

The Mobile Government

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As far back as elementary school, we Americans have been taught about checks and balances. The preeminent one can be found in the image of “Blind Justice.” The concept behind “Lady Justice” dates back to ancient times. The blindfold was added in the middle ages. The statuary, for there are many versions, portrays a balance between the interests of two parties, hence the scales. What is often overlooked is that the person holding the scales is a woman, and she holds a sword. The implications are obvious. In America, as elsewhere, the blindfold represents the goal that whomever is meeting out justice is not influenced by those seeking justice.

We were also taught about the “Balance of Power” housed in the three branches of government and how each branch can act to “check” the actions of another. We can easily visualize this by substituting a balance made of three arms, hung from a chain. Neither of any two arms can outweigh the third arm when all are in balance. Just as with the blind Lady Justice, however, there is much more to our own story. Why we aren’t taught the intricacies of the balance in school is a mystery.

Within the three branches of government, there are additional checks and balances that are seldom recognized. For example, only the House of Representatives can propose a bill in which money is spent. Executive Orders can only be issued by the President. There are many more. In fact there are so many more that the three-armed balance is no longer the image we need to understand. But we can still return to elementary school to find a more accurate representation.

Remember that science project where the kids made a solar system out of foam balls? The model planetary system was created using something referred to as a “Mobile.” Most of these use coat-hangers and fishing line to hang the balls representing the planets. The key here is that it only works when everything is balanced. It’s the same with the form of government intended in the structure of the Constitution. Imagine, if you will, a mobile representing American Government. There would be, for starters, the three branches of government, but beneath them, there would be about 45 more balls representing other separations of power and responsibility. They all need to be in balance to keep the mobile from going off-kilter and collapsing. But, we’re not done yet. In addition to these federal balls, we need to add fifty more representing the states and a couple more representing the territories. It’s important to know that these balls do not fall beneath the federal balls, but are mixed in, more or less equally.

If you can picture that, you now have a working image of the vision given to us by the original thirteen colonies. And, as an added benefit, you can visualize how things can get messy when the balls begin to stick together, destroying the separation and balance of powers. The system was set up this way to prevent too much power from residing in one place; to prevent oligarchy and preserve individual freedom.