

Comments by William French,  
On the Undergraduate Dissertation of Jan Král:  
**"Men of Different Faiths. Unity versus Diversity of Anti-Federalism, during the Period  
of the Ratification of the U.S. Constitution"**  
19 June 2006

Overall Grade: 1

Comments:

As I come from a very different academic system and approach than the one here, I hesitate to evaluate your work, not being sufficiently familiar with what expectations and standards ought normally to apply. By North American standards, I would say that your work does not show enough of your own ideas and thoughts; nevertheless, it does seem to be a rather intelligently organised and coherent recapitulation of the work of others; and it certainly is clear that you have had to put considerable thought into making sense of what others say, which is not at all a bad thing! Were you writing in North America, I think, we would want to see more of yourself put into it, i.e., to see you weighing the merits of the various ideas that each of the groups presented, and not just the merits of the accounts made of them by others. But, perhaps I am here applying an inappropriate standard to you, i.e., that of political theory, and you are perhaps more concerned to be writing a text on political history, or some sort of hybrid. In any event, I applaud your courage in taking on a large topic packed with nuanced political positions, lost in the mists of time. This requires a great deal more intellectual curiosity, drive, and seriousness than one might expect from a student who pursues, e.g., questions about American foreign policy in the Cold War, etc.

If you are thinking about where you might go from here, I would suggest thinking a bit more about the relation of these various Ratification Period positions to the "Peopling of North America". In particular, I would recommend "Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America", by David Hackett Fischer (Oxford University Press), which successfully portrays how the folkways of the four founding mother colonies of America are intimately interwoven with their respective, and quite particular, ideas of liberty. Moreover, he posits and attempts to demonstrate that it is the unresolvable tension between these four ideas and cultures that gives America its peculiar dynamic.

I would make a side note about your written English: it gave me fits! What I have to say concerns polishing, but without it you will plague your reader. You are working with complex and subtle ideas and phenomena that require artful, effective sentences. Your expression of ideas is very good, and you have much promise as a writer in English, but you must learn to punctuate, in order to show the shifts of thought within a sentence. Please become familiar with the proper use of commas and semicolons. You might take a look at "Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation", by Lynne Truss (London: Profile, 2003). It is very enjoyable, popular, and helpful. Of course reading is helpful, except that punctuation has become a lost art. Consult Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and others of the Nineteenth Century: they knew the semicolon personally.

I wish you well with your studies.

