

The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series, Vol. 9: ***September 1791-February 1792***. Edited by Philander D. Chase, Dorothy Twohig, *et al.* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000, Pp. 672.\$ 62.50.)

The Papers of James Madison, Secretary of State Series, Vol. 5: ***May-October 1803***. Edited by J. C. A. Stagg, *et al.* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000, Pp. 704. \$67.50.)

These two carefully edited and annotated volumes provide splendid windows into the early national statesmanship of founding fathers George Washington and James Madison. During the time periods covered, both men demonstrated remarkable political acumen, but with different results: in 1791-1792, President Washington experienced growing difficulty and frustration over domestic issues, while in 1802-1803, Secretary of State James Madison enjoyed remarkable diplomatic success.

Three issues in particular dogged President Washington from October 1791 to February 1792: conflict among those responsible for developing the

Federal District, General Arthur St. Clair's defeat by the western Indians, and a contest with the U. S. Senate over foreign policy powers.

Volume 9 of the *Presidential Series* illustrates Washington's constant involvement with the laying out and building of the District of Columbia. Indeed, the president became much more involved than he wanted or expected to be, thanks to the refusal of planner Pierre Charles L'Enfant and his subordinates to work under direction of the Federal District Commissioners. Rather than obey his superiors, the planner hoped to answer directly to the president. L'Enfant differed with the commissioners, preferring to finance construction through foreign loans rather than through land sales and favoring an ambitious building schedule. Determined to control events, he obstructed the sale of lots and even demolished a private dwelling being built in the path of a projected District street without authorization. Washington closely followed the controversy, exchanging a stream of letters with all parties to the dispute, patiently trying to achieve a reconciliation. Hoping to retain the talented but ungovernable planner, the president nevertheless insisted on obedience to the commissioners. When L'Enfant refused to accept these terms, Washington fired him.

Even more disheartening, the president in December 1791 received the shocking news that General Arthur St. Clair's party had been defeated by the western Indians the previous month on the Wabash River. The administration responded to this crisis by proposing to Congress a new and more vigorous military campaign to subdue the frontier foe. When several congressmen voiced opposition to what they considered an immoral and bankrupt policy, Washington took his case to the public, an unprecedented step. Secretary of War Henry Knox published a defense of the administration's actions in the newspapers, along with Washington's carefully drafted cover letter.

In making overdue diplomatic appointments, Washington clashed with the Senate over foreign policy powers. The issue involved whether the Senate should specify the location and grade of diplomats, leaving the president merely to fill the openings it created, or whether the executive possessed the authority to recognize overseas nations, and the Senate merely the power to confirm nominees. The upper house approved the appointments of Thomas Pinckney to Great Britain and Gouverneur Morris to France only after the administration convinced it of the need for such representation abroad. The larger constitutional question of whether the president or Senate should recognize foreign nations remained unresolved, however.

Washington's handling of these and other events illustrates his presidential leadership style, an area where historians only recently have

accorded him the high marks he deserves. To address thorny issues, he began, late in 1791, to summon his department heads for group consultations. Thus evolved the group advisory board that we now know as the cabinet. The president employed such seemingly modern leadership devices as ghost writers, informal advisors, and hidden-hand leadership. He also resorted to lightning rods, asking his personal secretary, Tobias Lear, to sign letters dealing with matters about which Washington did not wish to go on record.

Although not formally a member of the administration, Congressman James Madison of Virginia served as an informal advisor to Washington. By late 1791, however, with the executive department heads now in office and cabinet meetings taking place, Madison no longer played the central role he had in 1789. As an insider in the Washington administration, and later as secretary of state under President Thomas Jefferson, Madison helped to shape the executive branch that he himself took over in 1809. Having spent eight years in Congress (1789-1797), Madison knew well the issues he would confront as secretary of state.

Covering May through October 1803, Volume Five of the *Secretary of State Series* documents one of the most successful periods in American foreign policy. In July, word arrived in Washington that France had agreed to sell Louisiana to the United States for 15 million dollars, a diplomatic breakthrough that resulted from bold negotiations. With the retrocession of Louisiana from Spain to France, and the subsequent closing of the Port of New Orleans to American shipping by the Spanish Intendant stationed there, the Jefferson administration had resolved to defend western commerce. Despite frontier outrage and Federalist hawkishness in Congress, the administration had pursued a pacific settlement by sending James Monroe to join Robert R. Livingston in Paris, empowered to purchase New Orleans and West Florida for two million dollars. Napoleon offered a much better deal—all of Louisiana for 15 million dollars—which Monroe and Livingston readily accepted. While the United States had made clear that it would protect its vital interests at all costs, France's fear of British power helped produce the generous offer. Madison admitted that the global situation worked to America's advantage when he wrote that "political management consists rather in taking advantage of events as they occur, than in precisely foreseeing or inviting them" (112). Nevertheless, the achievement was an impressive one for a secretary of state who had never traveled outside the country, let alone served as an overseas diplomat.

Madison's diplomatic success also owed much to the resourcefulness of his foreign ministers, especially Robert R. Livingston and James Monroe. Madison's attempts to instruct his diplomats were hampered by the fact that his letters took several weeks to reach their overseas destinations. As a

result, the secretary of state gave multiple layers of contingent directives that depended on the status of rapidly changing events with which he could not keep up to date. Even instructions granting wide discretion often made little difference, however, because they often arrived too late to help Livingston and Monroe, who already had been forced to make difficult decisions on their own. Jealous quibbles over credit for negotiating the Louisiana Purchase further complicated the diplomatic mission. Madison confidentially, and perhaps unjustly, sided with his friend Monroe in these disputes, fearing that Livingston would assist the Federalists in attacking the administration's handling of the negotiations.

Madison's handling of the Louisiana Purchase provides a window into his constitutional thinking. At no time prior to the arrival of the treaty from France did Madison ever question the constitutionality of a federal land purchase, the administration's objective from the outset. But when faced with the actual transaction, the secretary of state wavered, toying with the idea of a constitutional amendment to legitimize the acquisition, even preparing a draft. Did Madison pursue this course because of his own or Jefferson's strict constructionism, or to silence partisan attacks? Ultimately, the administration dropped the amendment proposal. Madison's actions were not those of a hypocrite jettisoning his ideologies when they became inconvenient, but those of a man struggling to achieve theoretical consistency in a pragmatic world. Madison frequently grappled with dilemmas of this nature during his five decades of public service. Instead of being praised for his intellectual honesty, he has often been unfairly accused of being either inconsistent or downright insincere.

Madison's stubborn diplomacy persisted until the United States took possession of Louisiana. The administration initially had hoped to take advantage of events by gaining Florida as well, but Spanish anger at the sale of Louisiana convinced Madison that additional acquisitions would have to await a more favorable time. When Spain protested that the Purchase violated its retrocession of Louisiana to France, however, Madison point-blank warned Spanish officials to mind their own business and informed them that the United States would answer resistance with force. When the French *charge d'affaires*, Louis-Andre Pichon, tried to add to the Purchase treaty additional provisions concerning payment, moreover, Madison deftly countered with additional United States demands. Faced with the secretary of state's intransigence, Pichon reluctantly ratified the treaty as originally negotiated.

The editors of these volumes have judiciously handled a large quantity of complicated material. The documents appear in chronological order, transcribed as literally as possible, followed by careful and judicious annotation. In selecting among the voluminous papers, the editors omitted

several categories of routine administrative items and many letters from office seekers. Brief editorial notes provide essential background and context where necessary. These definitive letterpress editions, showing the breadth and scope of executive functions, will be invaluable not just to presidential scholars, but to anyone interested in the early republic.

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