

*The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series. Vol. 3: 3 November 1810–4 November 1811.* Edited by J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue. (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996. Pp. xlv, 584. \$55.00, ISBN 0-8139-1632-1.)

Like the most recent volume of the Secretary of State Series, this volume of *The Papers of James Madison* finds Madison trying to manage the affairs of the new nation in the midst of perilous world and frontier circumstances over which he has very little control. The death struggle between Napoleonic France and Great Britain devastated American commerce on the high seas; Louisiana and Florida were in chaos as Spanish authority over the Gulf Coast declined; Mexico, Venezuela, and other parts of Latin America were in revolt; and American Indians in the Northwest—often allied with the British in Canada—threatened the region between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes. This volume also finds Madison trying desperately to ascertain what is going

on in places out of communication for months at a time and then trying to shape responses with woefully inadequate means. The result was often missed opportunities, frustration, and failure.

The documents presented, then, offer few glimpses of Madison's creative intellect (no constitution or bills of rights to draft or defend, etc.), nor are there any visionary or triumphant manifestos of republican government and American nationhood, as we might expect from a founding father. What we do have, though, is a firsthand and intimate look at how the leading theorist of American constitutional government conducted its executive branch under trying circumstances. Clearly implicit is Madison's firm commitment to the need for the president to take the lead, not in commanding Congress or the people (he knew that was unauthorized, of course), but in guiding and persuading them to proper courses of action. He also took pains to carry out his responsibilities in scrupulous accord with the law. He was, that is, the faithful republican executive, entirely in tune with his colleagues—Thomas Jefferson, Albert Gallatin, and James Monroe—and as intent as they were on showing that elective government could lead to good and effective rule. Though Madison lacked Jefferson's magnetic personal style in managing colleagues and his better luck in avoiding factional quarrels, there is no hint in this volume that the third and fourth presidents were anything but utterly in accord in theory and practice. Madison's annual message of December 1810, for example, is thoroughly Jeffersonian in its purpose and approach to government.

The almost total focus of the volume on the conduct of executive office suggests that the editors continue to struggle with a weight of material that contains very little so-called deep Madison. Indeed, most of the documents are addressed *to* him, as would naturally be the case for the paper on his desk, and even documents written by him are generally formal and administrative rather than expository or reflective. Many of the letters addressed to him—from American ministers in London or Paris, from informants around the world, from political allies throughout the nation, from American officials in threatened frontier posts—though important and informative nonetheless require space-saving summary. (Sometimes, though, the commentary is pungent and to the point, as Benjamin Hawkins's blast at fired Secretary of State Robert Smith's pamphlet attacking Madison: "a weak wicked and ill judged thing engendered in the basest passions [that] would recoil on and punish its author" [p. 485]).

The editing continues to be at once astonishingly learned and blessedly brief in helping the reader understand the documents. If there is a flaw it is occasionally in leaving the reader wondering about some person or some event that is mentioned in the document. But since the documents refer to a multitude of people and happenings crowding for the president's attention, it would be impossible and intrusive to identify or explain them all. On the whole, the editors' judgments are fine-tuned and provide the information that is needed in order to understand the conduct of the presidency in difficult

times and in a way that remained faithful to republican principles. We can be grateful to the editors for another superb volume that lets us see how executive office worked in the early republic.

Syracuse University

RALPH KETCHAM