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Constitutional Violence by David Bates

Reading Response

How war was fought during times of Enlightenment, and why it was fought in the first place are some of the main questions people have regarding this time period. It seems ironic, that a period that we draw much of our values from was filled with so much war and violence. David Bates aims to bridge the connection between warfare and Enlightenment values.

Bates begins by showing how the Enlightenment influenced political views and goals towards one object. That objective would prove to be “maintaining political unity”. Bates claims that sovereign states essentially wanted to maintain themselves more that support any particular group. This idea is the exact opposite from what I thought. I originally thought states’ main goals were to spread their ideals of politics onto neighboring states and cities. Bates goes on to describe how the Enlightenment encouraged states to think independently and as their own sovereign powers, whose main military goal was to preserve its own political unity. War, as described by Bates, was used during the time of the Enlightenment to allow states to become conscious of their own political goals, and utilize the philosophies of that time in order to establish themselves, and grow. This idea was new to me as I did not realize that states were still developing political mindsets in the 17th century. I was under the impression that they remained loyal to their monarchies.

Evidence in this journal was presented well and clearly. Bates had many footnotes that readers could refer to in order to gain further information of evidence. The logic and flow of his argument was smooth, greatly helped by the titled sections serving as transitions. Bates presented each idea clearly and provided a substantial amount of evidence from other scholars to prove his point. There is a possibility that bias could have skewed the argument as Bates includes his own opinion, but that is a rare occurrence.