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Kevin R. C. Gutzman. *Virginia's American Revolution: From Dominion to Republic, 1776-1840.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. xii + 233 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-2131-3; $28.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-2132-0.

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Kevin R. C. Gutzman's careful study of Virginian state politics and constitutional history from the American Revolution to the end of the 1830s deliberately rejects what he finds to be a nationalistic bias. The dominance of Virginia in federal politics, and such notable Virginians as George Washington, James Madison, John Marshall, James Monroe, and Thomas Jefferson, to name the most obvious suspects, has understandably attracted a lot of scholarly interest. Instead, Gutzman prefers to examine issues from the viewpoint of the state and state-centered politicians and intellectuals, and offers a valuable and, at times, novel perspective. Virginians were, he finds, self-centered in their strong conviction that the United States should mirror the qualities and republican values of self-government found in the Old Dominion. This "self-centeredness" expressed itself in Virginia's leading role in the creation of the federal Constitution, but also in its campaigns against the Constitution and subsequent criticisms of the federal government (p. 2).

Virginia's American Revolution addresses a wide range of topics, from perhaps the high point of its influence on revolutionary era views on self-government in 1776 to the low point of the state's political preeminence by the 1830s. Chapter 1 aptly traces the major constitutional arguments about self-governance that were captured by George Mason, Richard Bland, the House of Burgesses, and Jefferson, as well as the state constitution of 1776 and the Declaration of Rights. The implementation of the Revolution (1776-88), or specifically the political, legal, and social reorganization required to embrace republican principles, is the focus of the second chapter. This chapter provides a good overview. Though his discussion concerning disestablishment is less clear or comprehensive than the treatment of other matters, Gutzman significantly highlights the variety of concerns related to the West: the Pennsylvania border dispute, Kentucky as a separate state, and East-West disputes over western internal improvements. The Virginia ratification convention of 1788 is the subject of the third chapter, as well as "the most persuasive of all campaigns" against the federal Constitution (p. 3). Virginian opposition to Federalism in the 1790s, as well as Virginia's Republican understanding of the Alien and Sedition Acts and response with the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 forms the core of chapter 4. The last two chapters describe the breakdown of consensus among Virginian Republicans during severe economic problems and attempts at educational reform, and finally the escalation of internal political stresses from 1815 to 1830, as revealed through reaction to the Missouri Compromise and several legal cases (i.e., *Martin v. Hunter's Lessee* [1816]; *McCulloch v. Maryland* [1819]; and *Cohens v. Virginia* [1821]). In these contests, Gutzman finds debate over the meaning of self-government, the American Revolution's legacy, and Virginia's future.

Gutzman asserts that "state identity dominated people's consciousness in a way barely conceivable now," and that "state-level activity of those years struck contemporaries as more important" (pp. x, 1). Both views are helpful in balancing a nationalistic perspective, although it was largely in reaction to specific federal policies that Virginian state politicians or thinkers typically articulated their pro-state views. Rather than proving (as the above quotation suggests) that one level of the American Revolution, the state versus the nation, was more important to contemporaries, Gutzman's work does reveal the interplay of federal and state concerns that highlighted and encouraged expressions of state allegiance and Virginian Republicanism. One might, however, also wonder about the impact of local, community, or family matters on the state-level discussions, particularly given Gutzman's recognition that "local institutions–parishes with their vestries; county courts; and militia units–were far more important than the House of Burgesses, the Council, and the governor in the lives of common Virginians and members of the gentry alike" (pp. 14-15). Additional exploration of local issues (and whether state leaders embodied local popular opinion) might have deepened this argument about the primacy of state political identity.

Although claiming that he is avoiding "a great man-centered approach," Gutzman instead turns state politicians, rather than federal ones, into his great or leading characters (p. x). This approach does not deliberately aim to capture popular opinion, but it does provide a keen understanding for the political, constitutional, and legal views of those Virginian Republicans who opposed the federal government in this era. Many little-known state figures are prominently featured, and so readers can become better acquainted with now relatively obscure personalities like George Nicholas, Thomas Ritchie, and Spencer Roane. John Taylor of Caroline gets particular attention and praise. Featured in several chapters, Taylor's opinions are described as both "brilliant" and influential (p. 117). Gutzman later asserts that Taylor was "once again to become Virginia's favorite thinker in the last decade of his life" (p. 171). Gutzman does a fine job describing and analyzing Taylor's views, yet the extent of his authority among Virginians is harder to demonstrate. Edmund Randolph apparently believed that Virginian planters had fallen under Taylor's influence, but in his concern over federal policies, did he shape as well as "share" popular opinion (p. 117, 131n14)?

