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Introduction by Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: Andrew Cayton, James G. Cusick, James E. Lewis, Jr., William E. Weeks

**J.C.A. Stagg. *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier, 1776-1821*.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 320 pp. (cloth; \$50.00). ISBN: 978-0300139051.

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

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All historians look forward into the contemporary period of their study and most also look back with hindsight to evaluate the consequences of their subject whether it be an individual leader, an international conference, bilateral relations or a diplomatic/military engagement. Recently a number of international relations specialists with contemporary concerns and 20<sup>th</sup> century-focused publications have looked back into earlier periods of United States' foreign policy and international relations in order to explore the origins of specific characteristics of American attitudes and behavior that have contributed to 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American policies and problems. John Gaddis, for example, responded to September 11<sup>th</sup> and George W. Bush's strategy with *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004) which evaluated the Bush doctrine as grand strategy and looked back to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams as an example of an American statesman faced with a security threat during the War of 1812 with the British occupation of the U.S. capital and who responded with concepts of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

When scholars march into the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to find roots and precedents, they encounter specialists who look forward into the contemporary context and are less preoccupied with forming precedents for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A recent example is David C. Hendrickson's *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (2009). Hendrickson explores the three ideologies, perspectives, paradigms in his title as they evolved looking forward from the 1790s. Empire, for example, is evaluated as an evolving concept that emerges as continentalism with a good amount of contingency and even reservations and opposition to expansion from republicans concerned about over-extension, from Federalists fearing the loss of control, and from concerns linked to the issue of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For assessments of Gaddis' analysis, see "John Gaddis's *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*: A Roundtable Critique," *Passport: The Newsletter of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations*, Vol. 36, Issue 2, August 2005: 4-16; and Thomas Maddux's review for H-Diplo, May 24, 2004. For other examples of historians looking back from the contemporary period, see the H-Diplo roundtables on Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2006) which emphasizes the threat that the U.S. posed with its aggressive expansionism, its revolutionary ideology and liberal, commercial society; Walter Hixson's *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (2008) which develops a "culturally constructed and hegemonic" national American identity that emerged with the Puritans, what the author refers to as "the Myth of America" that has rationalized a past of aggressive behavior and frequent resort to war; and Michael Hunt's *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (2007) in which Hunt explores the 19<sup>th</sup> century foundations of America's rise to world power status. It should be noted that among his seven or more books on the Cold War Gaddis has been in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries previously with *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History* (1978) and so has Hunt in several books on U.S.-Chinese relations.

<sup>2</sup> See the H-Diplo roundtable on Hendrickson at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-X-25.pdf>

J.C.A. Stagg's *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier, 1776-1821* is very much in the looking forward camp. Although Stagg does offer generalizations about James Madison's contribution to territorial expansion and his management skills as President in his conclusion, the heart of his study is a very close reading of Madison's prolonged effort to acquire East and West Florida from Spain based on legal claims linked to the Louisiana purchase agreement with France and Spain's Treaty of San Ildefonso with France that traded Louisiana to France with the provision that the colony included the area France had claimed before the creation of the U.S. Stagg also examines Madison's effort to secure an advantageous border in the southwest with Texas.

As the reviewers note, Stagg gives great attention to context, to detail, to who knew what when, and to related military activities. Congress does come into view from time to time as well as reports in the newspapers of the period, but the main focus of Stagg is on Madison, his advisers in Washington, and their communications with the special agents that Madison sent out into the various disputed territories and American officials on the borderlands, such as the Governors of Georgia and Mississippi, and military officials. You will not find cultural interpretations or extensive analysis of the presence and role of Indian nations in the Spanish and American southeastern borderlands or the participation of slaves and free African Americans on both sides of the border. However, you will experience a reassessment of Madison and an important case study of American expansionism as it moved from a republican stage of trying to achieve the acquisition of territory and enhanced security through negotiations based on a legalistic, treaty-rights approach to the more aggressive democratic approach of Andrew Jackson as he marched into Florida and commanded American forces at the "Miracle at New Orleans" against the British on his march to the White House.

