

The Papers of James Madison: Secretary of State Series. Volume IV: 8 October 1802–15 May 1803. Edited by Mary A. Hackett, J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, Susan Holbrook Perdue, and Ellen J. Barber. (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998. Pp. xliv, 673. \$65.00, ISBN 0-8139-1747-6.)

For a book that covers only seven months in a long series, this volume has a remarkable topical unity: it documents the circumstances and negotiations of the Louisiana Purchase during the spring of 1803. This dramatic and vastly significant event, unanticipated as this volume opens, dominated Madison's conversations in Washington and the flow of paper across his desk at the Department of State. Looming behind everything was Napoleon's intent to establish a French empire in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico that would be, he and his advisors hoped, what Talleyrand called a "wall of brass forever impenetrable to the combined efforts of England and America" (quoted in Irving Brant, *James Madison: Secretary of State, 1801–1809* [New York, 1953], 69). President Jefferson and Secretary Madison recognized the danger that this posed to American westward expansion and to its international relations. Hence when events reached a climax in late 1802, the administration—assuming that France itself would soon actually take control of New Orleans from Spain—instructed the American minister in Paris, Robert R. Livingston, to increase his efforts to purchase the city and its strategic environs (including West Florida) in order to forestall the palpable threat posed by Napoleon's ambitions.

This volume records the determination of the Jeffersonian administration to protect the American presence in the Mississippi Valley. The rest of the momentous negotiations is fully documented: James Monroe is appointed to work with Livingston in Paris; Napoleon's plans falter when his armies are defeated in Saint-Domingue and the relief force is icebound in Dutch harbors; and Monroe and Livingston with awe and near disbelief respond quickly and successfully to the French offer to sell not only New Orleans but all of the Louisiana territory. We read not only the dispatches Madison wrote and received from Paris, New Orleans, Madrid, London, and elsewhere, but also his delicate communications with the French minister in Washington and the voluminous reports he received from American consuls and others around the globe about dangerous and threatening crosscurrents as France and Britain prepared to renew their worldwide war. The months covered in this volume are thus as nerve-racking, portentous, and ultimately triumphant as any in American history.

By recording the events and correspondence day by day through publication of original documents in context, the editors furnish remarkable tools for the historian. Thousands of clarifying details needed to understand the business of the State Department are provided in the footnotes that make it possible to use the volume as a sort of reference work. A detailed index further facilitates this use. The volume is in fact almost entirely a record of the business and conduct of the State Department; the letters of a personal nature are perhaps less than a dozen in all. Most of this diplomatic correspondence speaks of such matters as trade, reparation settlements under previous treaties, relief of stranded seamen, and payment of consuls, all of which required

Madison's attention if not always response. Altogether this volume provides a previously unavailable look at the day-to-day conduct of the premier department of American government during a vital period.

The same questions arise about the value and editing of this volume as about earlier ones in the series. There is virtually nothing in it of Madison's private life or opinions (a few letters about the settlement of his father's estate are exceptions), and even his long letters on diplomacy, though important and influential, are both rather formal and for the most part have long been in print. So we learn very little about Madison's more profound thought and even very little in general that is not previously pretty well known. What we do get, though, is invaluable detail, nuance, and precision. The prickly clash of egos between Livingston and Monroe over "credit" for the Louisiana Purchase, for example, each with an eye out for their own presidential aspirations, is fully, painfully evident. Scholars can now see the sorry side of this "collaboration" in embarrassing detail. Largely validated, too, in the correspondence presented here, is Irving Brant's thesis of nearly a half century ago: that it was in fact Madison's arguments and even politely phrased menaces (about thousands of armed American militiamen ready to seize New Orleans) to French Minister Louis-André Pichon in Washington and conveyed to Talleyrand and Napoleon, that most helped to persuade the French to abandon their plan to place a "brass rail" across American westward expansion. (Evident, too, of course, is that French defeat in Saint-Domingue, ice in Dutch harbors, and the need for cash to renew his European wars of conquest did much more to divert Napoleon's ambitions than did American diplomacy.) In any case, there is everything to praise and very little to complain about in the superb editorial presentation of these vital records of early American government.

The Maxwell School, Syracuse University

RALPH KETCHAM