

An Analysis Of John Roche's Essay

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In John P. Roche's essay "A Reform Caucus in Action", he suggests that the constitutional framing process was a highly democratic process involving the interests of each state of in the Union. The paper was written as a response to those who believed the framing of the document was a reflection of the elitist views of its framers.

The [Constitution of the United States](#) has been one of the most hotly debated topics in [American history](#) since its inception in 1787. Charles Beard attempted to characterize the delegates of the Constitutional Convention as money grubbing landowners who intended nothing more than the protection of their most valuable asset, property. Other writers have argued the abstract and converse nature of the [founding fathers](#) political ideals, and thus have characterized the Constitutional convention as somewhat arbitrary. In his essay "A Reform Caucus in Action", however, John Roche argues a completely different perspective on the creation of the constitution, claiming the constitution to be a great compromise between states, and that the final result was not one of greed or arbitrary thought, but of specific compromise between the small and large states of the union. Roche begins by describing the Constitutional Convention as a democratic reform caucus. This plainly means that the founding fathers specifically intended to create a document that would preserve the nation as a whole without sacrificing the democracy that the revolution of 1776 had created. Roche continues by elaborating on the extreme political constraints of the convention, noting that the legislation and tedium that surrounded forming the caucus was great and lengthy. Roche attempts to characterize the framers of the constitution as elitists, but in a markedly different way from the way Charles Beard does so, claiming that though the authors of the Constitution did have many biases toward their respective states and ideologies, that they were more than willing to compromise their views for what they perceived to be the greater good. Roche comments that the political theory of the time was not so much a barrier between the founding fathers, but a unifying factor, dispelling the long perceived notion that there were strict states rights advocates and strict nationalist advocates. Finally, Roche confronts the influence of the Federalist on common interpretations of the Constitution, and argues that though the Federalist displays a remarkable amount of retrospective symmetry, it is not the only, nor the complete interpretation of the Constitution. The [United States Constitution](#) is the most basic of all constructs of American government, and in understanding its usefulness, one must as thoroughly as possible analyze the intentions of its creators.

Roche begins his essay by describing the Constitutional Convention as a democratic reform caucus. This is central to Roche's argument regarding the intentions of the founding fathers. The key word in understanding this characterization of the creators of the constitution is the word reform. Roche starts by explicitly stating the founding fathers intended to reform the government, not manipulate it according to their personal needs. The Articles of Confederation were weak and unenforceable as a governing body, and lacked the true [legislative](#) power necessary to support a functional democracy. The United States hadn't the power to compete in the global economic climate because it lacked the power to enforce its own laws and decrees. This was an important factor in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Though the founding fathers plainly understood that a national government would no doubt limit the power of total democracy in the country, the also understood that without a strong central government, no democracy was possible at all and the country was doomed to failure. States were at the verge of breaking off into factions and developing their own standing armies to protect their own interests. This description of a democratic caucus is in stark contrast to Charles Beard's description of the intentions of the founding fathers, in which he argues that the authors of the constitution did not particularly care for the notion of democracy and that they intended to preserve it only to placate the people. Roche strongly favors the argument that the founding fathers intended to preserve as much democracy as humanly possible in the government under the sole pretext that it produced a functional governing body. Only as a functional governing body could the United States effectively protect the freedoms that it so dearly fought for in the Revolution of 1776. Roche's notion of a democratic reform caucus accurately sums up his entire argument regarding the founding fathers. They intended to protect democracy and reform the Articles in a way that worked efficiently and smoothly, not in their own interests, but in the interests of a greater good.

Roche acknowledges that the political constraints of the day greatly limited the efforts of the reforming founding fathers in their quest to amend and create a functional Constitution. He uses the example of New York, a known advocate of states' rights as an example of this great problem that was confronted. Roche comments that the absence of New York from the convention would be disastrous and thus doom the project to failure, and severely tedious steps were taken in order to ensure their presence at the convention. He lists these steps, briefly, but in detail in order to further his argument. First, New York had to agree to even send delegates to the Constitutional Convention. Second, New York had to provide maintenance for the delegates as they traveled to Philadelphia, a step that was also taken by many other states such as New Hampshire, which did not provide maintenance for its delegates until long after they initially decided to attend the convention. Third, New York had to create a convention of their own within their state with the purpose of ratification of the document which would be created at the Constitutional Convention. Finally, New York had to concede to and accept the decision of their convention that their state should participate in the Constitutional Convention at all. Roche attempts to expose the great political blockage

that prevented the founding fathers from swiftly reforming the constitution. As well as describing the tedium of eighteenth century politics, Roche also succeeds in exposing the reasons why the Constitutional Convention could not have been solely convened on the pretext of retooling the Constitution to their personal needs. In consideration of the politics of the time, such an effort would have been impossible had it been made for completely selfish notions, and undoubtedly many states would not have gone through the trouble of sending delegates to a convention that intended to not reform the Constitution, but to mold it in order to maintain the status quo. Roche's argument is supported by the simple fact that politics of the time would not have permitted such a whimsical change to the law of the land, no matter how influential the core members of the Constitutional Convention were.