The reviewers note the strengths and a few areas that some consider problematic in Stagg's study including:

- 1.) The reviewers are favorably impressed with Stagg's central thesis on the nature of Madison's approach on territorial disputes with Spain. Stagg questions assessments of Madison that depict him as a "weak and indecisive statesman" who lost control of policies in Congress and got "stampeded ... into a conflict which he did not want and which he then mismanaged." By focusing on Madison's handling of relations with Spain rather than the more familiar origins of the War of 1812, Stagg advances a thesis that Madison attempted to achieve a territorial settlement based on America's legal claims and "consistent with the law of nations" as opposed to 20<sup>th</sup> century covert operations and military pressure tactics. (pp. 2, 4) The reviewers believe that Stagg makes a persuasive case by relying on extensive evaluation of Madison's correspondence on these issues and how the President generally rejected attempts by Washington's agents in the field to instigate revolts by American settlers in the disputed territories that would lead to American annexation. In his response Stagg appreciates the approval on his close reading of Madison's correspondence: "it was my hope that *Borderlines in Borderlands* ... would remind historians of every description of just how much benefit can still be derived from a close and critical study of the documentary record that remains as the essential foundation for the

work of all of us.” (4) As James Cusick points out, however, Madison’s maneuvering does not take place in a court of law. Instead, he attempts to maintain the U.S. claims in a tumultuous international environment of the Napoleonic wars, Spain’s doomed effort to maintain its Western Hemisphere colonies, persistent suspicions about British intentions with respect to the contested territories and nearby Cuba, and the interests and concerns of American settlers on the ground who wanted land, who worried about slave revolts, and who had to deal with Southern Indian tribes in the borderlands. Cusick captures the challenges Madison faced with the suggestion that “Madison’s defense of American territorial rights can be likened to someone trying to play a game of bridge, a game of chess, and a game of dice all at the same time.... Madison, sometimes partnered to France, sometimes to another power, was playing bridge against Spain, with expectations of winning; at times he was playing chess against Britain and France, particularly, when it came to keeping those countries out of North America; and with the inhabitants of the Gulf South, he was stuck in a game of dice that he probably did not relish.” (2)

- 2.) Stagg does not suggest that Madison’s pursuit of the southern borderland territories was flawless as he concludes that Madison was not “a very efficient administrator” and failed to exercise sufficient control over his agents, most notably George Matthews in Florida. (pp. 12, 206-207) Stagg also notes that Madison “achieved success in West Florida by means of conquest and occupation rather than by the diplomacy he would have preferred to employ.” (p. 206) Although recognizing the uncertainties that Madison faced with respect to Spanish and British intentions on East Florida and the likelihood that Spanish authority looked very weak, Stagg does criticize Madison for failing with the limited forms of communication available to stop Matthews’ various schemes leading to a rebellion by American settlers and guerrilla warfare involving Georgia militia volunteers against Spanish troops, Seminoles and free blacks in East Florida.<sup>3</sup> (pp. 97-100, 111, 120-121, 127) William Weeks endorses this conclusion and goes further to suggest that “Madison’s foreign policy successes were limited by his moral scruples as much as anything.” (3) Andrew Cayton also notes, in agreement with Stagg, that Madison’s successors, James Monroe who assisted Madison on the borderlands as Secretary of State, and Monroe’s Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, profited from the significant changes in Europe and the geopolitical situation which left Spain pretty much alone to deal with both the U.S. on the borderlands and growing independence movements in its empire. (2-3)
- 3.) The reviewers welcome Stagg’s emphasis on Madison’s views and contributions to U.S. expansionism. As Lewis emphasizes, Stagg “sheds light on some of the most intriguing issues in the recent historiography of early American foreign policy—the

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<sup>3</sup> In August 1811, Madison had an opportunity to reject Matthews’ plan for a revolt in East Florida and request for arms and artillery or arms and assistance from U.S. gunboats in the area at St. Marys. Neither Madison or Monroe responded and Matthews decided to encourage a revolt and get approval later. Stagg typically places this in context and administrative practice: “it was by no means uncommon for cabinet members to ignore letters containing suggestions the administration did not wish to adopt. In fact, it was almost standard practice for executive departments to disregard such letters when they advocated policies that exceeded the instructions their writers had originally received.” (pp. 105-111) See also Stagg’s response on p. 2.

