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Lorri Glover. *The Fate of the Revolution: Virginians Debate the Constitution.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 204 pp. $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4214-2002-8.

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In *The Fate of the Revolution*, Lorri Glover crafts a suspenseful narrative of the Virginia ratification battle. She argues that as the states considered the proposed Constitution in 1788, Virginia was already the center of the new nation--that it truly held the "fate of the revolution" in its hands. Virginia was the most populous state--home to one in six Americans--and was also the largest in territory, holding one fifth of US land. Its power and influence were so great that in 1788, as Americans considered the new form of government proposed by the Philadelphia Convention, "many well-informed Americans believed that Virginia's rejection, regardless of which other states ratified, would sink the proposed Constitution" (p. 4).

This was an ominous prospect because Virginians were divided, and many were suspicious of the new government. In June 1788, as the delegates to the Virginia ratification convention gathered, the great orator and patriot Patrick Henry issued a warning. "Here," he ominously told his fellow delegates, "is a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain" (p. 110). Henry, who would dominate the convention, sensed the magnitude of the changes proposed and the potential for the federal government to hold great power. He objected, for instance, to the vagueness of the "necessary and proper" clause: "the implication is dangerous," he insisted, "because it is unbounded" (p. 119). The power accorded to the federal Congress worried him, as did the new government's ability to tax, the standing army, and the potential for New England to dominate the other states. The Constitution's advocates minimized the import of these concerns, but Henry held his ground.

Henry was not the only skeptic. George Mason, author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and of the state's first constitution, was actively working to defeat the new government, and many others also expressed their reservations. On the side of ratification, James Madison, Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, and a mostly circumspect George Washington were fierce advocates. The prospect of the new government now divided men who, only ten years ago, had worked together to achieve a successful revolution despite great obstacles.

And the new government divided not just elites, but the people as well. From the time the Constitution reached Virginia in September 1787 through the ratification convention in the summer of 1788, the debate absorbed everyone "from the Governor to the door keeper," as one man put it (p. 1). As a visitor to southwest Virginia noted in the winter of 1787-88, "even in these remote wilds the people are deeply engaged in that science. The

new Constitution is the subject of universal discussion" (p. 27). More than that, as Virginians elected their convention delegates (according to the views on ratification that those delegates held), they were determined to reach their own conclusions--no matter what Virginia's "leading gentlemen" told them to do (p. 73). As they thought about who to send to the convention, voters throughout Virginia also began to consider a more fundamental matter: the nature of representation. Should they elect men who they knew shared their opinions on the Constitution, or men whom they trusted--men who were experienced and respected, and who would then make their own informed decisions on the fate of the new country?

The result was a series of fierce local and personal battles followed by a hard-fought ratification convention, one that was the most evenly matched, Glover explains, of all the conventions, in terms of the skills and political importance of the Constitution's proponents and opponents. In the fall of 1787, a majority of members of Virginia's House of Delegates were opposed to the Constitution, indicating where political opinion overall stood. The convention began on June 2, 1788, and James Madison was still unsure of the outcome when he delivered his final speech of the convention on June 24. Ultimately, eight delegates, Glover reports, disregarded the clear wishes of their constituents and voted for ratification, and two others ignored specific instructions. (p. 146). The Federalists triumphed. When the convention tallied the final votes of the delegates, ratification had won--but only by the slim margin of 89-79 (p. 142).

But even after they lost, Henry and his fellow Anti-Federalists resolved to shape the meaning of the new Constitution themselves. During the ratification convention, they had fought bitterly with their opponents about what the document meant, as well as where it would lead. Now they would seek to influence its impact within the bounds set by the new government. In his final speech to the convention, Henry announced that, if he lost, he would support the new government. There would be no armed rebellion. "If I shall be in the minority," he promised, "I shall have those painful sensations, which arise from a conviction of being overpowered in a good cause. Yet I will be a peaceable citizen!" He assured his fellow delegates and the audience that "I wish not to go to violence, but will wait with hopes that the spirit which predominated in the revolution is not yet gone." Instead, he would hope that the federal government would be "changed so as to be compatible with the safety, liberty, and happiness of the people" (p. 141). Henry also squelched an attempt by George Mason, after the convention, to rally further opposition. Mason suggested to Henry and fellow opponents of the Constitution that they write an address to give to their constituents; the contents of Mason's proposed address are lost to history, but it was so provocative that his fellow Anti-Federalists, including Henry, were taken aback. Henry insisted that he himself had done his duty "strenuously" and in the "proper place," and now "they had all better go home" (pp. 148-149).

In the meantime, ratification advocates took their own steps towards compromise. After the final vote, a group of the Constitution's supporters and opponents met to craft suggested amendments. They also composed a statement directing Virginia's representatives in the first Congress to propose the amendments. This result pleased neither Madison--who ideally had wanted the document unamended--nor Henry, but the close convention had made compromise necessary.

