

THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON, PRESIDENTIAL SERIES, VOLUME 3: NOVEMBER 3, 1810-NOVEMBER 4, 1811. Edited by J. C. A. Stagg. (Charlottesville, Va., and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996. xiii, 584 pp. Preface, acknowledgments, editorial method, Madison chronology, significant federal officers, index. Cloth \$55.00, ISBN 0-8139-1632-1).

"It is . . . difficult to understand the meaning of Bonaparte towards us," complained James Madison in the spring of 1811 to his predecessor, and ongoing advisor, Thomas Jefferson. It was a matter that would preoccupy him throughout the part of his

presidency covered in this most recent volume of what has become one of the outstanding editorial projects of our time. Madison had good reason to be anxious: he had committed himself to a policy of economic pressure on Great Britain that would very likely lead to war, and he had done so upon promises from Napoleon that were, to put it charitably, open to interpretation. While students of the subject will find no hitherto undiscovered key to Madison's march into the unpopular war that has so conditioned his posthumous standing, they will better appreciate how difficult it was for him to engage in aggressive diplomacy against such formidable competition, with decent intelligence an ocean away.

Nearer at hand were the Floridas, another intriguing area of this year of Madison's presidency. Readers will recall that here, in the "residue of Louisiana," the United States was pecking away at the periphery of decrepit Spain. The president may have been playing a deep game for control of East Florida, as many suspected at the time (Jefferson not only suspected, he *hoped*, counseling only that it be done, as he put it, "with closed doors"). If the suspicions were correct, this volume does not turn up the hole card. On the other hand, it certainly shows that the government was sending nothing that might be construed as a negative signal to anyone interested in repeating the West Florida filibustering actions. Readers with an interest in Louisiana should find this tangential material absorbing, and they will find much else in the volume that relates even more directly to the early history of the state. Sadly—though necessarily, given the hard editorial decisions that had to be made with such a huge collection of documents—they will also find that much of it is abbreviated, as most previously published material (the letters from Governor Claiborne in the *Territorial Papers of the United States*, for example) is here only in abstracted form.

Deteriorating foreign policy, surreptitious expansionism, and other high profile features of the year get a great deal of attention here, as one would expect. But an equally good reason to pick up a volume such as this is to get a feel for the full range of activities and concerns that filled the day of a president in the early national period. Architect Benjamin Latrobe reports in enthusiastic detail about the new buildings going up in the capital city; by 1814, there would be much more for the British to burn. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin presides over

the dismantling of the Bank of the United States, the center of so much controversy since its inception and a last link with the Washington years. The English expatriate Thomas Cooper asks the president (the *president!*) to help him track down a load of undelivered books. One "Honestus," an apparent lunatic, calls Madison a "canting Scab". Old friend James Monroe returns from his self-imposed exile (his 1806 negotiations with Great Britain had come to nothing, for which he blamed then-Secretary of State Madison) to join Madison's cabinet. The president, still holding firm on his commitment to separation of church and state, vetoes a bill granting acreage to a Baptist church—for which he receives letters of support from *other* Baptist churches.

Lastly, one can open the volume anywhere and join the continuing seminar on sheep. "Retournons à nos Moutons," says Richard Peters of Philadelphia, and return the reader will, to varieties, diseases, prices, the fine points of nostril structure. The subject fascinated Madison, for scientific reasons as well as more mundane economic ones; fresh news on any aspect of the subject was a guaranteed entree. For present-day readers—some of whom, one suspects, may not be fully up to speed on the sheep question—this will be instructive. It will also be a refreshing reminder of how deeply agrarian a society America still was at that time.

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