John Roche attempts to debunk Charles Beard's historical idea that the founding fathers were only rich, white, influential, landowning men who intended to change the Constitution only to maintain the status quo and keep the rights to their lucrative property investments and their land. Roche instead characterizes the framers of the Constitution, not as scheming rich men, but as men genuinely dedicated to the creation of a functional democratic government. Roche acknowledges that the founding fathers may have had many motives that factored into their creation of a Constitution, but that though some of these motives may have been entirely impure, they did not dictate the atmosphere of the convention, nor did these impure motives drive the intentions of all of the founding fathers. Roche also claims that there are no immaculate conceptions in history, and that the founding fathers obviously had their own agenda when it came to the topic of national government, however, these agendas were not the impetus of the convention, and that the sole and pure intention of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was to create a functional democratic government. He characterizes the framers of the Constitution as men who were obviously bias toward their own personal needs, but entirely willing to compromise if it appeared to be for the greater good of [the United States of America](#). He argues that the Constitution could never be created by purely selfish motives because it was much greater than the men who created it. There is no possible way for men with entirely divergent interests on the economy, global affairs, and domestic issues to have created a document that suited them and only them. Compromise was the only way to create a government that was support any of their interests, and thus their personal biases, while influential, were put aside in the hope that the Constitution they created would serve all the states as a whole, and govern the country in an effective and efficient way, the likes of which the world had never seen before. The framers of the Constitution were far too wise to conform to the strict Beard interpretation of their motives, and thus, nothing would have ever been accomplished.

Political theory also played a great role in determining the purpose and effectiveness of the Constitution and ultimately asserted itself as deliberation occurred between the states. John Roche comments that the political intentions of the founding fathers were not as starkly different from each other as previous interpretations of the motives of the framers had implied. He dispels the notion that there were strict states' rights advocates at the convention and strict national government advocates. Roche claims that had the men's political philosophies been so different as to divide them into two opposing factions, the Constitutional Convention would have floundered from the start. Many interpretations of the Constitutional Convention cite the absence of influential [members of the United States](#) such as Thomas Jefferson from the convention as proof of this dissent within the country. However, Roche paints a distinctly different portrait of the founding fathers, claiming that the political ideals that they held did not do as much to divide them as they did unite them, and that the Constitutional Convention could not have survived if the men did not agree on a common goal. The states that advocated their rights heavily could have easily left the convention and doomed it to failure. Roche argues that the fact that even the most disagreeable states stayed at the convention illustrates that the men truly intended to reform the Constitution. Most striking yet is the notion that the states that strongly disagreed could have easily voted down any measure that threatened their rights, but they did not. The states, large and small, with populations great and little, though they hotly debated the issue of representation, stayed at the convention and eventually compromised on a government that could serve all of them effectively. This presence at the convention distinctly shows that all the representatives knew that the Articles of Confederation were weak and did nothing to protect their rights, and had they not compromised at all, their states would soon be reduced to nothing.

Finally, Roche confronts the common interpretation of the [Federalist Papers](#) as the great interpreter and explainer of the purpose of the Constitution. Throughout history, The Federalist has been used without hesitation in blatant examination of the United States Constitution. Roche concedes that the main components of the Federalist Papers, [James Madison](#) and Alexander Hamilton, had a distinct talent for retrospective symmetry, and did accurately portray the events of the Constitutional Convention. However, Roche argues, that a strict interpretation of the Constitution in the context of the Federalist Papers would be unwise because the Federalist was undoubtedly, for lack of a better word, complete propaganda. It is impossible to deduce the motives of the Constitutional Convention from the Federalist Papers because they did not reflect the political ideals of the convention, but merely reflected the political ideals that the convention created. Roche comments that the Federalist was merely an improvisational piece of propaganda that detailed how the government was to work under the new Constitution rather than why the Constitution was created in the first place. This completely debunks the idea that The Federalist ideas were the driving force behind the Constitutional Convention, and rather portrays the document as a piece of reactionary literature, detailing the ideas that came from the convention, rather than the ideas that went into it. This supports Roche's argument that the founding fathers did not have their own personal interests in mind when drafting the

Constitution of the United States. Charles Beard relies heavily on the Federalist in his essays regarding the motivations of the framers. Had the document been strictly a reactionary piece of literature full of new ideas, it would not have accurately reflected the political climate before the ratification of the Constitution, and thus becomes useless in an argument regarding motivation.

The United States Constitution has served the country well since its inception in 1787. It has been scrutinized, interpreted, reinterpreted, and analyzed since the very moment it was ratified in that hot summer in Philadelphia. Subject to much of the same scrutiny have been the purpose of the Constitution and the motivations of its authors. Charles Beard attempted to characterize the framers of the Constitution as men who were purely self interested, and thought only of amending the government of the United States to serve their own personal goals of wealth and land. John Roche argues a completely contrary perspective. He begins this argument by describing the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as a democratic reform caucus. This is important in understanding Roche's argument as whole. He uses the key word of reform to illustrate that the founding fathers did not intend to alter the Constitution on a whim, but on a carefully thought out plan to make the government efficient, effective, and to preserve democracy. Roche argues that the political constraints of the time were not conducive to such a wild and selfish alteration of American government, and the steps that were necessary to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention were far too tedious and numerous to serve this purpose. Roche characterizes the framers of the constitution as undoubtedly biased, but points to their incredible desire to compromise as credence to the idea that they were not at the convention simply to obtain their own goals. The political theory of the time was also instrumental in dictating the actions of the founding fathers. Had their ideas been so different and divergent, many of the delegates could have easily left the convention to flounder. Roche claims that the presence of all the states at the convention proves that they had much more in common than they did to divide them, and that they had only the country's fate in mind as they drafted the Constitution. Finally, Roche completely debunks Charles Beard's argument for a selfish Constitution by attacking his main resource for information on the motivations of the framers. He claims that the Federalist, while possessing a knack for retrospective symmetry, was not a document that reflected the ideas that went into the Constitution, but the ideas that ultimately resulted from it. The United States Constitution will continue to be analyzed for flaws and motivations for as long as it remains the basic governing document of American Government. However, John Roche makes a strikingly supporting argument for the good and democratic intentions of the founding fathers. His interpretation of the Constitutional Convention will remain a staple in [United States history](#) for centuries to come.

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