

## **HIST 5453 – New American Republic**

Dr. Keith Pacholl

By Deb Wold

08/20/2022

### **Decisions in Philadelphia Response paper**

*Decisions in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787* became an eye opener to me. I was not aware of the strife that our founding fathers endured while building the new United States government from scratch. The class lecture from 8-23-2022, confirmed my understanding of what I was reading in the book. Throughout reading the book, I found three different themes that ran through the entire book: rhetoric, exhaustion, and struggle.

Rhetoric can be observed throughout the book through the passion of the different founding fathers. Their speeches are full of strong conviction on both sides of the spectrum on subjects discussed. As discussed in class on 8-23, rhetoric and passion in beliefs has been around since the beginning of the United States. Authors, Collier and Collier, use the descriptive words to bring to life James Madison's speech to the delegates at the Constitutional Convention. Madison was debating the Virginia Plan versus the New Jersey Plan. He gives a "convincing speech" and concludes his speech by "begging" (Collier and Collier, 152).

In multiple chapters of the book, I could feel the exhaustion of the founding fathers. "The delegates were tired, they wanted to go home, and they were not interested in the obsessions of this too-vehement New Englander (Collier and Collier, 329). This epic task of creating a new government did not come lightly to them. The founding fathers wanted to make sure that the new

nation would not repeat the type of leadership that they fought against. The country just went through a very long fight for independence. The physical fight might have ended, but the intellectual and mental fight was not over. On page 103, Collie and Collier discuss the multiple occasions when not all the delegates did not attend the meetings. They do explain that this could be due to other obligations, however, I read an undertone of exhaustion and not wanting to deal with the situation anymore. Some of these men needed a break from all of the debates and decision making. The authors continue on page 112 with a specific example. "...nobody commented, but many were silently dismayed. The Pennsylvanians had already let it be known that they were 'tired of continental gatherings in which the smallest had the exact same voting power as the largest,'". This quote may be referring to a specific exhaustion of a small state, but it reiterates the undertone that is felt throughout the book.

A third theme I saw that was woven throughout the book is the idea of struggle. The founding fathers in a sense "bit off more than they could chew". One topic of discussion in class on 8-23 was that the founding fathers did not have a plan when the colonies united and declared independence from England. They were unprepared for the aftermath of the war. The founding fathers struggled with building a new government. There was a lot of bickering that happened during the initial meetings while building this new government. As mentioned before, the founding fathers did not want to create a government similar to the monarchy in England. The idea of statehood was a new concept. James Madison expressed his struggles and fear of failure on page 110. "...Madison wanted to be prepared, later on, to defend himself if the Convention failed, or went off in some direction he did not like." The most important debate was how to distribute power between the federal government and the local state authority. On page 302, Collier and Collier discuss the struggles in detail "There was also a good deal of confusion: once

again, the Convention could not settle anything about length of term and reeligibility and both questions were postponed.”

Collier and Collier’s *Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787* was an eye-opening read. This brought to life my quick day trip to Philadelphia back in 2016. During my day in Philadelphia, I had the privilege to have lunch at the now closed City Tavern restaurant. This restaurant is a replica of the tavern where our founding fathers met while having these meetings in Philadelphia. I really enjoyed that I was able to connect an experience that I had to the content of the time.