

The Papers of James Madison. Volume 17: 31 March 1797–3 March 1801 with a Supplement 22 January 1778–9 August 1795. Edited by DAVID B. MATTERN, J. C. A. STAGG, JEANNE K. CROSS, and SUSAN HOLBROOK PERDUE. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991. xxviii, 610 pp. \$47.50.

FEW historical works have as compelling a narrative as this volume of documents from the years of James Madison's "retirement" from public office. In this richly annotated collection of letters and public papers, Madison and his political allies, Thomas Jefferson, John Dawson, and James Monroe, faced what they considered a Federalist assault on liberty and republican government. Monroe wondered in 1797, as the Federalists started to expand the military and stifle domestic dissent, if "this is the country we inhabited 12. or 15. years ago," or if "we have not by some accident been thrown to another region of the globe, or even some other planet" (p. 60). Madison's retirement to Montpelier had left the Republicans without their foremost public advocate, and Jefferson told him in April 1798 that "[t]he times do not admit of the inactivity of such talents as yours" and urged him "[f]or heaven's sake then, take up your pen, and do not desert the public cause altogether" (pp. 116, 107).

Madison heeded the call with two essays, "Foreign Influence" (pp. 214–20) and "Political Reflections" (pp. 237–43), and we see why Jefferson wanted Madison back in action. These two anonymous essays stand beside Madison's other great political writings advancing the cause of liberty and republican government. In "Foreign Influence" Madison warned of British attempts at "recolonizing the American character" (p. 219) and asked whether Britain or France was more likely to cause the people's disaffection from their government, or the government's from the people. Interna-

tional affairs would dominate Madison's terms as secretary of state and president more than they would any administration until the twentieth century, so these essays are important additions to the Madison canon, because they help us understand Madison's thoughts on the interrelationship between international and domestic politics. "Political Reflections" stands with *Federalist* 10 and the "Report of 1800" (pp. 307–50) as a masterpiece of political writing, as he looked at France and asked if responsible elected rulers were capable of abusing their trust. Though Madison was writing about revolutionary France, he was talking about Federalist America. "It is such things as these the people want," Jefferson wrote, "Reason, not disgusting blackguardism" (p. 226).

This volume is rewarding both for its glimpses into the statesmen's minds and for glimpses into their lives. Jefferson began a letter reporting on the Alien and Sedition Acts with a long discourse on door hinges and an account of a shopping expedition to find the right ones for Madison's house. With another letter Jefferson sent forty pounds of nails and a draft of the Kentucky Resolutions, but his main point in writing was to ask Madison to send the man laying floors at Montpelier to Monticello, because Jefferson's floors had to be done while he was at home. Writing their great political treatises and organizing their electoral triumph, they also discussed door hinges and chimneys, frosts and hickory leaves, threshing machines and water bellows.

Despite Federalist threats to liberty and Gabriel Prosser's August 1800 revolt against their society, Madison and his circle were confident men, certain that their own interpretations of the Constitution would prevail, that the government they had created would have "every power for its great purposes and not more" (p. 377). Truth would prevail, these men knew, and while the Federal-

ists guarded against insurrection and sedition, Madison responded with confidence in the people's ability to listen to reason. "What a lesson to America & the world," Madison wrote when Jefferson's peaceful inauguration was assured, "is given by the efficacy of the public will when there is no army to be turned against it" (p. 475).

ROBERT J. ALLISON
Harvard University