



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > Popular Culture and Ratification >
Federalist and Antifederalist: The Origin of the Terms > Federalists as Consolidators

None of the Well-Born Conspirators Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, 23 April 1788

In public disquisitions, especially political controversies, one of the parties generally adopt some *cant word* or *phrase*, whereby they may be distinguished from their opponents; and what renders the circumstance remarkably curious, the *word* or *phrase* is nineteen times out of twenty wrong applied. Thus in the party politics of Britain, under one administration *candor* was their *shibbolith*, when the most *abusive*, *uncandid*, and *dirty mouthed* scoundrels in the kingdom were the favourites of *court*; under another, *œconomy*, was the *watch-word*, yet *profuseness* and *prodigality* in public concerns, was then at their *ne plus ultra*; again, *national honor*, was buz[z]ed about, when not a fragment of *honor*, *principle*, or even *national courage* could be traced at court; this was in Lord North's ever memorable administration. Now in an exact agreement with this plan, one of our American political parties, are incessantly bellowing out, *federalism*, *federal measures*, *federal gentlemen*, &c. &c.

If the words, Federal, Federalism, &c. are to be taken in their general and common acceptation, as derived from Fœdus, a league, or covenant, entered into for the mutual advantage of all; there cannot be found a greater abuse of words than in this instance; for our modern federalists, namely, the advocates of the new constitution, evidently aim at nothing but the elevation and aggrandizement of a few over the many. The *liberty*, *property*, and every social comfort in life of the yeomanry in America, are to be sacrificed at the *altar* of tyranny. *Federalism* then taken in this sense must imply something very remote from its original natural import; it must, (and truly there is no help for saying so) signify a league entered into against the sacred liberties of the people; that is in plain terms a conspiracy; and this is the fifth signification of the word Fœdus, given by Ainsworth in his excellent Latin dictionary. Perhaps the consciences of the conspirators in the *dark conclave* urged them to assume a name which might be in some measure a key to disclose their perfidy. Conscience is a stern arbiter, and often compels us to witness against ourselves. Accompanied by such a faithful monitor the abettors of despotism adopted an epithet that should, when perfectly understood, be the true index to their base intentions. Take the word Federalism directly or indirectly, and it amounts *neither* to more nor less in its modern acceptation than a conspiracy of the *Well-born few*, against the sacred rights and privileges of their fellow citizens.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XVII: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [5] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1995), 202–6.