

of power during the tenth century is inextricably linked to the Carolingian collapse of the ninth (Chapter 3). Again, his approach stresses how slowly change took place.

In *Medieval Europe* Wickham manages to distill over one thousand years of human history into around two hundred pages, but the book should not be confused with a textbook of Medieval Europe; it is not sufficiently comprehensive, nor does it try to be. It provides an overview of critical events that changed the face of Europe from ca. 500-1500. Wickham has created a narrative that would best serve teachers of medieval history in course development. It would also be a good text for graduate students in the context of a seminar on any topic during the Middle Ages. *Medieval Europe* discusses Eastern-Western relations in the Mediterranean and beyond, but Europe occupies the center of Wickham's book. Wickham deliberately avoids the "great men" (or even "great women") model of scholarship. We read more about land tenure, taxation, economic production, or "the politics of land," in his words (11). Wickham prefers to identify patterns rather than to detail the biographies of kings and popes. The major players are there but with respect to their role in wider changes. In spite of the emphasis on structural change, the downside of which tends to reduce people to numbers, through Wickham's descriptive examples individual personalities emerge.

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Carol Berkin. *A Sovereign People: The Crises of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2017. Pp. 307. \$30.

While one may be tempted to wonder whether either the public or academia need another recounting of the American political landscape of the 1790s, senior historian Carol Berkin puts that issue to rest in the first several pages of her crisply

written monograph, *A Sovereign People*. Best known for her classic examination of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 (*A Brilliant Solution*), Berkin's latest book provides an argument-driven overview of the tumultuous 1790s, making the case for a Federalist Party that, irrespective of its reputation—then and now—for overreach, did the young United States great service by handling several political and diplomatic crises in ways that “established a nation on firm ground”(3). The penchant for modern Americans to view the Constitution and the government it established as self-evidently generating the strong sense of nationalism that accompanied the meteoric rise of the United States in the nineteenth century is challenged by Berkin's assertion that “the core of nationalism—loyalty to a country and its government and a shared identity as its citizens—was the result of the hard work of governance”(6). And in the 1790s that meant the Federalist Party.

Berkin develops her argument through a recounting of four crises faced by Americans in the 1790s: the Whiskey Rebellion; the Genet Affair; the XYZ Affair; and the Alien and Sedition Acts. In the first crisis, populist protests against an excise tax of whiskey, centered in western Pennsylvania, were ended by a show of federal force led by President George Washington in the only instance in American history where a president took the field. The fact that the protests ended before Washington's troops reached their vicinity is evidence for Berkin of the respect Americans had for the President himself as the leader of the new nation. That respect spread from Washington to the office of the presidency in the decade's second crisis, triggered by the aggressive efforts of the French minister Edmond Genet. When Genet's belief in the popular support for France in its war with England emboldened him to ignore normal diplomatic protocols and practices, the Washington administration's firm response, culminating in a request for Genet's recall, resulted, according to Berkin, in a growing respect for the office of the presidency—not

just its beloved occupant.

Later in the decade, during the administration of John Adams, the United States found itself in a showdown with revolutionary France, triggered by a demand from the French foreign minister Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand for a bribe to be paid by American diplomats before they could even be officially received. The resulting furor and military build-up by the Adams administration and Federalist Congress helped galvanize American public opinion around the idea that they had suffered a national insult that required a national response. For Berkin, this was another step away from Americans' identities and loyalties being rooted in their respective states towards one based on allegiance to their new nation.

When the Federalists subsequently passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, the former placing onerous restrictions on immigrant citizenship and the latter on freedom of speech and of the press, the country pushed back, and the Federalists lost favor. While acknowledging this backlash, Berkin still sees a triumph for the Federalists and American nationalism in the parameters of the debate. Rather than arguing against the idea of the Constitution or the federal government it created, the opposition Republicans framed their objections to the new legislation around an alternative interpretation of the Constitution. In other words, what in 1787 had been a debate within and among the states about the ratification of the Constitution and the very idea of a strong national government had become, a decade later, a debate about how to best interpret the Constitution in the furtherance of collective—national—interests.

A Sovereign People succeeds as a monograph in spite of its central argument being not entirely persuasive. In fact, Berkin's confidence as a scholar allows her to implicitly acknowledge that reasonable people might make a historiographical case that challenges or even refutes hers. Like the Revolution itself, the politics and diplomacy of the 1790s remains a contested

historiographical field, and because of this Berkin's book should find a place in college classrooms as an example of impeccable scholarship and writing in service to the still vibrant ongoing debate about our nation's contested founding.

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