roots of expansionism, the workings of 'local diplomacy,' and the culture of diplomacy." (2) Stagg reinforces David Hendrickson's emphasis on viewing expansionism in context and recognizing the primacy of an ideology of continentalism rather than the later Manifest Destiny perspective among the Federalist and Jeffersonian leaders such as Madison. Thus, Stagg depicts Madison as viewing the new U.S. as successor to British claims on the North American mainland and then moving to takeover French and Spanish claims through negotiations. (pp. 5-7) This leads Stagg to explore Madison's interest in Texas and a boundary settlement. Madison sent William Shafer as an agent to the area, but he and Monroe opposed an American filibuster effort to seize San Antonio and declare the independence of Texas in 1811 that ultimately failed. (pp. 132-133) Weeks agrees with Stagg's assessment of Madison's contribution to expansionism through his diplomacy and continentalism, but Weeks suggests that the "expansionist impulse was deeply rooted in U.S. history ... [and] it could be that continentalism was merely Manifest Destiny without the nationalist chutzpah." (2) Cayton also enhances Stagg's analysis by emphasizing that Madison witnessed as President in the War of 1812 "the death knell of a late eighteenth-century world that James Madison had helped to define. It was his misfortune to preside over the last gasps of an enlightened sensibility in international relations and an approach to continental expansion that relied on persuasion, alliance, and negotiation." (2-3) Although Monroe and Adams eventually concluded, with Madison's support from retirement, a successful settlement of the southern border to the Pacific in the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, the Hero of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson, was knocking on the White House door and would bring, as Cayton points out, a different perspective, methods, and rhetoric: "With little patience for legalities and no interest in Europe, Jackson set out to do what he knew to be right: eliminate Indians threats to settlers in Tennessee, open the land to the south of his state for development, and rid the North American continent of the remnants of the haughty British Empire." (3-4)

- 4.) The main reservations that some of the reviewers have on Stagg's analysis focus on whether or not he gives adequate attention to all of the participants in the borderlands and their impact on Madison's policies and results. None of the reviewers question the extensive analysis that Stagg provides on Madison's agents and their interaction with American settlers, officials, and Spanish officials. Lewis and Cusick suggest that Stagg's inclusion of the local actors is sufficient and important for "what emerges from the book is an image of a president backed into corners by regional events he could neither control, nor anticipate, nor always comprehend," concludes Cusick, and "as a result, and against his inclinations, he was repeatedly forced into sudden, improvised measures that themselves only mired in further difficulties." (2-3) Weeks and Cayton, however, criticize the minimal attention that Stagg devotes to Indians and blacks in the borderlands, nothing the issue of Indian land claims and Jackson's conquest of native peoples in Alabama and Mississippi and later in Florida and the role played by state militias. (Weeks, 3, Cayton, 3) Most of the attention that Stagg devotes to Indians and blacks is somewhat indirect such as the importance of the Indian trade, Spanish use of Indian soldiers, concerns among borderland whites about slave revolts and the presence of free blacks in East Florida. (pp. 36, 56, 73, 92, 102-103, 125-129) In his response

Stagg responds with emphasis on the priority of his focus on Madison and the “story of how the American nation-state had obtained the boundaries that it had by 1821.”  
(3)

### Participants:

**J.C.A. Stagg** is professor, Department of History, and editor in chief, *The Papers of James Madison*, at the University of Virginia. In addition to his editing of many volumes of the Madison papers, Stagg is the author of *Mr. Madison’s War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (1983) and a number of articles on the Madison period in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the *Journal of the Early Republic*, and *Diplomatic History*. Professor Stagg is a recipient of the Arthur S. Link Prize from SHAFR, 1996, the National Historical Society Book Award, 1984, and the Stuart L. Benath Memorial Prize from SHAFR, 1977.

**Andrew Cayton**, Distinguished Professor of History at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, received his Ph.D. in History from Brown University. He has written extensively on the history of trans-Appalachian North America. With Fred Anderson, he is the author of *The Dominion of War: Liberty and Empire In North America, 1500-1800*. He and Anderson are currently at work on *Imperial America, 1672-1764*, a volume in the Oxford History of the United States.

**James G. Cusick** (Ph.D., Anthropology, University of Florida, 1993) is curator of the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida Library and author of *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (University of Georgia Press, 2007). His interests in Florida history focus primarily on its colonial and 19th century past. He is currently directing a project to put Civil War collections online and is translating criminal court records from the Spanish colonial period in St. Augustine.

**James E. Lewis Jr.** is an associate professor of history at Kalamazoo College. He has published *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (1998), *John Quincy Adams: Policymaker for the Union* (2001), and *The Louisiana Purchase: Jefferson’s Noble Bargain?* (2003), and was the contributing editor for Chapter 5 of Robert L. Beisner, ed., *Guide to American Foreign Relations Since 1600* (2003). He is currently writing a study of the Burr Conspiracy.

**William E. Weeks** received his Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego in 1986 and specializes in 19th century U.S. History at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to Civil War* (1996) and, as a contributing editor, “Expansion into the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, 1815-1861,” in *American Foreign Relations since 1600: Guide to the Literature*, 2nd edition (2003). His work explores the relationship between American nationalism and American imperialism.



