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The Federalist Companion: A Guide to Understanding the Federalist Papers

Edward Duvall
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The Federalist Papers were newspaper articles published between October 1787 and May 1788 in New York by Andrew Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. These essays were written to convince state voters to ratify the newly written United States Constitution. The three men were successful and their works have become widely accepted, along with notes from the actual constitution convention kept by Madison, as the best contemporary exposition of the various provisions of the US Constitution.

In The Federalist Companion: A Guide to Understanding The Federalist Papers, Edward D. Duvall has compiled a useful study of the US Constitution and the Federalist Papers. The book includes the full text of the Constitution, the Articles of Confederation, and each of the Amendments.

In his lengthy introduction, Duvall lists in chronological order numerous historical events from 1761 through 1787, preceded by a brief explanation of what he alleges were attitudes of the colonial people on several related topics. At the end of this chapter is a short bibliography; references are cited later in the book. Remarkably, the bibliography contains no historical data published after 1938 (although one source was reprinted in 1968) and Duvall does not explain why he has apparently ignored contemporary historical works. Additionally, while several references to anti-slavery activities or attitudes which Duvall claims existed in Virginia and South Carolina during the colonial period are referenced, the author fails to mention the fact that slavery was enshrined in the Constitution, as adopted, and continued to exist in Virginia, South Carolina, and other southern states until the Civil War.

The Constitution was written by shrewd politicians and the meanings of the document's various provisions have changed to meet the requirements of the times. Nonetheless, having a guide that directs a reader from a specific provision of the Constitution to the Federalist Papers and discusses that provision is worthwhile. While far from comprehensive, Duvall has assembled a useful outline of the Federalist Papers in which he lists a great many topics, and supplies for each a reference point for the subject in the Federalist Papers.
JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (March 24, 2011)

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