At the moment of ratification, Virginians believed that theirs was the crucial ninth state needed to put the Constitution into effect. But actually the tiny state of New Hampshire had beat them to it only a handful of days earlier. In any case, the Constitution was now law. And, as Glover puts it, although "New Hampshire technically made it official, Virginia made it real" (p. 150).

What to make of Virginia's ratification convention and its close outcome? Since Glover's book is meant to be a narrative, part of the Johns Hopkins's Witness to History series, her treatment of both the historiography and her own explicit contribution is made with a light hand. But she does offer a few thoughts. Historians, Glover explains to her readers, have tried to account for this nail-biting outcome in various ways. They have relied on frameworks of east versus west, national versus local, establishment versus newer money, youth versus experience, commerce versus agriculture, and aristocracy versus democracy. But despite the scholarly debates, she contends, "some things are clear." "Virginians," she concludes, "were the most important and divided players in one of the greatest human dramas in American history. In no gathering during the entire revolutionary era was there so vigorous a contest between so many talented, famous, and committed leaders." In the end, "the outcome was unpredictable, but the consequences were crystal clear." The fate of the Constitution was, as they saw it, the fate of mankind; as one contemporary commented, "one of the most serious and important subjects that ever was agitated by a free people" (p. 9). At this moment, Virginians were divided as to what their "country" actually was and what it should look like. Was it Virginia, as it was for Patrick Henry, or America, as it was for military veterans like George Washington and Richard Henry Lee? And what would it mean to move forward as a new nation?

These questions were debated by Virginia's "great men," but also shaped by their constituents--by the Virginians who themselves debated the merits of the proposed government. And it was these state debates, as James Madison later observed and as Glover emphasizes, which took the "draught of a plan" drawn up by the Philadelphia Convention, and gave the document its significance; it was nothing but a "dead letter, until life and validity were breathed into it" (p. 6).

Here, Glover gets closest to an analytical theme. The Constitution did not have a predetermined meaning, she suggests, but rather had the meaning that people gave to it over time. This meaning was contingent and contested—determined by the process of ratification, which was itself about circumstances as much as hard and fast characteristics. Virginians did not, she insists, split along many of the lines suggested by historians—by class or by their commercial interests, by their education or past military service. Region mattered, but not as much as was sometimes reported. Instead, ratification seemed to be most influenced, Glover argues, by the structure of the debates themselves, especially by the Federalists' experience and strategy. They had a clear proposal, whereas the Anti-Federalists offered fears, but no concrete alternatives. "The Anti-Federalists," Glover notes, "seemed to play more on men's fears than their hopes, and this was a hopeful age" (p. 145). The fact that many states had already ratified also gave the Constitution momentum, as did the fact that George Washington supported it. Also, the Federalists managed to frame the debate as yes or no, all or nothing, and warned that without the new government, the country would fall apart. In the end, this tactic helped the Federalists to triumph. Glover seems to suggest, albeit circumspectly, that the Federalists won not because people necessarily agreed with their explication of the Constitution or their prognostication of its effects, but rather because it was the only concrete option.

For his part, Patrick Henry had been vocal about his fear that Virginia would lose influence and autonomy under the new government. "This Government," he had warned the convention, "is not a Virginian but an American Government" (p. 111). In reality, of course, just the opposite would turn out to be true: the new American government would become a Virginian one. A Virginian —George Washington, of course—would be the first president. Another, John Marshall, would become the "Great Chief Justice," shaping the

Supreme Court. Virginians would found the first opposition party, and Virginians would fill the presidency for thirty-two of its first thirty-six years. And Virginians were already leading in 1788. Virginians had proposed the plan that became the Constitution and had spoken the most at the Philadelphia Convention. Virginians also had led the opposition in Philadelphia and in the Confederation Congress.

But if Henry was wrong about the state's waning influence, he was right about the importance of its decision. "Our own happiness alone is not affected by the event," he exhorted the delegates on the final day of the convention, as a storm besieged Richmond and thunder shook the building. Instead, he warned as spectators ran for cover from the storm, "All nations are interested in the determination," and the "consequent happiness or misery of mankind … will depend on what we now decide" (pp. 3-4). Virginia mattered.

Glover's page-turning account of the Virginia ratification convention does not replace the great history of the entire ratification effort written by the late Pauline Maier. But it does provide a short, readable book that emphasizes the moment's contingency. Glover illustrates how the Constitution's meaning and implications were the subjects of bitter dispute, and the ways in which potential answers to those concerns were constructed by the ratification process itself. And she provides these crucial insights, insights shared with Maier, in a more manageable volume—one easily accessible to undergraduates and those interested in the Virginia convention in particular. This is an excellent book, perfect for undergraduate seminars and surveys that hope to introduce students to this pivotal moment in American history.

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