Readers familiar with the work of J.C.A. Stagg will not be surprised to learn that *Borderlines in Borderlands* is a model monograph written by a fine historian in total command of his sources, his argument, and his prose. Nor will they be surprised to learn that the book is primarily about James Madison, an historical figure the author knows better than any other scholar. Stagg's major goal in narrating the story of "James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier" is to correct the conventional wisdom of "two Madisons," one the brilliant member of the 1787 Constitutional Convention and the adroit politician of the 1790s, the other the befuddled Secretary of State (1801-1809) and President of the United States (1809-1817). In this quest, Stagg insists that Madison's (and Secretary of State's James Monroe's) policy toward Spain and the territory it claimed in eastern North America was consistent and legal. If the administration's initiatives ended in failure or stalemate, they had a long-term impact, especially on the origins of the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819.

President Madison has an able champion in Stagg. It is true that Madison often seems a secondary figure in the history of his presidency while the lead roles are played by a new group of American leaders, including Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Andrew Jackson. Stagg redresses the balance, in large part by reminding us of the eighteenth-century character of Madison's sensibility as well as his diplomacy. That valuable insight becomes the foundation of a bolder claim. Putting Madison at the center of borderland controversies, Stagg argues, reveals early American expansionism not as the expression of an incipient Manifest Destiny but as "an outgrowth of the ideology of American continentalism—a world-view that arose in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and one that rested on the belief that a secure and independent United States would . . . be the successor state to the rival European empires of North America." (5) *Borderlines in Borderlands* is a well-researched and well-argued brief in defense of that thesis.

A wonderful opening chapter locates the origins of Madison's diplomacy in the Model Treaty of 1776, which asserted that the United States was "the successor state to Great Britain in North America, and [would] include all the American territories of its empire as defined in the 1763 Treaty of Paris." (15) Subsequent events made that position difficult to sustain. The 1783 Treaty of Paris, which ended the American War for Independence, affirmed Britain's claim to Canada and Spain's possession of Florida south of the 31<sup>st</sup> parallel. The Spanish disputed that outcome until the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo, in which they accepted the borders outlined in the Treaty of Paris and granted American citizens the privilege of navigation on the Mississippi River and the right of deposit at New Orleans. Five years later, in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, Spain returned Louisiana to France with the stipulation that the colony consisted of the region France had claimed before the creation of the United States. In 1803, when Napoleon Bonaparte sold Louisiana, President Thomas Jefferson accepted this capacious definition because it made the United States the rightful heir to both the French and British empires in North America.

As Secretary of State and President, therefore, Madison operated upon the assumption that East and West Florida were legally parts of the United States. The challenge was to get Spain to accept that fact. To that end, Madison exploited the crisis in the Spanish Empire precipitated by the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in late 1809 to dispatch agents to collect information, negotiate with local residents, and improve the reputation and position of the United States. Much of *Borderlines in Borderlands* details the abortive activities of William Wykoff, Jr., George Mathews, John McKee, and William Shaler and their generally disastrous relationships with Spanish and American settlers in Cuba, the Floridas and Texas. Most spectacular, perhaps, was Shaler's quasi-support of a 1813 filibustering expedition into Texas that ended in failure and the brutal deaths of several Spanish officials. Real progress on a settlement with Spain only occurred after the conclusion of the War of 1812. After decades of war, neither France nor Great Britain had the stomach to help Spain deal with the United States. And Spain needed help, for it was preoccupied not only with recovery from the ordeal of French occupation but with ongoing crises in its American colonies. Spanish officials were especially concerned with getting the United States to stop filibustering operations of the kind the Madison administration had ambiguously supported and in closing American ports to ships engaged in trade with their rebellious colonies. (193)

Stagg contends that his intertwining of narratives of events in Washington, D.C., and along the Gulf Coast makes "the role of individuals, particularly those who wield executive power . . . more rather than less important." (11) The problem is that *Borderlines in Borderlands* qualifies if it does contradict that statement. While Stagg is persuasive on the consistency of Madison's policy, he constructs the President as a man largely at the mercy of events beyond his control. Madison appoints agents to represent American interests who are in turn beholden to local merchants and officials. The agents support movements and expeditions in the cause of liberty (and the United States) that are often violent and coercive. Men such as Shaler have serious doubts about the ability of barbarous dark-skinned Catholic Cubans and Mexicans to build a stable republic.

All this takes place, moreover, in a world about which men in Washington are profoundly ignorant. Repeatedly we are told that they do not know what is happening in Louisiana, let alone Mexico. Administration officials and their agents are constantly speculating about the future of North America, imagining scenarios and playing out possible options. And again and again they come back to events in Europe as the decisive factor in all their considerations. Initially, they assumed a French victory on the Continent and fretted about the repercussions on Spain and its colonies. Then the catastrophic outcome of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 turned everything upside down. If Napoleon was defeated, would revolution continue around the world? Would Great Britain dominate the globe? Who knew?

