

The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series. Volume 6: 8 February–24 October 1813. Edited by Angela Kreider and others. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008. Pp. [xi], 775. \$85.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-2756-5.)

The Papers of James Madison: Retirement Series. Volume 1: 4 March 1817–31 January 1820. Edited by David B. Mattern and others. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Pp. [xxxvi], 680. \$85.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-2849-4.)

These volumes of *The Papers of James Madison* again show the great benefit of the complete publication, thorough editing, and provision of unobtrusive context characteristic of the hundreds of volumes of documents from the early republic in the so-called founding series (the papers of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison). Editors Angela Kreider, David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, and their colleagues here do their work with the great skill and insight that make these volumes the bedrock for the research and understanding of public life in the founding era. With both the Secretary of State Series and the Presidential Series of *The Papers of James Madison* now half-way complete and the Retirement Series well underway, though the distance yet to go is great, the nature of the fine work in the volumes is now wonderfully clear—we can wish the editors Godspeed in their future work!

Volume 6 of the Presidential Series covers eight difficult, divisive, and largely unsuccessful months of the War of 1812, when Madison struggled with ambiguous diplomatic news from abroad, obstructive politicians at home, bad news from fighting on land and at sea, bickering generals, and a serious illness during a tense summer session of Congress. Many of the letters printed in full between Madison and other government officials, as well as the abstracts of formal communications between them, give readers a closer look at the conduct of the war than is available in any other place. Furthermore, letters and documents submitted to the executive department give the fullest view we have of the stresses, sufferings, political squabbles, aspirations, and complaints of various publics in the nation. Opinion about Madison's "life-threatening attack of 'bilious fever'" for three weeks in June–July 1813, for example, varied from patriotic prayers for his recovery to morbid hopes that he and sickly vice president Elbridge Gerry might both die so Federalists could maneuver in Congress to get a chief executive more to their liking (p. 393n1). The editors have rescued in a footnote what is the harshest critique I can recall by a Virginian of Madison: former political ally and Jefferson's close friend Wilson Cary Nicholas wrote that for a long time there had been "an end to all the ties of a personal nature between Mr. Madison and myself, as individuals we are probably separated for ever. . . . [I]f I was to nominate a President he is one of the last men in America I wou'd select. . . . In most things he has been feeble in some things childish and in almost every instance discovered a want of practical knowledge" (p. 49n3). Nonetheless, the best understanding we have of Madison's conduct of the War of 1812 emerges from this volume: he was determined, as a republican executive, to be responsive to regional and political interests in the country and even to obstructive tactics in Congress, while at the same time maintaining the essential free civil laws and institutions of the nation.

The first volume of the Retirement Series, though, is perhaps the richest volume yet of any in *The Papers of James Madison* for revealing Madison the human being and "Father of the Constitution," second only to Washington as a Founder of the nation and, by 1817, preeminent as an officer in guiding and securing its existence. The mayor of Washington, D.C., James H. Blake, sets the tone for the volume in his praise of Madison as he departed the capital for his Montpelier plantation: as Jefferson's "friend and successor, [Madison had] a like devotion to principle, softened by the same urbanity, the same hospitality, the same kindness, and permit us . . . to add [referring to Dolley Payne Madison] irradiated by a grace and benevolence that have inspired universal respect and friendship" (p. 1). The Madisons were the premier founding couple, ready now in good health to continue their public-spirited service to and embodiment of the nation in a new mode, receiving visitors at their home and corresponding with an ever-wider circle of friends, colleagues, and aspiring public figures than they had when in office. Letters seem to have passed as frequently between Madison and Jefferson and James Monroe as they did during Madison's presidency, and Madison's correspondence with John Quincy Adams, Richard Rush, and other important figures of Monroe's administration reveals that Madison was a very active elder statesman. In fact, the papers in this volume show as clearly as do the first volumes of the Retirement Series

of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, 2004–) how the twenty-four years of Jeffersonian Republican leadership (1801–1825) were a deliberate, self-conscious, and unified effort to work out in practice a republican ideology of self-government for the new nation.

In responding to often highly interesting and earnest correspondence, Madison exhibited his mature understanding of the nature of the Union. For example, in a rich exchange with John Adams, Madison cordially agreed with the aged ex-Revolutionary and ex-president that they shared a rejection of the Marquis de Condorcet's idea of government "in one Center" and a belief that a mixed government of checks and balances was much better (p. 34). Though to "[place] the powers of Government in different depositories, as means of controuling the impulse and sympathy of the passions," thus limiting government, was important, Madison added that the checks also "afford[ed] to reason, better opportunities for asserting its prerogatives" (p. 50). Madison corresponded with individuals across the country, and even around the world, about the demise of slavery, the expansion of education, the growth of civil institutions in the new western states, the enlarging and increasing sophistication of the American economy, and other ways for reason to assert its prerogatives for the public good—the essence of Madison's lifelong constitutionalism.

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