

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Mitchell Snay

The Papers of George Washington: Presidential Series: Volume 7: December 1790-March 1791. Edited By Jack D. Warren. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998. Pp. xxxii, 649. \$60.00.)

The Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series: Volume 1: March-December, 1797. Edited By W.W. Abbot. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998. Pp. xxvi, 566. Tables. \$55.00.)

The Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series: Volume 2: January-September, 1798. Edited by W.W. Abbot. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998. Pp. xxvi, 646. \$55.00.)

The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 27: September-December, 1793. Edited by John Catanzariti. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Pp. lii, 965. Illustrations, appendices. \$75.00.)

The Papers of James Madison: Secretary of State Series: Volume 4: 8 October, 1802 to 15 May, 1803. Edited by Mary A. Hackett, J.C.A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, Susan Holbrook Perdue, Ellen J. Barber. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998. Pp. xli, 673. \$65.00.)

These handsomely produced and impressive volumes cover various aspects of the careers of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. They range from three volumes dealing with Washington's early presidency and the first year and a half of his retirement to one volume each devoted to short stints of Jefferson's and Madison's service as secretary of state.

Foreign affairs, as might be expected, runs through all the volumes with the greater focus on relations with England and France and the efforts of the United States not to become entangled in the great European wars that lasted almost through the entire period. Domestic politics, however, was closely tied to America's foreign relations, and various crises with England and France polarized the proto-parties, exaggerated sectional differences, and made most Americans forget the broad area of consensus and agreement they shared. And finally, each of the three men was heavily engaged in successfully running his plantations, often as an absentee

owner. Their correspondence, especially in the Washington and Jefferson volumes, reflected the myriad of private and business details that they had to deal with in addition to their busy public duties.

Public finance, foreign relations, Indian policy, and plans for the future Federal City dominated the attention of Washington during the winter months of 1790-1791. Alexander Hamilton's funding and assumption plans sparked opposition outside of Congress. Washington was presented with joint resolutions from the Virginia legislature protesting that the policies must "produce one or other of two evils—the Prostration of Agriculture at the feet of Commerce, or a change in the present form of Federal Government, fatal to the existence of American liberty" (178). Debate over public finance continued as Hamilton's bill to create the Bank of the United States passed Congress. Washington, before he signed the bill into law, solicited the advice of his cabinet and was told by Jefferson that the "incorporation of a bank, & the powers assumed by this bill, have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the U.S. by the Constitution" (349). Hamilton's carefully reasoned counter-argument, "one of the most important state papers produced during the Washington administration" (422) according to the editors, established a powerful rationale for implied powers: "If the end be clearly comprehended within any of the specified powers, and if the measure have an obvious relation to that end, and is not forbidden by any particular provision of the constitution; it may safely be deemed to come within the compass of the national authority" (432).

Less weighty concerns help round out a more complete image of the Father of our Country, including Washington paying twenty dollars for a set of dentures crafted by John Greenwood of New York that included both ivory and human teeth.

The volume of Jefferson papers covers the period over two years later as the secretary of state prepared to retire from public life. Attempting to maintain the United States' delicate neutrality between France and England occupied much of Jefferson's official duties during his remaining months in office, including his almost futile efforts to restrain the intemperate and indiscreet French minister, Edmond Charles Genet. Jefferson announced to Genet the request for his recall in a stiff and rebuking letter on September 7, 1793, and warned the Frenchman that his continuance would be permitted until a replacement arrived "so long as . . . [his actions] shall be restrained within the limits of the law as heretofore announced to you, and shall be of the tenor usually observed towards independent nations by the representative of a friendly power residing with them"(52). The intrepid Genet, however, was not to be suppressed and Jefferson's correspondence

was full of letters discussing violations of American neutrality by French privateers as well as having to warn Isaac Shelby, the governor of Kentucky, about French plans to recruit Kentuckians in an effort to mount a campaign against Spanish Louisiana. "I hope," Jefferson wrote, "that the citizens of Kentucky will not be decoyed into any participation in these illegal enterprizes against the peace of their country, by any effect they may expect from them on the navigation of the Mississippi" (312).

These last months of 1793 were also critical in the shaping of an incipient Republican opposition to the Washington Administration. Jefferson and Madison, as well as some of their closest allies, were deeply concerned that supporters of France would be tainted and discredited by their support of the intemperate Genet, and critics of Genet would not distinguish between the French minister and the country he represented. In addition, Madison laid the groundwork for an early opposition strategy, when he complained to Jefferson that the "Country is too much uninformed, and too inert to speak for itself; and the language of the towns which are generally directed by an adverse interest will insidiously inflame the evil." It was essential therefore, he argued, that France and the United States government understand "the real sentiments of the people" (16). And to that end a series of county meetings were to be organized in Virginia.

Jefferson had hoped to end his service in the cabinet in September of 1793, but had stayed on at Washington's urging. While he dutifully, and for the most part successfully, attended to a growing foreign policy crisis that threatened to draw the United States into the war between England and revolutionary France, Jefferson longed for the peace and quiet of retirement at Monticello. To one correspondent he declared that by the first of the year he would "be liberated from the hated occupations of politics, and [would] sink into the bosom of my family, my farm and my books" (449). And to another, he reported that he was anticipating returning to Virginia "where I hope to spend the remainder of my days, in occupations infinitely more pleasing than those to which I have sacrificed 18. Years of the prime of my life; I might rather say 24. of them" (637).