Indeed, the future of North America became clearer only when the European political landscape became clearer. It was "far easier for the Monroe administration to settle the problems with Spain after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars than it had been for previous administrations to cope with them during those conflicts," writes Stagg. "And American success after 1815 owed as much to changes in the geopolitical situation of the

United States with respect to the European powers as it did to any differences in the diplomatic skills displayed by its political leaders.” (205) Bereft of allies and tired of war, the Spanish were on their own in trying to contain revolution within their empire. Spain was left “to confront the United States with less support from its allies than it needed” and as a consequence, “most of the advantages lay” with the Americans. (205) The Transcontinental Treaty, while the best deal Spain could have gotten, was a “substantial triumph” for the United States. Fulfilling the promise of the 1776 Model Treaty, the United States became the “successor state to both the French and British empires in North America.” In fewer than five decades, the federal government of a republic so weak that it could not protect its own capital from the British or enforce its will within its own states controlled the continent east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes.

Stagg’s story is persuasive within the intellectual borders he imposes on his narrative. But beyond those borders are a lot of important people and events he barely mentions. Stagg’s neglect of American Indians and Americans in the borderlands is the most egregious example. In many ways, the major story in the southeastern corner of North America in the second decade of the nineteenth century was the final conquest of the native peoples who had lived in what is now Alabama and Mississippi for generations. Their world collapsed in the 1810s. The military defeat of Indians was largely accomplished by state militia led most prominently by General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, who continued to solidify the American presence in the region with a victory over British regulars at New Orleans in January 1815 and a subsequent 1818 incursion into Spanish Florida. Jackson represented a view of the United States, let alone American expansionism, very different from that of Madison. With little patience for legalities and no interest in Europe, Jackson set out to do what he knew to be right: eliminate Indian threats to settlers in Tennessee, open the land to the south of his state for development, and rid the North American continent of the remnants of the haughty British Empire. Madison and the U.S. government may have seemed ineffectual to many people. Not so, Andrew Jackson and America, at least not to the hundreds of Creeks cornered and slaughtered at Horseshoe Bend in March 1814 or to everyone who heard of the Battle of New Orleans less than a year later. The situation in the southeast was dramatically different in 1815 from what it had been in 1812. The United States and Spain remained at odds over Florida, but there was no longer any question of who was the dominant power in the region.

In many ways, the War of 1812 was the death knell of a late eighteenth-century world that James Madison had helped to define. It was his misfortune to preside over the last gasps of an enlightened sensibility in international relations and an approach to continental expansion that relied on persuasion, alliance, and negotiation. After 1815, American Indians were no longer a significant presence east of the Mississippi, Europeans had lost interest in North America, and the citizens of the United States were becoming more bellicose and bumptious. We are in Stagg’s debt for his subtle reading of President Madison’s diplomacy and for highlighting the administration’s contributions to the history of American expansionism. But I can’t help but wonder whether the explanation for the difference between the Madison of the 1780s and the Madison of the 1810s lies less in the mind and behavior of the Virginian than in the rapidly changing nature of the United States and its people. By the time Madison left office, his policies seemed quaintly

anachronistic—if not irrelevant—to a new generation of Americans eager to embrace a romantic conception of their continental destiny.

In his new book *Borderlines in Borderlands* J.C.A. Stagg analyzes James Madison's attitudes towards American territorial rights and the country's claims against Spain for possession of Louisiana and the Floridas. The purpose of the book is two-fold: to review Madison's role in the expansion of the American republic and to balance out our understanding of Madison's Anglo-American foreign policy with similar scrutiny into his diplomacy with Spain.

Stagg opens his book with a brief discussion of historical views of Madison. Although James Madison is arguably as complex an eighteen-century personality as Thomas Jefferson, assessments of him have suffered from being static. He is comfortably docketed as a brilliant political theorist and ineffectual president—a convenient assessment easily written up for Wikipedia and remembered for exams. Stagg, as a long time editor and now editor-in-chief of the James Madison Papers, is well placed to challenge this view, and chooses a novel method of doing it. He has focused on Madison's little studied and (in Stagg's opinion) frequently misinterpreted efforts to settle territorial disputes between the United States and Spain after the American Revolution.