While this state-centered approach offers a worthwhile corrective, one might still wonder if the inclusion of a more deliberate and thorough treatment of prominent Virginian Federalists would have added to, rather than detracted from, the author's overall considerations of Virginian state identity. Consider Virginians like Washington or Marshall (who Gutzman admits make only "fleeting appearances in this account"); through their highly influential roles in the national sphere, they potentially contributed to the definition of the new Republic in a manner consistent with or in opposition to the peculiarly "Virginian" understanding that Gutzman emphasizes (p. 4). The presence of such prominent Virginians in national offices may have perpetuated state-centered Virginians' expectations that the United States could be made, or remade, in Virginia's image. Might Virginians, whether Federalists or Republicans, have agreed on that principle, if not the actual characteristics to be emulated? If national issues and federal policies were the context in which state discussions were occurring, then would not the perspectives of prominent Federalist Virginians have had an impact on the state-level discussions that are the main focus of this study?

Washington's characterization by Gutzman is also somewhat troublesome for its limitations. Noted as "the foremost lobbyist for connection of the great Virginia waterways to the rivers of the west," evidence of his Federalism, Washington is described as growing in the war years into an identification "with America generally, not with Virginia specifically" (pp. 51, 61). Given Washington's persistent and extensive ties to Virginia and his retirement there during much of the (early national) period under study herein, he may not have seen his federal duties as inconsistent or in any way incompatible with his Virginian affections. The "either/or" quality of Gutzman's characterization of state vs. national identity seems an oversimplification. In Washington's case, the one quoted passage from a letter to Patrick Henry does not seem thoroughly convincing on this point. Gutzman also does not account for, or mention, contrary interpretations (e.g., by Warren Hofstra in *George Washington and the Virginia Backcountry* [1998] and others) that might seem to suggest that Washington's story and Virginia's story are inextricably linked, at least in the colonial-revolutionary era and, one may argue, potentially beyond. On balance, it is the Federalism of Washington that accounts for his relative absence; Jefferson, another famous Virginian significant to national politics, makes more frequent appearances, given his state-centered philosophies.

Overall, this book has a traditional understanding of Virginia's hierarchical society in prerevolutionary and revolutionary times, one that accepts the idealistic and idyllic account of many contemporary elites and some modern historians that deference of the lower classes to their social betters ensured peaceful and harmonious relations between people. Gutzman writes early in the book that "commoners evidently did not resent gentry domination of Virginia politics and society" and common participation in events "made the yoke of gentry domination light" (p. 15). On Virginian politics, he comments, "Men knew their place, and they generally stayed in it" (p. 92). In discussing Edmund Pendleton, he remarks, "The fealty to the House of Hanover and the easy acceptance of hierarchy that had long been strong elements of Virginians' mental makeup died hard in him" (p. 93). This interpretation of elite hegemony and lower-class obedience owes a lot to historians Charles Sydnor and Rhys Isaac, the latter of whom is included in the bibliography, but Gutzman does not appear to consider more recent literature (e.g., works by Woody Holton or Michael McDonnell) that suggests that deference, even in Virginia, had its limits and that obedience of the lower classes was not at all secure, particularly during the Revolutionary War.[1] Gutzman's chronological focus from 1776 forward might have steered him away from many colonial secondary materials, like Richard R. Beeman's worthwhile analysis that argued that "the conduct as well as the self-conception of Virginia's political ruling class"

in the eighteenth century revealed a "picture that … falls substantially short of the deferential ideal."[2] These reinterpretations of Virginian society, one might claim, are peripheral to Gutzman's mainly constitutional, legal, and political history. Still, they have serious implications for his arguments on elite self-identity. Did leading Virginians in the early Republic expect deference, if it had long been seen as functionally precarious, or were they already well practiced in and experienced with alternative leadership methods and suppositions?

This study is a profoundly political and constitutional one, though it appropriately acknowledges the significance of social and religious changes in this period. Passages comment on religious disestablishment and property law transformations, particularly the ending of primogeniture and entail. Gutzman also considers briefly those early republican moments when Virginians debated seriously on slavery. While such social and racial considerations are not among the strongest features of this book, these issues do fully warrant inclusion for they converged with related arguments about sovereignty, self-government, and the relationship between state and federal governments that concerned state-oriented Virginians of this era. Instead, this book is far more effective and innovative in its consideration of the meaning of self-government, especially those constitutional, political, and legal arguments that persisted, Gutzman finds, from the imperial crisis of the 1760s throughout the first decades of the early Republic. In examining the ideas of Virginia's leading men in state affairs, Gutzman displays a detailed, even at times sympathetic (though not uncritical) understanding that many readers should find particularly worthwhile.

Notes

[1]. Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999) does not appear in Gutzman's bibliography, although that would appear to be an error since it is cited on a related point page 16 and in note 47 on page 38.

[2]. Richard R. Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 35.

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