The Geographic Center of the United States in a “Well Constructed Union”: James Madison’s Federalist No. 10 offers a “Tendency to Break and Control the Violence of Faction,”

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THE GEOGRAPHIC CENTER OF THE UNITED STATES
IN A “WELL CONSTRUCTED UNION”:
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break and control the violence of faction.”

ABSTRACT.
Peter Onuf’s essay in All Over the Map: The Origins of
American Sectionalism measures the cost of diversity in
constituencies: eventually geography tears a nation
apart or supplies the preconditions for its destruction.
James Madison’s Federalist No. 10 argues that large
republics are possible, a thesis (obliquely) opposed to
Onuf’s. Our Constitutional Logic investigates.

KEY WORDS. Geographic costs. Diversity in dispersion. Remote
communities. Coalitions blocking quotidian and organic change.

A woman of some parts approaches.
“I would consider it,” Mrs. Jarley remarks my cranium with
professional attention, “a privilege to measure you. May I introduce my
phrenological companion?”
Governor P and I pause outside her ‘celebrated waxworks.’
“Quilp is known to be mean,” Mrs. Jarley pleads our custom.
The Quilp displays the apparatus of his trade.
“Before you measure my head,” I bluster, “do
you have any qualifications?”
“The celebrated General of the Army, Dwight D.
Eisenhower, is on display. The assembly precedes
you,” he indicates the swelling progress.
“It’s pretty dark in here,” I say. “Couldn’t we
turn on the lights?”
“Allow me,” Quilp offers, “to press this button.”
A gramophone springs to life.
“Today January the Third, in the one hundred and eighty-second year
of Independence, I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States
of America, hereby sign the proclamation making Alaska the Forty-Ninth
state of the Union. In point of fact, Alaska is actually the sixtieth state to be
admitted, if you count eleven readmissions. But, as you will shortly
discover,” the voice continues, “Alaska was not birthed with any punctilious
attention to its credentials.”
Quilp presses the ‘pause’ button.
“You missed the funny part,” Mrs. Jarley turns a spotlight to the wall
display of the ‘Big World Map of the U.S.A.’ “As is plain to see, the
geographic center of the United States,” Quilp pins Nebraska, “was sited at
Lebanon.”
“Before Alaska was admitted to the union,” DDE intones, “I called
upon John Foster Dulles to compute the geographic center of the United
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States, the omphalos, the navel, so to speak, of our new forty-nine state union. A recitation may be in order.”

“My cue,” a new voice is heard.

“Euclid!” we chorus.

“Of course, I can’t ‘do’ non-Euclidean geometry,” the toga’d gent concedes, “but if you would add the longitudes, at the extreme westerly and easterly meridians, that is, those appearing at Eastport, Maine and along the International Date Line, west of Attu Island, divide by two, and then, perform the same procedure with the – what do you call them?”

“Baselines,” I volunteer.

“It’s a question of latitude,” Governor P backs me up.

“Take Quoddy Head, Maine to the meridian west of Attu, Alaska, otherwise known as “The Line.” Lemme see, that’s 114 degrees plus 10 which comes to 124 degrees divided by 2 which equals 62 plus the 66 we started with equals 128 degrees west of Greenwich. Then Barrow, Alaska to Key West, Florida, that’s 71 degrees all the way down to 24 degrees. So that’s is 47 degrees of difference divided by 2, equals 23 degrees, plus the 24 we started with equals 47 degrees north latitude. Voilà.”

Mrs. Jarley restarts the gramophone.

“By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Congress of the United States I, Dwight David Eisenhower, hereby declare that the center of the United States has moved from Lebanon, Nebraska, to, hmm, spin the globe, Mamie, 128 degrees west longitude and 47 degrees north latitude.”

“Isn’t the centre of the USA now in Canadian waters?” I ask. “Or close to it?”

“Congress moved the center of the United States into a nation,” Governor Palin considers the facts in evidence, “that celebrates their victory in the War of 1812.” She transfigures the assembly. “And you doubted me, one and all, when I said the Main Stream Media was to blame.”

“We could tidy up the facts,” Quilp suggests. “That’s what Dickens did. It’s the prerogative of novelists.”

“Perhaps the world is square,” Mrs. Jarley suggests. “That might help.”