This topic has garnered a good deal of attention in recent years from historians of the Gulf South, attention that has seen a reprinting of *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands* by Frank Lawrence Owsley, and the publication of new works such as *Filibusters and Expansionists* by Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* by Andrew McMichael, *The Original Lone Star Republic*, by David A. Bice, and my own *The Other War of 1812*, not to mention works on Texas and the Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River that are now in preparation. Madison is frequently a background character in these works, often interpreted as either a sympathizer with or master manipulator of local filibustering movements.

The strengths and contributions of Stagg's work are numerous. With respect to his desire to reassess Madison's ideas about territorial rights, his focus on the borderlands provides rich ground for analysis. He is able to closely follow the development of Madison's thinking about American claims to border territories, and can do so without the digressions into other aspects of his life and career that would be necessary in a biography. In his first chapter, he grounds Madison's thinking solidly in Anglo-American attitudes towards the Spanish borderlands as they emerged at the close of the French and Indian War and evolved during the Revolution. This is perhaps one of the key values of the book—its ability to connect the genesis of Madison's views on territorial rights circa 1776 with his later viewpoint and the actions he implemented as secretary of state and president. Stagg argues that Madison was too legalistic in outlook and too enmeshed in his understanding of international law to endorse the kind of filibustering that occurred in the borderlands from the 1790s on. For Madison, the legal grounds for American claims stemmed from the republic's inheritance of former British claims and its acquisition of French claims, as set forth in treaties and in the Louisiana Purchase. Given this, Madison seems to have been fairly consistent throughout his career that precedents in both treaty and law had

abrogated Spain's rights to the Floridas. The rise of filibustering efforts in the borderlands therefore confronted Madison with dilemmas. He was practical enough to see that agitation against Spanish rule could play into American hands. At the same time any American sanction of illegal actions would undermine what he saw as solid legal underpinnings for American claims, and put the republic on the wrong side of international law. Far from being someone who manipulated filibustering efforts, then, Madison, in Stagg's view, was a man who could only reconcile himself to a delivery of territory if it came in accordance with his own legal preconceptions about legitimate rights.

This is subtle argumentation, but on the whole it holds up. Madison's ideas about American territorial rights range from the abstruse to the obtuse and it is perhaps natural that historians might try to simplify their view of him. Stagg, however, is concerned about this trend. As he notes in his "Introduction," "Some scholars have come to believe that, far from stumbling into poorly considered or unwise efforts to enlarge the boundaries of the nation, Madison instead deliberately and purposefully adopted policies to subvert the Spanish authorities in the borderland territories as the means to accomplish his expansionist goals." I can plead guilty to this interpretation of Madison, at least with respect to my thinking in 2003 when I wrote *The Other War of 1812*, though I have somewhat modified my opinion in the light of Stagg's studies (not only in this book but in previous articles). In some respects, Madison's defense of American territorial rights can be likened to someone trying to play a game of bridge, a game of chess, and a game of dice all at the same time. Provided you can trust your partner and have a good head for cards, bridge will have a predetermined outcome; chess pits you directly against an opponent in strategy; dice is a game of chance. Madison, sometimes partnered to France, sometimes to another power, was playing bridge against Spain, with expectations of winning; at times he was playing chess against Britain and France, particularly when it came to keeping those countries out of North America; and with the inhabitants of the Gulf South, he was stuck in a game of dice that he probably did not relish.

This becomes apparent when borderland agitators continually disrupt Madison's carefully managed bridge and chess games against the European powers. What emerges from the book is an image of a president constantly backed into corners by regional events he could neither control, nor anticipate, nor always comprehend. As a result, and against his inclinations, he was repeatedly forced into sudden, improvised measures that themselves only mired him in further difficulties. This clearly seems to be the case with Madison's decision to occupy West Florida in 1810, a decision he made with the enthusiasm of a bather entering a freezing river. He also seems to have been backed into a corner in 1812 when George Mathews instigated an attack on Spanish settlements in East Florida and drew in American forces as an occupying force. Had the country not been heading for war with Britain, Madison's administration might have been able to salvage the situation and withdraw of troops. As it was, the war effort made this extremely risky, and Madison, throughout 1812 and 1813, sought desperately for some means of gaining congressional support and legal justification for an action already taken.

The subject of Madison and American expansionism is bound to be revisited numerous times in the next few years as the country approaches the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of

1812. Stagg is to be congratulated for writing a well-researched and well-argued book that will be essential reading for a wide variety of scholars dealing with the early republic.

