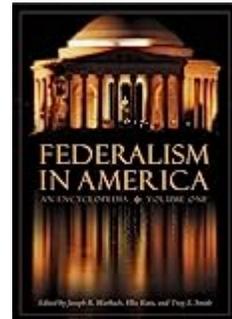


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph R. Marbach, Ellis Katz, Troy E. Smith, eds. *Federalism in America: An Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006. xxi + 760 pp. \$225.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32947-0.



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Everything You Ever Wanted to Know ...

If you or your students are interested in abortion or zoning, and everything in between these political issues, this set of volumes will be a welcome addition to the office or the library. The editors of the volumes noted that their initial objective was to assemble an advisory board of scholars working on the wide-range of topics within historic and contemporary American federalism. Perhaps the most difficult part of this was not the establishment of the editorial board, but the creation (and limiting) of a list of four hundred entries. Many of us, perhaps, might believe that this list could be enlarged by at least 50 percent and still not cover the subject completely. The result, however, is a set of volumes with entries which are relatively concise and very to the point.

The individual entries vary in length. Topics such as abortion and the Constitution of 1787 encompass the better part of five pages; other topics such as *Shreveport Rate Case* (1914) and *West Coast Hotel Company v. Parrish* (1937) receive much less space, often less than a page. This variety, however, was planned and executed quite well. Smaller entries provide a description of their importance in relation to federalism and then, as is true with all of the entries, the authors provide key links to other entries within the encyclopedia. The more lengthy articles contain not only a reasonable understanding of

their relationship to the topic of federalism, but often give significant historical detail and summation. The entries often provide new and insightful thoughts on both the subject and federalism. Authors frequently move beyond the conventional context of the United States and incorporate the origin of ideas from outside. For these entries, authors give historiographical analysis and description, such as the discussion of Harold Berman's *Law and Revolution* (1983) in the entry on self-government and federalism (pp.559-561). Often entries provide new and insightful thoughts, which move beyond an analysis through a strict American or North American context.

If this was the only strength of the volumes, we still would have four hundred outstanding entries. However, many entries provide scholars with bibliographies containing the standard works within a subject and more recent studies. These entries provide a brief bibliography that spans the entry's history. For example, on the aforementioned topic of self-government and federalism, Vincent Ostrom provides a bibliography which includes the works of Harold Berman, James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, and John R. Commons as historical and political science investigations, along with *The Federalist Papers* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Here lies the second strength of these volumes—the ability of readers to understand the subject and its rela-

tionship to other related topics and to have a brief, but comprehensive, bibliography providing primary and secondary sources for further examination.

Perhaps the greatest compliment to be paid to these volumes is through the discussions they can create within ourselves and our classrooms. For example, the entry which examines federalism covers a stretch of history and perspective that is hard not to find intriguing. Its author, at one point, comments that “all this should make it apparent that federalism is a form of popular government embodying elements of both republicanism and democracy” (a thought which I have harbored and lectured upon through a comparison of the political ideas of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) and concludes by saying that “federal systems operate best in societies with sufficient homogeneity of fundamental

interests” (pp. 234, 240).

Here, as in numerous others, the conclusion of the entry begins the discussion. What is the consensus about issues such as abortion, immigration, and the environment? It is not the task of the entry writers or the editors to begin to answer this. They have only provided the definitions of federalism and explanations for how it operates. Holding true to form in their perspective that this form of government is both republican and democratic, and lacks a domestic policy that is based upon force, they do not provide answers, but rather provide the tools through which the populace of the republic can further understand their government’s operations and their objective in placing competent people into office to mediate and construct this consensus.

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