

their antagonists. It was the beginning of the end of the uprising.

Yet many rebels were prosperous leaders in their communities who resented the state's eastern elite and its aristocratic rule. In April 1787, insurgents or their sympathizers were elected to fill a large majority of seats in the state legislature, which slashed taxes and eased tax collection. Populism triumphed in Massachusetts, too, as it had earlier in most of the other states.

Members of the Massachusetts elite deplored this development. So did members of the political elite throughout the country. To them, the rebellion and its after-effects were proof that the American revolution had gone too far, and that the new country needed a powerful national government that could-

Michael Klarman interprets the drafting of the Constitution as a coup.

succeed without being undermined by the excesses of democracy prevailing in the states. Beginning that May, these concerns became the project of what was then called the federal Convention.

In his new book *The Framers' Coup*, Michael J. Klarman explains how this brief, geographically isolated, and seemingly thwarted uprising fundamentally shaped American governance. The Bancroft Prize-winning legal historian and Kirkland & Ellis professor of law writes, "Shays's Rebellion played a critical role in the creation of the Constitution."

IT WAS A COUP, Klarman lays out, because Madison—now known as the father of the Constitution and a primary shaper of it—and key colleagues went to the convention in Philadelphia with a frankly anti-democratic agenda and, by and large, fulfilled it. By anti-democratic, Klarman does not mean *autocratic*. Instead, he means opposed to a purely democratic system in which the majority would always rule. After persuading the other delegates to deliberate behind closed doors and keep what happened there a secret, the Federalists led the convention to approve a constitution that was, in Klarman's words, "nationalist and democracy-constraining." Madison later observed that "no constitution would ever have been adopted by the convention if the debates had been public."

To solve problems Congress had struggled with in the wake of the war, the new document gave that body power that was "virtually unlimited" to impose taxes, regulate commerce, and create a military. The constitution said that, once it was ratified, it would be "the supreme law of the land," along with federal laws and treaties. To enforce that principle, it commanded the creation of a supreme court and authorized Congress to create lower federal courts.

Most state constitutions equipped voters to keep their representatives on short leashes: the tools included, as Klarman writes, "annual elections, small constituencies, mandatory rotation in office, and (often) instruction of representatives"—the right of voters to tell their representatives what to do in office. The national constitution established terms "longer than any existing under state constitutions," with four years for presidents and six for senators. Even for the members of the more democratic House of Representatives, the delegates' anti-democratic bias showed: they established two-year rather than one-year terms; large constituencies for each member, rather than small; and no provisions for "instruction, recall, or mandatory rotation in office."

Some delegates wanted the constitution to be far more nationalist, either by empowering Congress to veto state laws it disliked, or by abolishing the states altogether—in order, as one delegate put it, to create "one nation instead of a confederation of republics." But the convention struck the balance

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Dennis De Witt inquires about the origin of the phrase "wretched excess." He has found citations to *The Edinburgh Review* (1805), Sir Walter Scott (c. 1830), and the sixteenth-century Jesuit Martin Delrio, but hopes to learn more.

Alethea Black asks who wrote: "What is the thing which man will not surrender? That which he never fully possessed, or missed in its true season."

William Benemann seeks the source of a motto tattooed on the arm of a Massachusetts sailor in 1872: "Not a star shall fall." He has found the phrase in the farewell speech that Colonel J.J. Seaver gave to the men of the Sixteenth New York Volunteers at the end of the Civil War, but further online searches suggest that Seaver was quoting an earlier source.

Eve Menger would like to learn "the earliest usage of the word 'Union' in distinction to 'Confederacy.' Union Square in San Francisco is said to have been named in honor of pro-Union, anti-slavery rallies held there, led by the Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King. However, there is an 1853 newspaper article which refers to that area as Union Square. Was 'Union' used at that time in the political sense?"

Truth in the well (November-December 2016). No links to Harvard's Pump have emerged, but John Gordon and Jenny Rood, citing *The Oxford Book of Proverbs*, noted that "We know nothing certainly, for truth lies in the deep" is attributed to Democritus, and the revision, "Truth lies sunk in a well," to Lactantius (*Institutiones Divinae* III, xxviii). Gordon added that Judith Oster, in *Toward Robert Frost: The Reader and the Poet* (page 82) cites Democritus for "Of truth we know nothing, for truth lies at the bottom of a well." In addition, Bernard Witlieb shared Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting, *Truth Emerging from Her Well* (with a whip to use on humanity), and Louise Abbot recalled Sully Prudhomme's sonnet, "Le doute," beginning: *La blanche Vérité dort au fond d'un grand puits*.

"between...business and eternity" (November-December 2016). Joseph Marcus identified the speaker as English bishop Zachary Pearce (said to be citing a reply first made to Emperor Charles V), based on Hugh James Rose's *A New General Biographical Dictionary* (1850; vol. 2, page 3).

Send inquiries and answers to "Chapter and Verse," Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138 or via email to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.