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On (Non-)Resembling Representation

James Madison, an American Federalist, ‘Father of the Constitution’, and the 4th President of the United States, argues in the “Federalist Papers” in favor of representation that does not directly resemble the constituents. Madison and other Federalist supporters of a strong centralized government as presented in the Constitution put forward a system of separation of governmental powers and suggest non-resembling representation as means to control faction effects. In this paper, I will analyze Madison’s position using as a vehicle the system of representation in the modern Republic of Singapore which actualizes in certain respects Madison’s beliefs by lacking direct resemblance of the representatives to the constituents. I will use this example to shed light on defects of the Madisonian construction, namely that much decision-making power in the hands of governmental figures whose values do not directly and explicitly align with the will of the citizens can lead to poor judgement and growing public discontent. However, I will also acknowledge that the liberty placed upon the hopefully enlightened non-resembling representatives can also do much good as choices and decisions are made quickly and the state economy, for example, can undergo a rapid large boost as happened in Singapore. I will begin my argument by investigating the Theory of Faction and how Madison’s proposed changes to political representation will alleviate some of the present problems. I will define the role of the Madisonian representative and establish the conditions that

would best lead to the proclaimed benefits of Madison's assertion of non-resembling representation. I will explore an opposing view advanced by Brutus in support of resemblance, indicate some prevalent issues with this view that Madison's representation would ease/mitigate, and create an association between Madison's beliefs and the modern democracy in Singapore.

James Madison asserted that a necessary step to be taken in the founding of the new American republic is a change in the principle of representation. Along with the numerous other advantages he presents, he states that "a scheme of representation... promises the cure for [faction] which we are seeking" (The Federalist, 59). As defined by Madison, a political faction is "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a minority or majority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (56). Further, he claims that the unequal distribution of property in society may lead to the formation of factions where the unpropertied class forms a majority and therefore takes more control over the government. Madison identifies dispute over political life between factions, such as preferred religion for example, as critical disturbance to the new nation. He concludes that neither morals nor religion can control faction because these values are more effective in individuals than groups and a change in the system of representation would help alleviate the issues at hand by being flexible enough to control the struggle of opposing interests.

Broadly speaking, to Madison the role of a representative is to be a "fit character" (60) to represent the public's voice. From there, he argues that a large republic is more favorable over a small one in that there is more talent to choose from in terms of a representative and also more voters to make a better collective decision. Further, a large republic would present a greater variety of interests among the people and therefore it will be more difficult to find an everlasting

majority. Thus, a republic that is large in population is a condition likely to lead to successful representation. The ideal of this construct, and another condition leading to proper representation, is the independent representative of republican virtue who is tied to the public by duty, gratitude, and ambition serving them with impartiality and objectivity.

Other political philosophers such as Brutus, Robert Yates in real name, argue that representation should exist as a direct resemblance between representative and constituent. Although that is often the ideal and initial goal of representation within a democratic republic, the diversity of the citizens makes it impractical and close to impossible in actuality. A failed attempt toward this ideal often leads to corruption (Virtue Theory). Madison's solution is that representation should not work by resemblance to the constituent. Rather, representatives should filter and refine the public's outlook and "augment or improve the constituents' views using their wisdom and temperance".

In these words, Madison does not sound much different than Plato in his "Republic" of wisemen philosopher rulers (Book IV). In modern times, Singapore is sometimes used as a qualified case study. In the Republic of Singapore, the prime minister is head of the government and the country's most powerful political figure. Every five years or earlier, the Parliament of Singapore is dissolved and the leader of the majority party becomes the Prime Minister. With an unlimited amount of five-year terms permissible, the previous Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, served for 31 years, from 1959 to 1990.. In a real sense, soon after his first few terms Lee Kuan Yew became a Madisonian representative of the people with little resemblance anymore to the average constituent. Government is generally thought to exist 'for the people' and be run 'by the people' as stated by Abraham Lincoln post Madison's time. The Singaporean system (or tradition) of representation and Madison's own beliefs of proper representation seem

to align more strongly with the idea that government is ‘for the people’ rather than directly run ‘by the people’, as Brutus would argue. In both instances, there exists an example of representation where the figures in power theoretically filter and refine public views.

While in the United States the power of the ultimate representative, the president, is controlled using systems of checks and balances (also proposed by Madison), the Prime Minister of Singapore has more of an absolute say in political affairs, vastly amplified in my opinion by the lack of term limits and the resulting continuous accumulation of power in a single individual’s hands. This, however, will not be further addressed in this paper. Although the power distribution is significantly different between the American and Singaporean system of political representation, the effect of governing ‘for the people’ by wisemen is nonetheless present. Such lack of complete resemblance with the citizens may allot more decision-making ability/flexibility to the representatives themselves. In Singapore, this manifested itself with some impressive statistics in the economic growth of the country. Singapore became “the poster child for ‘the concept of good governance’”— the “per-capita GDP in Singapore grew 12-fold” and the infant-mortality rate fell from 27.3 deaths per 1,000 births to only 2.2 (The Atlantic). “The World Bank produces Governance Indicators metrics on government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption” focusing on what experts call the effectiveness of the governmental process itself and Singapore ranked in the top ten worldwide. However, in terms of personal liberties, Singapore scored in the bottom half worldwide. This leads one to acknowledge that while non-resembling democracy can quickly produce some good socioeconomic results, the power of the non-resembling governing members themselves may hinder the individual power and freedom of the constituents. Poor decisions can be made that do not comply with the wills and needs of the citizens. In a recent paper that I presented in the 2020

International Young Researchers Conference I quoted Nussbaum and concluded: “‘History has taught us to mistrust what the government [wisemen] will do when it tries to take control of our lives through superior wisdom’ (Nussbaum) ... [This] minimizes access to opportunity and, maintaining the class status quo, is promoted as natural. This leads to a growing, loud discontent with the ‘educated elite’ who are seen as indifferent, or disinterested, in serving the real needs of the working class. Social classes with minimal opportunity for mobility create class-type envy and hierarchies that may lead to hatred from below and discrimination from above” (Pados).

In summary, Madison argues that the formation of overpowering factions in the United States leads to a variety of fundamental problems that only a change in the system of representation can alleviate. A proper Madisonian representative is one who does not directly resemble the citizens and uses own wisdom and knowledge to filter and augment pervading public views serving with objectivity and impartiality. Further, Madison claims that a large republic is the ideal state for representation because it provides more talent to choose from and allows more voters to ensure a fit decision. The modern Republic of Singapore can be seen as an example where the prime minister acts as a Madisonian representative of highest power since never ending appointments by elections quickly dissolve any sense of constituent resemblance. Positive socioeconomic effects are seen of this governing and representing method, while adverse effects such as hindered personal freedoms persist as well.

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