This book, inspired perhaps by the shrill partisanship of the modern political era, retrieves the concept of moderation. A common word, moderation as a concept is usually misunderstood as some sort of vague residual centrism. For Robert Calhoon, it is more than a position—it is an outlook of benevolence and charity, chastened by the lessons of history, and marked by discretion. Moderate ideology is no spineless compromise but rather a principled position that is conciliatory, ethical, and rational. It is centrist not as a political tactic, but for moral and philosophical reasons. Although moderation has deep historical roots, as an ideology it never fully coalesced in the United States. Its effects have therefore often been subtle and difficult to recognize.

Calhoon traces moderation's course in America's first two centuries and shows that it is as deeply rooted as are other, more distinct elements of the national political culture. Most of his evidence is drawn from the southern backcountry, a region of ethnic diversity and political partisanship that was especially likely to benefit from more moderate thinking.

The first chapter discusses "Augustan Moderates," during the period of Britain's newfound power in the eighteenth century, which to many eyes resembled the Roman age of Caesar Augustus. Calhoon presents four examples where moderate state policy sought to temper strident situations in British North America. The first concerns the radical adjustments forced upon Thomas Nairne, John Stuart, and Charles Woodmason as they encountered ethnic diversity in the Southern backcountry. At the other end of the spectrum was the cosmopolitanism of royal governors Francis Fauquier of Virginia, Arthur Dobbs of North Carolina, Thomas Pownall of Massachusetts, and William Bull of South Carolina. Calhoon also examines the unusual situation of New York, Philadelphia, Newport, Norfolk, Savannah, Charleston, and Wilmington during the war for independence while under British military government. In all of these places, moderates strove to prevent the crisis from erupting into something more destructive.

The second chapter proceeds to examine moderate influences during the American Revolution and its aftermath. Here as in the previous chapter, Calhoon draws heavily upon his command of the British colonial backcountry. Some of these figures such as Presbyterian educator David Caldwell are familiar repositioned as part of a broader intellectual climate. More conservative figures, such as John Marshall, also receive sympathetic treatment for their contribution toward moderation.

The third chapter follows the geographical extension of moderation as the new republic expanded into the Mississippi Valley while yet balancing order and liberty. The vanguard of this effort was in places like western Pennsylvania and other backcountry districts where ethnic and religious diversity existed in close proximity. Calhoon also discusses the often overlooked topic of education and its influences upon public life. The section of this chapter discussing the Middle West is more narrow than anticipated, adhering primarily to the Northwest Ordinance and the figure of Abraham Lincoln. The tone is more suggestive than demonstrative.

The final chapter closely examines the multiple strands of Christianity in moderating the emerging national culture. Much of this information will be familiar to readers, but brought into an interesting synthesis. Instead of emphasizing religious
developments of the early national era as being novel, radical, or divisive, Calhoon points out the commonalities. Of particular note is the extended discussion of religious efforts to bridge the growing chasm around racial slavery, and the general striving toward a moral center in public life.

For scholars of the southern backcountry, *Political Moderation* will be most interesting for adding substantially to the region's intellectual history, arguably the most under-developed aspect of the field. The way ideas infiltrated the southern interior reminded this reviewer of parallel work such as that of Ann Smart Martin's *Buying into the Backcountry* for commercial goods. Many readers will struggle to hold and maintain the distinction between moderation and simple centrism, but if they can they will be rewarded with a subtle and fresh perspective on early American thought.

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