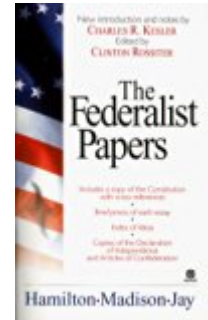


Clinton Rossiter, ed.. *The Federalist Papers*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999. lix + 606 pgs \$6.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-451-62881-7.



Reviewed by R. B. Bernstein

Published on H-Law (October, 2000)

Revising a Classic Edition of a Classic

In 1961, no fewer than four distinct editions of *The Federalist* appeared -- Jacob E. Cooke's variorum edition for Wesleyan University Press, which established the texts of the essays as they first appeared in the newspapers of New York City in 1787-1788; Benjamin F. Wright's John Harvard Library edition for Harvard University Press, which featured Wright's extensive and learned introduction; Roy P. Fairfield's abridged edition for Anchor Books/Doubleday, which included an extensive bibliography of *Federalist* scholarship; and Clinton L. Rossiter's edition for Mentor Books of New American Library. The Cooke edition immediately became the standard edition for scholars, due to the accuracy of its text; the Fairfield edition remains notable for its extensive bibliography, and has been updated and revised for Johns Hopkins University Press; and the Wright edition, though having fallen out of print for more than two decades, has been restored to print by Barnes & Noble's publishing division.

Ironically, Rossiter's edition, the most modest of the four, has had the longest uninterrupted life

and the widest use. Rossiter (1917-1970), who earned his Ph.D. in political science at Princeton under the mentorship of Edward S. Corwin and taught for many years at Cornell University, was a fine writer and a superb analyst of constitutional institutions and arrangements. At the time he prepared his edition of *The Federalist*, due mainly to his magisterial *Seedtime of the Republic*[1], *The American Presidency*[2], and *Parties and Politics in America*[3], Rossiter was the most widely-read political scientists in the United States; he also was one of the most historically-sensitive practitioners of political science. In preparing his edition of *The Federalist*, he kept in mind the needs of those who assigned the book in courses in history, political science, and constitutional law. He chose as the basis of his text the first book edition of the essays, published in two volumes in 1788 by John and Archibald McLean. In the process, Rossiter slightly modernized the text, dispensing with what he viewed as unnecessary punctuation and capitalization and regularizing spelling. He also followed the findings of Douglass L. Adair in assigning the famous "disputed" essays to James Madison rather than to Alexander Hamilton. His

graceful and accessible introduction (most of which later he incorporated into his unjustly neglected book *Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution*[4]) beautifully sketched the origins and enduring significance of the essays, going beyond patriotic platitudes to enlightening reflections on the place of *The Federalist* in the history of ideas. His Note on the Text also included his famous "greatest hits" list of the 21 most indispensable of the essays for those who lacked "the energy and fixed purpose" to make their way through all 85. The great glories of his edition, however, were his annotated table of contents, which provided a first-rate road-map of the essays for those coming to them for the first time; his "Index of Ideas," which is the best that has ever been prepared for *The Federalist*[5]; and his text of the Constitution keyed to relevant passages of *The Federalist*.

For nearly forty years, Rossiter's edition has dominated the field as the one of choice for course reading. Compact and well-designed, it has had several rivals in recent years, but none has managed to displace it.[6] Indeed, in 1986, for the bicentennial of the Constitution, Mentor issued a companion volume edited by Ralph L. Ketcham, *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*. [7]

Now, Mentor has reworked the Rossiter edition. The new editor is Charles R. Kesler, associate professor of Government at Claremont McKenna College, and director of the Henry Salvatori Center for the Study of Individual Freedom in the Modern World. In 1987, he edited a fine symposium on *The Federalist*. [8]

To those who have long assigned the original, and who will want to know whether the new version is an improvement or a travesty, the news is on the whole very good indeed. Kesler has preserved Rossiter's version of the text, and his index of ideas and collated Constitution. He also has added a useful Selected Bibliography, which presents his useful "greatest hits" list of scholarship on *The Federalist*, and he has restored

Alexander Hamilton's brief preface, which originally appeared in the McLean edition. Finally, he has added a new introduction and table of contents, a new note on the text, and a set of explanatory notes to the essays.

Kesler's notes and Bibliography are valuable supplements to the text and provide superb resources for students and scholars alike. His Introduction is useful and cogent, and expands considerably on Rossiter's original, though in some ways Rossiter was the better stylist. In particular, Kesler takes pains to address the structure of argument of *The Federalist* and to situate the essays more firmly in the history of Western political thought. (Veteran readers and users of the original Rossiter edition will miss his original introduction and his list of "the cream of the essays," however.)

The one major flaw of this edition is the revised table of contents. Although the new Kesler/Rossiter edition sensibly begins the pagination of the essays with page 1, the table of contents has dropped Rossiter's superb road-map of *The Federalist* in favor of a reprint of the table of contents from Henry Cabot Lodge's 1896 edition, which has nothing to recommend it; all Lodge did was to sprinkle a series of cryptic phrases in paragraph form after the original McLean title of each essay. Students have found the Rossiter roadmap a valuable, enlightening, and reassuring adjunct to the essays themselves; it has not dated at all in the nearly forty years since it first appeared, and its omission from the new edition is a serious mistake.

On balance, however, the Kesler/Rossiter *Federalist* is a valuable tuneup of a classic edition of a classic. Perhaps Kesler and Mentor Books could be prevailed upon to restore Rossiter's "roadmap" table of contents, reset to conform to the current pagination, in future reprintings.

Notes

[1]. Clinton L. Rossiter, III, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origins of the American Tradition of*

Political Liberty (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952).

[2]. Clinton L. Rossiter, III, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956; revised ed., 1960; reprint, with new introduction by Michael Nelson, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

[3]. Clinton L. Rossiter, III, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960). Rossiter's other major studies include *Constitutional Dictatorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948); *The Supreme Court and the Commander in Chief* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1951; revised ed. by Richard P. Longaker, 1976); *1787: The Grand Convention* (New York: Macmillan, 1966; reprint, with new introduction by Richard B. Morris, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987); and the posthumously published *The American Quest, 1790-1860: An Emerging Nation in Search of Unity, Identity, and Modernity* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

[4]. Clinton L. Rossiter, *Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1964).

[5]. *But see* Thomas S. Engeman, Edward J. Erler, and Thomas B. Hofeller, eds., *The Federalist Concordance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[6]. *See, e.g.*, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison (Garry Wills, ed.), *The Federalist* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982) (based on the Cooke text, with a new introduction); James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay (Isaac Kramnick, ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1987).

[7]. Ralph L. Ketcham, ed., *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates* (New York: Mentor Books/New American Library, 1986).

[8]. Charles R. Kesler, ed., *Saving the Revolution: The Federalist Papers and the American Founding* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-law>

Citation: R. B. Bernstein. Review of Rossiter, Clinton, ed. *The Federalist Papers*. H-Law, H-Net Reviews. October, 2000.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4621>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.