

H-Net Reviews

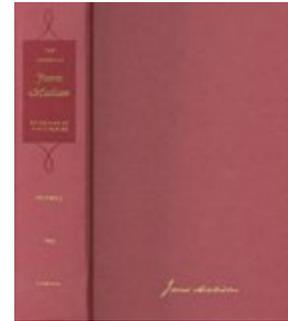
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



James Madison. *The Papers of James Madison*. Edited by David B. Mattern, et al. Secretary of State Series. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000. xxxv + 643 pp. \$67.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-1941-6.

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Published on H-Pol (August, 2001)



Madison as Secretary of State in 1803

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This is the fifth volume of the *Secretary of State Series* of *The Papers of James Madison*, covering the dates of May 16, 1803 to October 31, 1803. As with all of the volumes in this collection, it is the definitive primary resource of Madison's writings and should be in any library with an American history collection.

This volume includes numerous letters and memoranda to and from Madison during a crucial period in United States history—the acquisition of the vast territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains attained through the Louisiana Purchase. This land acquisition during the Presidency of Thomas Jefferson (when James Madison was the Secretary or State) effectively doubled the size of the United States and expanded Jefferson's "Empire of Liberty" across the North American continent. The negotiations for the purchase of this enormous land mass (at which Madison was at the center) involved Great Britain, France and Spain—the leading "superpowers" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These papers review the complexity of those international negotiations and display Madison's brilliance in them. Each of these European nations held specific animosities towards the United States—and towards one another.

Though Madison is most remembered as "The Father of the (U.S.) Constitution," and as an author of *The Federalist Papers*, this correspondence shows him to be a skill-

ful and subtle diplomat. By the summer of 1803, American diplomats in London (Livingston) and Paris (Monroe) were warning the Secretary of State that Napoleon was looking for any pretext to nullify the Louisiana Purchase, which he had come to realize was a strategic and financial mistake for France. War between Great Britain and France was renewed in May, 1803, and the British were threatening to reoccupy the Western territories. To further complicate matters, Spain insisted that France had no right to sell the land in the first place because of a secret provision in a previous treaty. At home, Jefferson and Madison faced domestic resistance (Federalist and Republican) to the Purchase and the means by which it was effected (a potentially unconstitutional action by the President and Congress). So, as the length of this volume shows, Madison had his hands (and mind) full during the summer and autumn of 1803.

This did not prevent him from taking the customary two-month-long summer vacation at his Virginia estate, Montpelier. But even then letters and conversations occurred between the Secretary of State and President Jefferson (at his nearby estate, Monticello). An example of Madison's adroit diplomacy occurs in his June 1 letter to the Spanish ambassador concerning Spain's complaint that American ships had interfered with the fishing of "seadogs and other amphibious animals...by Spanish subjects on the coast of South America" (p. 48). Madison calmly explained that the United States was "not inclined to countenance in any manner acts of their citizens

in contravention of the rights of His Catholic Majesty nor to screen them from the lawful consequences resulting from such conduct;" but "at the same time...he expects...that the rights of our citizens to navigate and use the seas...will be neither controverted nor interrupted" (p. 49).

Other international incidents that occupied Secretary of State Madison's time included the continuing impressments of American seamen by the British navy and the war in the Middle East (Arab pirates attacking U.S. ships and enslaving their sailors). In negotiations with Islamic Morocco, Madison noted in letters of July 14 and July 16 that the Moslems of Algiers were impressed with the religious freedom in America: "...the Barbary powers...view us more favorably than other Christian nations" because there is no single official church in the United States (p. 178). "Foreign" relations also included the American Indians or Native Americans' contacts with the United States government, and some correspondence in this volume reflects those as well. A letter to Madison from Colonel Hawkins (July 11) says, "Tell Mrs. Madison we are all Quakers, in the Indian agency, ...we require...that the followers of the meek and humble Jesus...treat us accordingly" (p. 162).

In addition to the extensive official correspondence, this volume includes a number of Madison's personal

letters, concerning his plantation business, land sales in Kentucky, horse trading, Monroe's and Lafayette's financial affairs, and the settling of his father's estate.

The editorial method of this volume of Madison's *Papers* involves "a policy of increased selectivity," according to the editors (p. xxix). The vast amount of material from this period caused them to abstract (very ably) many of the letters to Madison. Their criterion for inclusion of other material is "whether or not it illuminates James Madison's thoughts or his official and personal life" (p. xxix). So, they omit "a large number of bureaucratic documents...generated as a result of the broad responsibilities of Madison's office" (p. xxix), such as letters of appointments, ship's papers, patents, etc. As excellently as this volume is edited, these "silent omissions" are undoubtedly of little importance; but for the sake of completeness, they might be listed with brief explanations in an appendix. But other than this minor editorial addition, this volume, like the previous ones in *The Papers of James Madison*, is a model of superb academic scholarship and is essential to any public, secondary, college, or university library with an American history collection. As one who has written on James Madison's political philosophy, I can attest to the value of such carefully edited and published primary sources to the continuing scholarship on the American Founding and the early Republic.

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Citation: Garrett Ward Sheldon. Review of Madison, James, *The Papers of James Madison*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. August, 2001.

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