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Aschenbrenner**

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Counting Words in The Federalist Papers

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**COUNTING WORDS IN *THE FEDERALIST PAPERS*:
LOCATING THE TROUBLE WITH ‘CONSTITUTION’,
‘FEDERAL’, AND ‘REPUBLIC’.**
[2 OCL 332]

PETER J. ASCHENBRENNER
Department of History, Purdue University
paschenb@purdue.edu

ABSTRACT.

Word counts for each of the eighty-five articles published by Publius, the (collective) pseudonym of John Jay, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, are surveyed. The 189,497 words are also broken down by author. The effort is ancillary to OCL’s project fixing the semantic values of ‘constitution’, ‘federal’ and ‘republic’ throughout the Early Republic (=1787 through 1857).

KEY WORDS: *The Federalist Papers*

A. INTRODUCTION. John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison authored eighty-five articles (total: 189,497 words) in support of the ratification of the (new) constitution at the New York ratifying convention scheduled for June 17, 1788. Viewed as preliminary product (= empirical efforts underway), these word counts set the stage for deconstruction of these authors’ efforts at persuasion. *Hamilton and Madison Deploy ‘Constitution’ in The Federalist Papers: Semantic Values Surveyed*, 2 OCL 331, sums up the state of the analysis to date, which will name and analyze those words most frequently used and which *also* deliver (to posterity) the most problematic results.

B. RELATIVE WORD COUNTS. The Philadelphia Constitution weighs in at 4,321 words; *The Federalist Papers* (*TFP*) at 189,497. Take the forty-three to one ratio, as approximate as it is. Does it usually take forty-three (propagandic) words to convince a dialogue partner that one word of Philadelphia text is worth the risk of ratification?

Keep in mind that Madison and Hamilton (as of 1796) were on record as distinguishing talking in public as a means of persuasive effort *from* writing many words to get people to accept a few words.

And, what happens when some of the many words (so we’re back to a few well-chosen words) carry a lot (or too much) of the semantic workload? Is there a possibility that a wide range of values for these terms destroys their value as reliable carriers of concepts/ideas/thoughts? And how much stress is too much? And where (if anyplace) in *TFP* does the trouble appear?

C. THE LARGER PROJECT. OCL has launched three projects to which Table 332A is ancillary.

In the first, OCL has located the semantic values for ‘constitution/al’ in *TFP*. The results appear at 2 OCL 331, referenced above.

In the second, now ongoing, the values for ‘federal’ are being investigated; in the third, the values for ‘republic’ will be tabled.

OCL is about half-way done with ‘federal’; there are 321 hits compared to the 647 hits on ‘constitution’. (Internal references to ‘federalist’ were omitted in the count.) ‘Republic’ comes in third with 169 hits. Readers are welcome to nominate their favorite troublesome words. Prof. Wm. Winslow Crosskey’s views are a matter of record.

OCL has already counted semantic values in Madison’s Bank Bill speech of February 2, 1791; JM’s ‘constitution’ dramatically shifts – ‘semantic cleansing’ is OCL’s term – toward ‘constitution’ = text as JM realizes that non-text based methods of reasoning will destroy the efficacy of the Tenth Amendment.

This project establishes a baseline for semantic values for these three words, as well as grounding other explorations of *TFP*.

A little perspective on word counts: Congress wrote 903 words from 1789 to 1804 to complete and correct the Philadelphia Constitution; Hamilton, Madison and Jay flogged ‘constitution’, ‘federal’, and ‘republic’ 1,137 times in 189,497 words to get the Philadelphia Constitution to the

point where ‘only’ another 903 words were required to get the machinery spinning down the road to its date with destiny: March 6, 1857. ‘They may be a few words,’ as Daniel Webster might have said, ‘but there are those who love them.’

D. STATUS. TABLE 332A is complete; the project is ongoing.

E. CITATION FORMAT. Please cite as 2 Our Constitutional Logic 332 *or* 2 OCL 332.

F. TABLE ANNEXED. On SelectedWorks, the table appears as a separate file. See Table Annexed to this Article. See BEP’s website at http://works.bepress.com/peter_aschenbrenner/

G. SERVER LOCATION. This file is maintained on the I/D server.

H. LAST REVISED. This file was last revised on August 7, 2012; it is version 005.

I. FILE FORMAT. The format of this file is MS Word 2010; the format of the associated table is also MS Word 2010.