

1988 Virginia Assembly

*on
The Quest for Community
in a National Republic:
A Bicentennial Reappraisal*

*Final Report and
Keynote Address*

Held April 8-10, 1988
Richmond, Virginia

Sponsored by
University of Virginia Center for Public Service
Virginia Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Virginia State University

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Foreword

The Center for Public Service is pleased to publish this report from the 1988 Virginia Assembly on *The Quest for Community in a National Republic: A Bicentennial Appraisal*, which met in Richmond on April 8-10, 1988.

The Virginia Assembly is modeled after the American Assembly, established by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1950 while he was president of Columbia University. Since 1982 the Virginia Assembly has been inviting selected opinion leaders from many fields to meet together and discuss some issue of public policy in an objective and nonpartisan way.

In past years the Virginia Assembly has focused on land use, adult corrections, public education, and the future of the environment. The topic of the 1988 Assembly was selected because of its special significance in the year of the 200th anniversary of Virginia's ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

The Virginia Assembly is a nonpartisan educational activity sponsored by the Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia and the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service of VPI & SU and Virginia State University. The 1988 Assembly was also sponsored by the Virginia Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution which handled much of the organization and planning for the event. The Assembly was funded in part by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy.

This report represents the work of many people. Special appreciation goes to Timothy J. O'Rourke, staff director of the Virginia Bicentennial Commission, and his staff members Tracy Warren, Billie Easton, and Jane Beard. Others who deserve special recognition are J. Paxton Marshall of the Virginia Extension Service and Sandra H. Wiley of the Center for Public Service. Sandy Lewis of the Center for Public Service skillfully typed the report, and Barry Jackson, also a Center staff member, helped with the design.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the participants in the 1988 Virginia Assembly. Neither the Assembly's sponsors nor its underwriters have taken any stand on the views expressed in the statement.

James A. (Dolph) Norton
Director, Center for Public Service
University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia
August 1, 1988

About the Virginia Assembly

The 1988 Virginia Assembly on Public Policy met on April 8–10, 1988, to discuss *The Quest for Community in a National Republic: A Bicentennial Reappraisal*. The Assembly included some sixty-five distinguished Virginians. These participants included state and local elected officials, governmental executives, business leaders, attorneys, civil rights activists, academicians, and private citizens; they came from all regions of the Commonwealth and from rural areas, suburbs, and large cities.

The central purpose of the Assembly was to offer this diverse group the opportunity to discuss a perennial issue of governance—the creation and preservation of community. Indeed, the Founding generation was divided on the issue of whether the spirit of community could infuse a territory and population as large as the United States. With a view to the past—in the year of the 200th anniversary of Virginia's ratification of the Constitution—and with an eye on the future, the Assembly discussed the meaning of community, in order to identify areas of agreement among the participants and to understand more fully the points of difference. The following statement represents the results of these discussions. The Assembly's findings and recommendations are addressed to all Virginians concerned about the future of constitutional governance.

In this regard, the discussions of the Assembly, together with its final report, are very much in the spirit of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, penned by George Mason in 1776 but still a part of the Virginia Constitution. The Declaration reminds us "That no free government, nor the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people, but ... by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles ... [and] that free government rests, as does all progress, upon the broadest possible diffusion of knowledge...."[Article 1, Sec. 15]

Under the procedures of the Assembly, no participant was asked to sign the final report. This report is the collective effort of the entire

Assembly; it should not be assumed that any or all individuals subscribed to particular parts of the report. Moreover, participants at the Assembly spoke for themselves, not as representatives of any institution, organization, or agency with which they might be affiliated.

Prior to meeting in Richmond, participants read a series of articles offering various perspectives on the theme of the Assembly. On the opening day of the Assembly, Professor A. E. Dick Howard, chairman of the Virginia Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, addressed the meaning of community within the context of American constitutional development. Following Professor Howard's address, a series of three panels, comprised of leading social scientists and constitutional scholars, looked at three overarching questions of community: (1) How Did the Founders View the Problem of Community? (2) Do People Have the Right to Define Their Community? (3) Which Communities Are Entitled to Political Representation? A list of the panelists accompanies this report.

On the morning of the second day, columnist Neal R. Peirce, coauthor of *The Book of America: Inside Fifty States Today*, delivered the Assembly's keynote address, "Federalism's Newest Challenge: Community Rights, Responsibilities, Self-Governance." What then followed was one and a half days of intense debate and discussion among the Assembly participants; the debate culminated in this final report.

For information about the 1988 Virginia Assembly, please contact Professor Timothy G. O'Rourke, Center for Public Service, 207 Minor Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22903 (telephone 804/924-3396).

Final Report

INTRODUCTION

Crime, homelessness, illiteracy, persistent poverty, suburban sprawl—these problems, and many others as well, are often blamed on the decline of community. In turn, it is commonly argued that the solution to such problems depends on the creation or restoration of community institutions or community spirit. The frequency with which such arguments are made suggests that, indeed, 'community' is a compelling idea in contemporary politics.

From a constitutional perspective, some see an urgent need for a reinvigoration of local institutions. Wilson Carey McWilliams contends:

Democratic citizenship requires dignity. Neither dignity nor citizenship is at home in an unstable society or a large state. Whatever possibilities we have for democratic life require us to turn government's resources to the task of protecting and reconstructing local community and private order. ["Democracy and the Citizen: Community, Dignity, and the Crisis of Contemporary Politics in America," in Robert A. Goldwin and William A. Schambra, eds., *How Democratic Is the Constitution?*, (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), pp. 100-111.]

Others, however, regard such proposals for decentralization as a threat to a different notion of community, one implicit in the language of "We the People." Samuel H. Beer contends for "a national theory, which envisions one people ... asserting, through conflict and in diversity, our unity of origin and destiny." The challenge, says Beer, is