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States' Rights and the Union: Imperium in Imperio, 1776-1876 (American Political Thought (University Press of Kansas))

By Forrest McDonald



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Elegantly and accessibly written for a broad readership, McDonald's book provides an insightful look at states' rights—an issue that continues to stir debate nationwide. From constitutional scholars to Supreme Court justices to an electorate that's grown increasingly wary of federal power, the concept of states' rights has become a touchstone for a host of political and legal controversies. But, as McDonald shows, that concept has deep roots that need to be examined if we're to understand its implications for current and future debates.

McDonald's study revolves around the concept of imperium in imperio—literally "sovereignty within sovereignty" or the division of power within a single jurisdiction. With this broad principle in hand, he traces the states' rights idea from the Declaration of Independence to the end of Reconstruction and illuminates the constitutional, political, and economic contexts in which it evolved.

Although the Constitution, McDonald shows, gave the central government expansive powers, it also legitimated the doctrine of states' rights. The result was an uneasy tension and uncertainty about the nature of the central government's relationship to the states. At times the issue bubbled silently and unseen beneath the surface of public awareness, but at other times it exploded.

McDonald follows this episodic rise and fall of federal-state relations from the Hamilton-Jefferson rivalry to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, New England's resistance to Jefferson's foreign policy and the War of 1812, the Nullification Controversy, Andrew Jackson's war against the Bank of the United States, and finally the vitriolic public debates that led to secession and civil war. Other scholars have touched upon these events individually, but McDonald is the first to integrate all of them from the perspective of states' rights into one synthetic and magisterial vision.

The result is another brilliant study from a masterful historian writing on a subject of great import for Americans.

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- Sales Rank: #816633 in Books
- Brand: Brand: University Press of Kansas
- Published on: 2000-10-24
- Original language: English

- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .69" w x 5.51" l, .81 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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About the Author

Forrest McDonald is Distinguished Research Professor of History at the University of Alabama and author of sixteen books, including Pulitzer Prize finalist *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*; *The American Presidency*; *The Presidency of George Washington*; and *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson*. He was named by the NEH as the sixteenth Jefferson Lecturer, the nation's highest honor in the humanities.

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