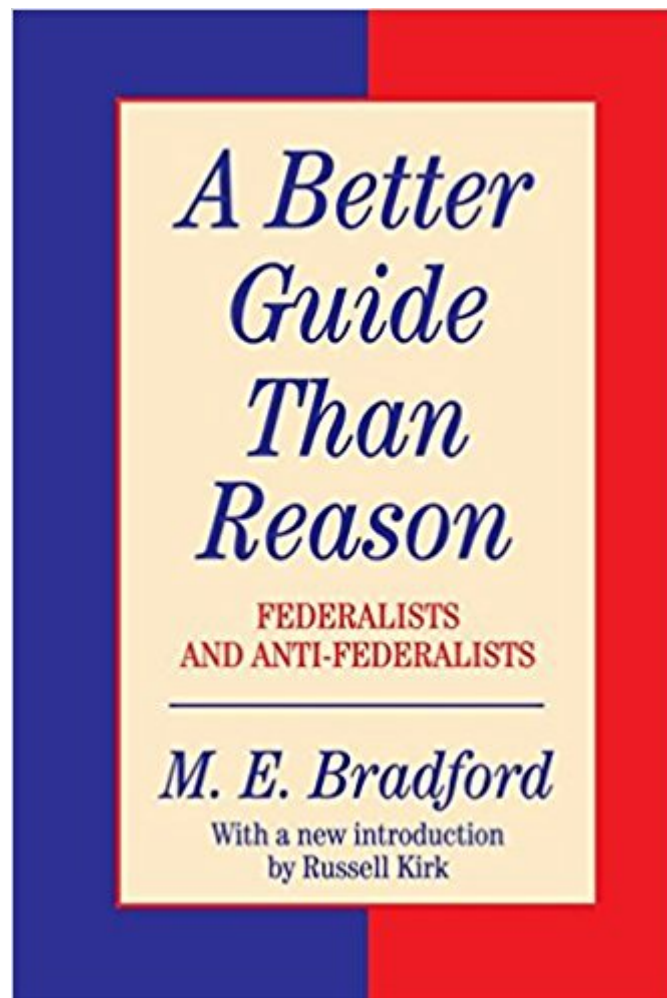




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# A Better Guide Than Reason: Federalists And Anti-federalists (Library Of Conservative Thought)



## Synopsis

In this seminal volume, M. E. Bradford defines the Old Whig political tradition in American thought, showing that the inheritance of the prescriptive anti-federalists still lives. For Bradford, important elements in our heritage from the American Revolution have been systematically hidden from our view by anachronistic and partisan scholarship. He believes that other, more ideological components have been emphasized at the expense of the rest. Here he attempts to return us to our heritage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

M. E. Bradford, until his death in 1993, was professor of humanities at the University of Dallas in Texas. His work has appeared in many journals of opinion, including *The Intercollegiate Review*, *Modern Age*, and *Imprimis*. Russell Kirk (1918–1994) was the author of twenty-nine books in several fields. He was the founding editor of *Transaction's* Library of Conservative Thought series.

M.E. Bradford wrote a number of essays on the Founding of the Republic over the course of his career which sadly ended with his death in Midland, Texas in 1993. Some of those essays are contained in this book which is geared to serious scholars on how the Founders declared their independence from the mother country not for some "dangerous innovation" or "dreadful novelty" as

they call new ideas, but rather they desired to return to the principles established by the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights of 1689. Bradford wrote about John Dickinson, a forgotten founder who brilliantly stated that experience was to be a guide to good government and not reason, for Dickinson stated that reason could not discover the odd and the "absurd" notion of trial by jury. Bradford also wrote that the Bicentennial Commission in 1976 did a great disservice in not stating the "Why" of the War of Independence and instead stated the "what." Bradford also wrote about the tensions between the North and the South by remarking that much of the North viewed themselves as members of the New Jerusalem and looked upon the South as another country to be subdued into a thing called a nation. Bradford derides Lincoln's Gettysburg address as sheer demagoguery equating the birth of the nation with the birth of Christ and that the speech, coupled together with Julia Ward Howe's Battle Hymn of the Republic made for a blatant case of millennialism. To be honest, many of the essays required slow reading which would discourage the casual reader. However, if one is serious about legal scholarship as it related to our country's founding, then this book is for you. Five stars.

In the spirit of Russell Kirk, who self-consciously valued tradition, prescription, and religion over the abstractions of political theories (or "ideology"), Bradford here presents a collection of essays in the same vein. Bradford was chosen by Ronald Reagan as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. His appointment was intensely opposed by the neo-conservatives due to his critical writings on Lincoln and his support for George Wallace's presidential run. Hopefully the author's being viewed by the neo-cons as dangerous is enough to make you interested in his writings! "They never will love where they ought to love who do not hate where they ought to hate," said Edmund Burke. Bradford knows where to hate. First, he hates equality (at least its use as a political axiom, where it is essentially meaningless), and has a fine essay in this collection on "The Heresy of Equality." He also detested Lincoln (at least until he apparently softened somewhat in his final year of life), and provides an essay on "Lincoln, the Declaration, and Secular Puritanism: A Rhetoric for Continuing Revolution." Bradford also loves. He loves liberty and those who seek to defend it. In this volume you will find sympathetic treatments of John Dickinson, Patrick Henry, and William Henry Drayton, as well as a defense of the secession of 1861. For lovers of liberty, this book is highly recommended.

Bradford's work demonstrates how it was the "anti-federalists" and not the "federalists" who were the true architects in hammering out the substance of what emerged as the U.S. Constitution. It

demolishes the "nationalist fairy tale" as well concerning its origins. Should be required reading for all graduate students of the era. Eric Martin Bethesda, MD

This book is a very poor example of scholarship. Bradford attempts to impose his hackneyed ideological theory on the men of the revolutionary and founding generation. He attacks such brilliant scholars as Bernard Bailyn for having the audacity to base his work on reality. In the place of past interpretations, Bradford invents an almost laughable concept of "Old Whig" thought, which in all truthfulness seems to have been made up out of thin air. I could go on and on about the horrible failings of this work, but that is not necessary. Instead, I will only point the potential reader of this work to true works of ideological scholarship, those of Bailyn, Gordon Wood, Caroline Robbins, H. Trevor Colbourn, Pauline Maier et al. While these works are not perfect, they are far superior to Bradford's brand of puerile revisionism.

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