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Opinion

Allen Mendenhall: The Montgomery Federalist Society as a little platoon

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 08.31.25



The author with Judge Richard Anderson at a recent Montgomery Federalist Society meeting.

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Last week, at the Montgomery Federalist Society luncheon, the Honorable Judge Richard Anderson graced our assembly with a most illuminating discourse on the venerable principles of judicial ethics,

tracing their noble lineage from the sacred texts and the ancient codes of Babylon, through the Anglo-American constitutional tradition, to our present hour.

The address reminded me of a vital truth: that intellectual fellowship forms the very foundation on which gradual and enduring education is built.

Since June 2013, I have had the privilege of serving as president of the Montgomery Lawyers Chapter of the Federalist Society, which has convened faithfully each month, through fair weather and foul. Our membership has naturally evolved as colleagues have departed for different locations, have entered or left the halls of government, have taken their well-deserved retirement from the bench, or joined the ranks of the attorney general's office.

Yet through all these changes, certain faces remain constant, a testament to the enduring power of shared purpose and intellectual comradeship.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the 19th-century French observer of our democratic experiment, recognized the indispensable role of what he termed America's "mediating institutions," those vital associations that stand between the individual and the state, fostering civic virtue and democratic habits. Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish statesman and so-called father of modern conservatism, spoke of society's "little platoons," declaring them to be "the first principle of public affections."

Our modest gathering exemplifies precisely these concepts: a small but determined band of legal minds, united in their pursuit of constitutional understanding and the rule of law, serving as both a bulwark and a beacon in the great struggle for ordered liberty.

Indeed, from our ranks have emerged men and women of considerable distinction: some of our members – including our very officers – have ascended to the federal bench. Others serve in the current

presidential administration. We have counted among our numbers those who have labored in the corridors of the White House itself and advocates who have stood before the highest tribunal in the land to plead their causes before the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Our speakers have constituted a veritable parliament of learning: distinguished professors from the greatest universities and law schools of our nation, United States senators, judges both state and federal, constitutional officers, the intellectual captains of our foremost think tanks, titans of industry, men and women of letters, and those public intellectuals who shape the most pressing debates of our time.

Such has been the caliber of our proceedings that the watchful eye of C-Span has, on occasion, turned to us, broadcasting our deliberations to the nation at large. The subjects we address span the full breadth of constitutional and legal thought: a rich tapestry of ideas befitting a free society.

I am reminded of an amusing episode involving Richard Cohen, formerly of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who once dispatched a rather cryptic communication to me containing only two queries: “Is the event open to non-members?” and “When is it scheduled to end?”

One could not help but detect in these terse inquiries a certain suspicion, as though he imagined us to be some clandestine cabal, meeting in shadowed chambers to hatch dark conspiracies against the Republic!

But when I assured him that our gatherings were open to all – members and non-members of the Federalist Society alike, welcoming indeed people who possessed no legal training whatsoever – silence fell on our correspondence. He never graced us with his presence.

Since that curious exchange, we have welcomed attendees from across the political spectrum. Whatever preconceptions they may have harbored upon arrival, they have departed expressing genuine gratitude

for the elevated nature of our discussions and the rigorous intellectual framework within which we conduct our affairs.

Our chapter stands, in truth, as a sanctuary for all those possessed of that most precious quality: the sincere desire to learn.

What sustains our group is not merely the brilliance of our speakers or the prestige of our guests, but the simple and abiding strength of community itself. For it is within community that ideas are refined, friendships are forged, and the lonely burden of individual striving is transformed into a collective endeavor of lasting worth.

Ours is no solitary pursuit of abstract principle, but a common journey, animated by trust and sharpened by deliberation, wherein each voice – whether seasoned or newly joined – contributes to the harmony of the whole.

If the law is the architecture of liberty, then community is the mortar that holds its stones together. And in nurturing such bonds, we preserve not only the life of our chapter but, in some small measure, the vitality of our city, state, and country.

Allen Mendenhall is a Senior Advisor for the Capital Markets Initiative at the Heritage Foundation. A lawyer with a Ph.D. in English from Auburn University, he has taught at multiple colleges and universities across Alabama and is the author or editor of nine books. Learn more at AllenMendenhall.com.

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