

**William R. Nester.** *The Jeffersonian Vision, 1801-1815: The Art of American Power during the Early Republic.* Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2013. xv + 277 pp. \$16.99, e-book, ISBN 978-1-59797-895-8.

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

William Nester's *The Jeffersonian Vision, 1801-1815* is the third book that he has recently written on the early Republic (*The Revolutionary Years, 1775-1789: The Art of American Power during the Early Republic* [2011] and *The Hamiltonian Vision, 1789-1800: The Art of American Power during the Early Republic* [2012]). This well-written political synthesis of Jeffersonian America tells the often-overlooked story of our nation's past. Nester specifically examines how Thomas Jefferson and his policies shaped our national political culture in the first part of the nineteenth century. He surveys the presidential administrations of Jefferson and James Madison and demonstrates that the establishment of America's power was its economy.

Nester begins his latest installment with a vignette about the construction of the new national Capitol and the inauguration of Jefferson. With Jefferson in the new executive mansion, the Republican Party (later renamed the Democratic Party) ushered in a new era of dominance in American national politics. The author paints a picture of an exciting political landscape of the early Republic. He explores the Revolution of 1801 with the peaceful exchange of power in the executive branch and the battle of the courts, including the famous *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) case. In the first two parts of the book, Nester hits the

highlights of Jefferson's presidency, including the Louisiana Purchase, the Tripoli War, and the Burr conspiracy. In the latter two parts, he deals with Madison's two terms as president. Nester outlines the important events of Madison's presidency, such as the War of 1812, and its multiple phases, including the Great Lakes, the Indian campaigns, the burning of Washington, and the Battle of New Orleans.

The final chapter, "A Distant Mirror," reflects on American foreign policy of the early nineteenth century and compares it to modern times, such as Vietnam and Iraq. The author boldly states that the War of 1812 was a conflict fought to "protect abstract principles and enflamed feelings rather than hard economic and strategic interests" (p. 228). Nester shows that the War of 1812 was an economic disaster for the United States. For example, national debt went from "\$45 million in 1812 to \$127 million in 1815" (p. 223). He also suggests that America did not benefit much in territorial gains from the war. In the end, the War of 1812 dominates Jeffersonian America and it becomes the defining moment of the early Republic.

*The Jeffersonian Vision* is a solid and concise narrative of the Jefferson age. It would be a great book to use in a class about the early Republic or the War of 1812. With short chapters, it is a quick

read for any scholar or history buff alike. However, the one glaring weakness is that as a synthesis there is little new research added to the scholarship of the Jefferson era. Nonetheless, Nester argues that Jeffersonian policies ultimately hurt American interests and they present historical lessons for our present-day leaders.

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