“We need more real estate,” Dolley Madison replies.

“If only our invasion of Cuba – err, in 1906 and not 1961 – had been a success,” I wail.
“Or the Aroostock war of ’38-’39 had brought us the golden heart of New Brunswick,” Governor Egan declares.

“John Tyler!” I curse. “That traitor to Whiggery!”

“You’re all wrong,” Euclid snaps. “You need to move Barrow north by a lot. Or Key West south, at least to some degree.”

“That’s the problem with the United States,” Dolley clenches her fists. “My husband wrote Federalist No. 10 to convince everyone that size wasn’t a problem. Now it turns out that Scotland should have been admitted to the union. The USA is not big enough to hold its own center!”

A curtain rises on a spectacular repast.

“Dinner is served!” Dolley announces.

“Who’s the Scandinavian bombshell?” I ask.

“Karin, from Denmark. She’s always wanted to enjoy Dolley’s Feast,” Governor P answers me.

“But the original was supposed to be held in Norway,” Governor Egan polishes his silverware while signalling for a filler-up.

“Alaska affords plenty of desolate landscapes for film-making,” Governor Keith Miller, our most famous former Lt. Governor, declares.

“The rural skyscape is endless,” Karin agrees, accepting the aperitif the Baron offers her.

“I was referring to the location of my trailer court, which launched me from the mudflats of Turnagain Arm to high office,” Governor M sniffs. “I had a life before politics.”

“Not me!” the Baron speaks up. “I was born to deal. Now take Jimmy here. What inspired you to write Federalist No. 10? You argued that size mattered, viz, that bigger was better.”

“Let’s leave it to Euclid,” Jimmy tucks into our first entree, faux cailles de sacréphage avec plenty of truffles.

“Who’s doing the cooking?” I ask.

“C’est moi!” Dolley emerges from the kitchen. “I don’t want the roast to go up in flames and put the whole house to the torch,” she adds, with a ‘lighten up’ look at her husband.

“Is everyone getting on?” Karin asks. “Better than you were before? That’s the whole point.”

“Ah, the Café Anglais. It is my favorite meal,” a distinguished guest in pontifical whites proclaims.
“I thought Babette’s Feast was your favorite movie,” Governor E compares the glow from his apothecarial whites.

“Cameriere!” Francis calls out. “More vintage champagne to erase our differences.”

“Peter Onuf exposed the logic of dispersion in All Over the Map: The Origins of American Sectionalism,” Jimmy begins, ‘seeing as how Euclid is fumbling his scrolls.’ “To their amazement and horror, Americans discovered that’, Jimmy adds, there were indeed ‘differences worth dying for’.” 1996:37.

Dolley picks up the batôn.

“When you constitutionalize the ever-tempting Rule of 4-6-3, by which 6 states might be induced to join a single renegade and block legislation in the House of Representatives, then dispersed communities may discover the value of communal action. Because of and despite their diversities.”

“Naturalmente,” our pontifex maximus joins in.

“That’s what inspired me!” the world-famous Danish novelist points out. “Of course, most people study my Bill of Fare – faux quail, mock turtle, Peccorino-Romano, and in double portions – and consider this a spiritual feast. Uno ricordo of meals, first and last, having gone before.”

“That’s what I thought!” the Prelate from Buenos Aires interjects.

“In fact, it’s a metaphor for Euclid’s long-lost Geometric Logic of the Federal Republic.”

“Actually,” he speaks up, “I found it.”

“In that case, we’ve lost all interest,” Baron de Stoeckl sniffs.

“But the flaw!” our Hellenic genius objects. “Congressional districts, to maximize or even fulfill the logic of dispersed communities must cross state lines. ‘To break the violence of faction’,” Euclid addresses James Madison. “It was a very felicitous phrase.”

“The flaw merely adds spice to the meal,” Karin adds. “Where do you get fresh fruit in Alaska this time of year?” she asks the early republic’s most famous surviving First Lady, who has settled into Jimmy’s lap.

“The greenhouses of Chenoa’s End-of-the-Road Paradise,” Dolley answers. “Fairbanks is Alaska’s number one source of hot air.”

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Images:
[1] Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower
[3] A view of the west coast of Danemark, with visiting U-Boot
[4] Portrait of the Baron de Stoeckl

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