

Introduction

by Brandon Christensen

This is *Isonomia Quarterly*'s first special issue, and it is centered around the Declaration of Independence's 250th anniversary. However, before I delve into the specifics of the special issue, I should probably give the quarterly itself a proper introduction since I have not done so yet.

There has been a dire need for essay-length dialogue on all things libertarianism for quite some time now. At the near end of several edited volumes on libertarian and classical liberal international relations, I decided to fulfill that need (or at least die trying!). Two topics have long since given way to exciting buzzwords and punchy op-eds that can be lazily consumed on social media: equality under the law and global, interstate federalism.

It's been a good ride so far. Tiziana Stella of the Streit Council initially gave me the idea to run a special issue related to the Declaration of

Independence.¹ I ran with this idea but came up with a slight alternative: a special issue that digests my proposal in a 2021 article to start using the United States as a blueprint for a federal-republican world order rather than an anarchic one; and for the U.S. to start implementing a foreign policy of federation, of adding “states” to its union via an entrance mechanism. I could think of no better way to honor the Declaration of Independence than by exploring the results of its impact on how polities can interact with each other.

Van Staden has already confronted and digested my American Proposal in a special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis*,² so in this special issue he will instead be using the Americans’ Declaration of Independence as a launching pad.

Everybody else in this issue confronts my 2021 American Proposal directly, and I could not be more overwhelmed, grateful, excited, and humbled at the

¹ Here’s the Streit Council’s website:

<https://www.streitcouncil.org/>

² Van Staden & Woode-Smith. 2022. “To Tyrants, The Answer is ‘No’: Conceptualizing A Confident, Muscular, and Cosmopolitan Libertarianism.” *Cosmos + Taxis* 10(11+12)

https://cosmosandtaxis.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/vanstaden_woodesmith_ct_vol10_iss11_12.pdf

responses. I can't do justice to anybody's essays just now. Most of the essays in this special issue are going to require journal-length responses, which will hopefully proliferate throughout the broader classical liberal, libertarian, and federalist scholarly and activist communities of the world.

I will, however, give quick introductions and rebuttals to each of the contributions found in this special issue.

Totten sets a high bar for the special issue when he outlines the Philadelphian system as a whole, describes different points in history where it broke down, and gives insightful recommendations for improvements moving forward. This fulfills Ostrom's wish of ensuring that people understand the political order in which they live, and Totten's proposals and analysis can all be done via the republican processes that form the underlying internationalist underpinnings of the United States. His essay will serve as a fruitful foundation for many more years' worth of research and scholarship on the compound republic as an alternative to our Westphalian status quo.

Morgan does what nobody else has done yet and runs with the actual essence of my 2021 article by

putting forth another proposal for alternative world order: the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of Native North America. Morgan's take is sophisticated, and much more will be said on his civilizational angle, but for now my only critique is in the form of a question: did the Haudenosaunee Confederacy succeed in preventing predation by other polities?

Peñuelas is up next and she argues that a libertarian world order is best exemplified by a planet where states are sovereign equals; that a libertarian world order is one where states have their sovereignty respected by other states. Not individuals. Not people or peoples. *States*. Peñuelas zeroes in on Locke to make her argument for a world order composed of sovereign and equal states (not individuals) and makes excellent use of McMaken's recent speech at the Mises Institute for further elaboration. I have a paper under review that critiques Rothbardian reasoning – which I refer to as “Rothbard's conceptual prison” - from an academic perspective, so I will refer you to that work,³ but one issue that stands out to me in this essay worth highlighting is McMaken's speech. The

³ Christensen. Under review. “Instinctual Survival and Rival Traditions.”
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=6809540.

speech sounds, to me, like McMaken is trying to subtly and gently lead Mises Institute readers out of Rothbard's conceptual prison and into the broader academic and cultural ecosystems of the global liberal community. For this, he should be commended and more attention should be paid again to the Mises Institute.

Marquis & Coyne submit the American Proposal to a rigorous, brutal stress test by utilizing a mostly Public Choice framework. This is such an excellent piece of work, and a gruelling challenge, that I will be utilizing it for years to come. I trust others will, too. The contribution is so good that my only rebuttal in this special issue is a meta one: how bad is life in the United States? Truly? Yes, it has problems, and they are serious, and the United States can be, and often is, violent in foreign affairs, but what baseline are American libertarians subjecting judgment of U.S. foreign policy on? Is it an ideal baseline? Or do they have a rival polity in mind?

MacDonald's insights on coordination and consolidation are likewise too insightful and foundational for an effective introduction or quasi-rebuttal here. His insights on interstate

federalism will be useful to scholars and others for decades to come, and it may prove devastating not to the interstate federalist program in general (indeed, MacDonald's insights will strengthen this line of research and become a core pillar), but perhaps at least to my American Proposal.

Duryea rescues the American Proposal's blushes by building out the foundations for how such a proposal might actually work in the real world. **Studebaker** takes the American Proposal across the pond to Europe and teases out ideas, gleaned from ancient Rome, for implementing federal transatlantic bonds. **Gauderie** keeps us in Europe and explores how the interstate federalist tradition can contribute to the further weakening of nation-state sovereignty in that region of the world.

Oyerinde & Platt interrupt the explorations on how to extend the compound republic of the Americans by applying a brake on how African-Americans have been treated in the U.S. interstate federalist tradition. Their argument here is that federalist orders can be dangerous to minorities if great care is not taken to include them in constitutional bargaining processes.

Lee's essay could be viewed as equally devastating to the American Proposal, as he takes a prime example of a culturally- and economically-similar polity to the U.S., Canada, and explains why the Americans' neighbor to the north has resisted federating with the United States for two centuries. Lee is gracious enough to call not for an end to the American Proposal, but instead for scholarly avenues on how to strengthen ideas and advocacy for more federal and republican world orders.

Nientiedt seals the special issue with a fascinating musing on Switzerland, rather than the United States, as a model for interstate federalism.

The United States and social science today

All taken, I think that the United States gets less than a fair shake throughout the special issue. The U.S. seems to be taken for granted by many participants, if not viewed outright as an emergent institution that should have never happened.

Yet today, at the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the United States is still the place more people from more parts of the world want to be even with the rightly negative press that's come with the Trump administration's

immigration policies. This is true even as the U.S. continues to get mired in the politics of the world's anarchical regions. This is true even when the legislation that stems from its culture wars doesn't go your way.

All told, the United States as a polity continues to lead the way when it comes to innovation, self-governance, and liberty and justice for all.

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