at the heart of federalism have vexed the nation from the get-go. (Kevin R. Kosar Weekly Standard 2010-11-12) The virtue of LaCroix's account is to show not only that federalism as it developed was more intellectually coherent than a mere bundle of compromises, but also that its theoretical core had begun to emerge decades before the delegates travelled to Philadelphia in May 1787 [for the Constitutional Convention]. (Gary L. McDowell Times Literary Supplement 2010-12-10) About the Author Alison L. LaCroix is Professor of Law, University of Chicago Law School.