Republicanism has enjoyed a revival of scholarly interest in several fields. In this book Nicholas Onuf provides the first major treatment of the republican way of thinking about law, politics and society in the context of international thought. The author tells two stories about republicanism, starting with Aristotle and culminating in the eighteenth century, when international thought became a distinctive enterprise. These two stories highlight the thought of Vattel and Kant, and by telling them side by side the author identifies a substantial but little-acknowledged legacy of republicanism in contemporary discussions of sovereignty, intervention, international society, peace, levels of analysis, and the global economy. In identifying this legacy, the author gives historical resonance to the constructivist approach to international theory for which he is already well known.
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The republican legacy in international thought

Nicholas Greenwood Onuf

Florida International University
For my brothers, Christopher Onuf and Peter Onuf,
and my sister-in-law, Kristin Onuf
and in memory of my sister, Stephanie Onuf,
and my sisters-in-law, Millicent Quammen and Juliette Scott
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Preface

I did not set out to write a book about republicanism or, for that matter, about international thought. My background and interests in international law and relations hardly prepared me to write about republicanism. Indeed, I am only somewhat better qualified to investigate the historical underpinnings of contemporary international thought, which have only recently become a matter of sustained scholarly attention. Instead, this book is an unintended consequence of what I suspect my colleagues have always thought was a whimsical decision.

More than a decade ago, my brother Peter Onuf, who is an historian of the early United States, and I decided that the best way to carry on our frequent but fragmentary conversations about our work was to collaborate on a scholarly project. We planned a book on the United States as a federal republic in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when liberal internationalism made its first appearance. We adopted this plan because it seemed to represent the closest convergence of our respective scholarly interests, and because no one else seems to have paid any mind to the subject. We soon found that we could proceed as planned only by writing a prior volume on how the United States became a federal republic in a time that we characterized as “the world of Vattel” – a world that came crashing down with the French Revolution.

To be able to do my share, I undertook a major program of reading in history, both of the founding period itself and of the political thought that led up to it. With Peter’s indispensable assistance and a propitiously timed Sabbatical leave, I learned enough to think that I had something useful to say about the federal republican experiment. I am especially grateful to Peter for his reassurance on this score. I also learned how much the materials that I had been working with bear on
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the world as scholars in International Law and Relations have come to understand it.

As I explored the relevance of the past on contemporary ways of thinking, Peter contributed far more to the development of my ideas than I can properly acknowledge. Without him, I would have had little to say on the subject of this book, and I would not have troubled to say it. Working with Peter, I realized that an outsider to any field is forgiven many mistakes. Where I have been rash in my claims or careless with evidence, I should have learned more from him about good scholarship than I have. In no event should he, or anyone else, be blamed for those failings of mine that this book reveals.

Before thinking in terms of book (something Peter was first to encourage), I had written several of its chapters for separate publication. Chapters 3 and 7 appeared in journals devoted to international law. The audience I then imagined for them is the small but growing band of scholars who find international legal theory intriguing, along with those few theorists of international relations whom the language of law does not deter. Frequent discussions with Christopher Rossi reinforced my confidence in the large claims of chapter 3. Detlev Vagts made a number of suggestions for the improvement of an earlier version of that chapter prior to its publication in the American Journal of International Law, Vol. 88 (1994), pp. 280–303. The American Society of International Law has granted permission to reprint material to which it holds the copyright. Lea Brilmayer invited me to present an early version of chapter 7 to the International Jurisprudence Colloquium at New York University Law School in 1992. I am grateful to Bruno Simma for the opportunity to fashion a revised version for publication in the European Journal of International Law, Vol. 5 (1994), pp. 1–19, parts of which are reprinted here by permission of Law Books in Europe.

Chapters 4, 5, 8 and 9 were written primarily for those in the field of International Relations who have an interest in the provenience of ideas that they use every day. Scholars in allied fields will recognize these ideas easily enough. I presented an early version of chapter 4 to David Campbell and his graduate students at Johns Hopkins University in 1993 and, thanks to Daniel Deudney and Friedrich Kratochwil, to graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania in 1994. R. B. J. Walker’s advice led to an improved version that appeared in Alternatives: Social Transformation and Humane Governance, Vol. 19 (1994), pp. 315–337. Copyright 1994 by Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., and reprinted with permission of the Publisher.
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I wrote chapter 6 as if International Law and International Relations were one field. I presented an early version of this material at a conference held at Dartmouth College in 1992. Gene Lyons and Michael Mastanduno organized the conference and edited the volume in which a later version appeared. I thank Oran Young for helpful comments and the Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to reprint parts of “Intervention for Common Good,” in Gene M. Lyons and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention* (1995).

I wrote chapters 1, 2 and 10 to complete the plan of this book. These chapters would do away with fields as such. Instead they seek for an audience anyone with an interest in republicanism and its relation to modernity. Some material in the first two chapters comes from a paper that I presented in 1994 at the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, in a seminar series devoted to “The Evolution of International Society.” I am grateful to Jarat Chopra, who organized the seminar series, and Susan Marks for their helpful comments on that paper.

Paul Wapner read a draft of chapter 1 and, adding his voice to Dan Deudney’s, persuaded me to treat contemporary communitarianism as a republican legacy with global implications. Dan’s enthusiasm for all things republican reinforced my own enthusiasm, and his very different conception of what a republic is about forced me to clarify my own conception. Chapter 1 also benefited from Kurt Burch’s gentle but telling
Preface

criticism. Indeed, the book as a whole has benefited from Kurt’s irrepressible interest in my work.

Discussions with David Blaney helped me to see Hegel as chapter 10 depicts him. David’s careful reading of an early version of that chapter helped me again. I presented a later version of chapter 10 at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in 1996, thanks to Paul Wapner, who invited me to join a panel that he chaired. More than anyone else, Paul is responsible for my interest in global civil society, which is a thematic concern of chapter 10.

Over the years of this project, a succession of superb graduate students assisted me: Elizabeth Cohn, who was instrumental in getting me to think about a book as such; Thomas Johnson, who wrote with me an earlier version of chapter 9 and helped me grapple with the ancient Greek debate over nature and convention; Jeffrey Bury, who helped give shape to several chapters; Harry Gould, who superintended production of a complete draft and made many substantive suggestions for its improvement. They and many other graduate students at American and Florida International Universities prompted me to clarify or extend my thoughts, often as a delayed reaction to their questions and comments. I am indebted to them all.

In writing this book, I owe no greater debt than to my brother. To honor it means a return to the long-deferred project that we decided on so many years ago – a study of the federal union in a world becoming recognizably modern. Now at least I am better equipped for the undertaking. In my life with Sandy Keowen, there are no debts. There is only love, and her continuing forbearance as Peter and I engage in our interminable, animated and impenetrable conversations whenever we can, wherever we are.

Bay Harbor Islands, Florida
Thanksgiving, 1996