Was the “Father of the Constitution” also the father of the covert operation? In recent years, much of the writing on James Madison’s policies toward Spain’s New World empire has at least suggested so. The fourth president certainly made unprecedented use of “executive agents,” quietly dispatching quasi-diplomatic representatives to West Florida, East Florida, and Texas (as well as Cuba and Venezuela) in the early years of his administration. In each of the three bordering Spanish provinces, moreover, pro-American revolutions emerged at some point between 1810 and 1813; that in West Florida eventuated in the incorporation of much of the province into the United States as part of Louisiana. These revolutions were led by or largely composed of American citizens or emigrants. Connecting the policymakers in Washington, on one hand, and the events in Baton Rouge, St. Francisville, St. Marks, Fernandina, Nacogdoches, and San Antonio de Béxar, on the other, is not easy, however. In general, the recent historiography has had to rely to a large degree on supposition, claiming a place for Madison’s policies within broader patterns of American expansionism and often dismissing the absence of “smoking gun” documents as the product of a deliberate policy of “plausible deniability.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decade, J. C. A. Stagg, the editor in chief of *The Papers of James Madison*, has challenged this historiography in a series of editorial notes and published articles.<sup>2</sup> Through a combination of painstaking research and careful reconstruction of an often unclear past, he has raised serious, if piecemeal, doubts about the emerging consensus “that Madison deliberately sought to subvert Spanish rule in the borderlands” through the use of executive agents (213 n.10).

With his new book, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, Stagg does not just draw together those scattered writings or merely restate their findings and arguments in a more unified form. Instead, he expands beyond his earlier work to examine both “the ideological origins of early American expansionism” (5) and the complex processes by which “policy made in Washington played out in the affected regions of the borderlands themselves” (9). Ultimately, this approach reaffirms the basic point of his earlier writings--“that at no time after 1809 did Madison ever assume that the nation’s territorial disputes with Spain could

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the key works in this historiography are: Stephen F. Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Frank L. Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); and Joseph B. Smith, *The Plot to Steal Florida: James Madison’s Phony War* (New York: Arbor House, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>See “Madison and the Collapse of the Spanish-American Empire: The West Florida Crisis of 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series*, ed. Robert A. Rutland, et al., 6 vols. to date (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984--), 2:305-20; “Madison and the Problem of Mexican Independence: The Gutiérrez-Magee Raid of August 1812,” in *ibid.*, 5:235-45; “The Madison Administration and Mexico: Reinterpreting the Gutiérrez-Magee Raid of 1812-1813,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 59 (April 2002): 449-80; “James Madison and George Mathews: The East Florida Revolution of 1812 Reconsidered,” *Diplomatic History* 30 (January 2006): 23-55; and “George Mathews and John McKee: Revolutionizing East Florida, Mobile, and Pensacola in 1812,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 85 (Winter 2007): 269-96.

be solved by means that were other than legal, and that as a consequence only a settlement consistent with the law of nations could give the United States good title to the territories in question” (4). But it does so in a way that sheds light on some of the most intriguing issues in the recent historiography of early American foreign policy--the roots of expansionism, the workings of “local diplomacy,” and the culture of diplomacy.

Where much of the recent historiography on Madison’s Spanish American policies has “invoke[d] the vague notion of an incipient Manifest Destiny in an overtly anachronistic fashion,” Stagg situates them within an “ideology of American continentalism” that he traces to the mid-eighteenth century (5). This “world-view” saw an independent United States as “the successor state to the rival European empires of North America” (5). The first chapter traces the development of this ideology from its earliest expressions in U.S. policy in the Model Treaty of 1776 through the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Initially envisioning the new nation as the successor to Great Britain’s claims on the North American mainland, it expanded under the force of geopolitical developments in Europe and the Americas to include as well all of France’s and most of Spain’s. Efforts to clarify exactly what the United States had acquired by purchasing France’s territorial claims on the Mississippi River in 1803 and to supplement that territory with Spain’s remaining claims east of the river shaped Madison’s policies toward the southern and southwestern borderlands as secretary of state and president. These efforts gained particular force beginning in the spring of 1808, when developments in Spain threatened the integrity of its New World empire. If the United States was to achieve the increased security that acquisitions of neighboring provinces promised, however, they had to be made in ways that conformed to international law. Otherwise, as Stagg recognizes, they would bring only a greater risk of war not just with Spain, but also with Spain’s allies and supporters, whether Napoleonic France or Great Britain or the Holy Alliance.