On the one hand, since Jefferson would return to national politics within three years and he often engaged in hyperbole, it is difficult to take his lamentations seriously. Yet his distaste for and indeed repugnance of the agitation and growing contentiousness of public life was no doubt deeply and genuinely felt. But ultimately, as later volumes will demonstrate, his sense of duty prevailed over a life of retirement.

The two volumes of the Washington papers that deal with his retirement up to September 1798 reflect his desire to concentrate on

repairing and renovating his plantation, which he felt had deteriorated in his absence. But close ties to public life were not easily broken as he urged his correspondents (among others, Timothy Pickering, Oliver Wolcott, Jr., and James McHenry) to keep him abreast of the growing crisis with France as well as the bitter internecine disputes that developed among the Federalists.

As the foreign policy crisis with France heated up in 1797 and 1798, Washington was increasingly drawn back into a discussion of public policy and eventually accepted the post of lieutenant general in command of the New Army, organized to meet the threat of a possible French invasion after the XYZ Affair. Washington's letters during this period reveal his most partisan side, complaining that the opposition to the Adams Administration were "men who are governed more by passion & party views than by the dictates of justice, temperance & sound policy" (I, 501).

Nowhere was Washington's growing anger more apparent than in his private notations on the published edition of James Monroe's defense of his conduct in France. Monroe, who had been appointed by Washington to be minister to France, was recalled in disgrace after it had been determined that he had not been vigorous enough in support of the administration's policies, especially the Jay Treaty with England. In response, Monroe wrote a lengthy defense of his actions. After receiving a copy, Washington made extensive annotations that led the editors of this volume to conclude that: "GW's remarks on Monroe and his book, taken together, comprise the most extended, unremitting, and pointed use of taunts and jibes, sarcasm, and scathing criticism in all his writings" (II, 170n). Washington, in his notes defended the Jay Treaty against Monroe's accusations, and referred, numerous times, to the Republican opposition as "the French Party" (i.e., II, 183). Responding to Monroe's criticism of the instructions he had received from the administration, Washington charged that "None but a person incompetent to judge, or blinded by party views, cd have misconstrued as he did" (II, 197).

Later in 1798, the Adams administration and the Federalist-dominated Congress, in response to the deepening crisis with France, passed sweeping defense measures that included organizing the New Army with Washington at its head. Washington wanted Hamilton as second in command, but a dispute over seniority broke out, especially between Hamilton and Henry Knox, a major general during the Revolution and Washington's secretary of war. Knox, insulted by Hamilton's elevation over him, enlisted the aid of Adams. Washington's correspondence was filled with letters, not only from Knox and Hamilton, but from members of Adams' cabinet who were

sympathetic to Hamilton's ambitions. The increasingly frustrated Washington attempted to assuage the hurt feelings of Knox and could barely conceal his anger over the incompetence of McHenry. "To this moment," he protested to the secretary of war, "I am ignorant of every step that has been taken in the appointment of the Battalion Officers; for recruiting the Men—fixing the places of Rendezvous &ca" (II, 509). In addition, Washington bitterly complained that valuable time had been lost in organizing the army and that some of the nominated general officers were unfit.

The volume of the Madison papers covers the period from early October 1802 to the middle of May 1803. During this seven month period, Madison as secretary of state was occupied with the conflict with the Barbary powers in North Africa, the Spanish withdrawal of America's right to deposit goods in New Orleans, the domestic political reaction to this crisis, and the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France.

Foreign control of the Mississippi River and New Orleans had been a deep source of contention since the American Revolution. The 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo negotiated by Thomas Pinckney had presumably settled the issue and had granted United State citizens full use of the river and the right of deposit at New Orleans. In the fall of 1802, however, Spain rescinded America's right of deposit, which again aroused and aggravated long-standing fears of western separation and/or western strikes against Spanish territory. Federalist Senator James Ross from Pennsylvania attempted to make political capital out of the crisis by introducing a resolution in the Senate authorizing the president "to take immediate possession of such place or places" in New Orleans or adjacent territories as he deemed fit and to call into service a militia of up to fifty thousand men from the southwestern states and Mississippi Territory to be used in conjunction with the army and navy" (349n).

Ross's resolutions failed, and James Monroe, in a letter to Madison, labeled them as reckless measures put forth by "a party wh. has become bold by despair" (395). Monroe, who was about to leave for France to negotiate a cession of New Orleans and East and West Florida to the United States, worried that the Ross Resolutions had raised the expectations of western Americans, and if his mission failed, the Federalists would "derive advantage from its temerity at the expense of the admin." (395). Indeed Madison was told, a diplomatic failure might bring about a catastrophic domestic political reversal. The Federalists, "the enemies of free govt. wod. get into power," which would be "the greatest calamity that cod. befall us. War wod. follow and a thousand consequences wh. under

their auspices woud. be ruinous. If war is to take place it is better that it be under a republican admin., for then it might be directed to necessary useful objects only and terminated when they were obtained" (396).

All of the volumes under review offer revealing insights into the public and private lives of three of the first four presidents. All three men, as it was true of most if not all of their contemporaries, uneasily moved in an unfamiliar political universe without familiar guideposts. A lack of perceived consensus between the adherents of the reluctantly, and almost inadvertently, organized proto-parties was aggravated by a series of union-threatening crises after 1789. This led them quite naturally to assume the perspective of true believers, demonizing their opponents and confusing their own partisan hegemony with the security and future of the republic.

These superbly rich volumes are an example of historical editing at its finest. The editors provide an elaborate, though not intrusive, scholarly commentary that allows the reader to understand and appreciate the context in which each document was written.

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