“Getting the story in Washington right,” Stagg argues, “is only half the problem of understanding the American quest for the Spanish borderlands” (9). *Borderlines in Borderlands* is equally committed to examining the transformation and implementation of policy decisions in the borderlands. “Local populations,” Stagg understands, possessed at least some ability to shape, if not to dictate, “their own fates in the struggles between empires and nation-states” (10). His discussions of events in West Florida, East Florida, and Texas recognize the diverse interests and activities of: American emigrants; Spanish, British, and French settlers, merchants, and traders; rival Spanish officials; Native American nations; and, in some cases, black slaves. Decisions made in Washington (or Madrid or Cadiz or Havana) played out in local contexts shaped by these many and varied groups.

Linking the policymakers in Washington and the residents of the different provinces were various instruments of U.S. policy. The governors of neighboring states and territories, particularly William C. C. Claiborne in Orleans Territory (later Louisiana) and David B. Mitchell in Georgia, and the commanding officers of the major army and navy posts in the south and southwest played important roles. But the most significant intermediaries between Washington and the borderlands were the executive agents that the administration sent to West Florida (William Wykoff Jr.), East Florida (George Mathews

and John McKee), and Texas (William Shaler). Evincing a pattern that was common to U.S. diplomats in the early decades of the new nation, these men did not simply implement administration policy even when it was perfectly clear, which, admittedly, was not always the case. The willingness of Mathews, McKee, and Shaler, in particular, to use their quasi-official positions to advance either their own interests or their own interpretations of the nation's interests is thoroughly explored by Stagg. It is only by understanding the extent and nature of their deviations from their instructions, as he shows, that we can properly recognize the limited and legal-minded character of the administration's approach.

No one familiar with Stagg's extensive work on the military and diplomatic history of the early republic will be surprised to hear that *Borderlines in Borderlands* stands as an exemplar of the historian's craft. It is not just that seemingly trivial letters and documents have been tracked down in forgotten files and minor archives. Stagg has also, time and time again, managed to figure out whether they were misdated, when (and if) they reached their addressees, and to what cover letter or attachments they should be connected--rendering them, in the process, far from trivial. Characteristically, even a "badly burned fragment" of a letter yields useful nuggets of information in his hands (259 n. 89). While Stagg's research has certainly required him to look far beyond the file cabinets of the Madison Papers offices, his book also testifies to the incalculable contribution to research on the political and diplomatic history of the new nation that has been made by the editors and staff members who, for more than half a century, have worked to compile, organize, annotate, and publish modern editions of the papers of the "Founding Fathers."

The fruits of Stagg's research appear as largely narrative accounts of policies toward and developments in West Florida, East Florida, and Texas, preceded by a background chapter on the period before Madison's presidency and followed by a concluding chapter on the progress toward the Transcontinental Treaty. The analytical frameworks are established early in the book; while they clearly shape Stagg's narrative and occasionally reappear in an overt form in the chapters, they tend to be embedded in the narrative. At times, a more direct assertion of the argument or a more explicit engagement with the historiography would have been appreciated. Many of this book's details, arguments, and implications challenge, even overturn, what has become, in recent years, the prevailing interpretation of its subject. But the full weight of Stagg's contribution is not always made as clear as it might have been in either the text or the notes.

*Borderlines in Borderlands* is an important corrective to much of the recent work on Madison's policies toward the Spanish borderlands. It should certainly be read by scholars who have absorbed that historiography. But it is much more than merely a corrective. Stagg identifies his goal as "understand[ing] why the United States succeeded, somewhat inadvertently, in annexing most of West Florida . . . , why it failed to secure East Florida at all before 1819, and why . . . it consented to abandon the claim to Texas in order to obtain a boundary line farther to the north that extended to the Pacific Ocean" (10). In answering these questions, however, he uses what may seem, even to some diplomatic historians, to be a relatively minor issue to explore some of the most interesting issues in early American historical writing today: what were the sources of American expansionism during the first decades of independence, how did metropolitan and peripheral individuals, groups, and

forces interact in shaping developments in the borderlands, and what cultural forces influenced the behavior of federal officials? As such, *Borderlines in Borderlands* makes a much greater contribution to our understanding of early American diplomacy than its topic might suggest.

**M**y thanks to Tom Maddux for an opportunity to participate in a roundtable on this timely and important book.

John Stagg has made another valuable contribution to the ongoing re-examination of early 19<sup>th</sup> century US expansionism. *Borderlines in Borderlands* demonstrates an extensive engagement in primary sources, is driven by a dense, closely argued narrative, and contains a number of bold conclusions regarding Madison's role as an expansionist. In what is essentially a sequel to *Mr. Madison's War*, Professor Stagg reveals what he sees as the underappreciated role of Madison in envisioning and accomplishing continental expansion. In so doing, he aims to shatter the "two-Madisons" school of thought, that of the brilliant constitutional theorist versus the inept president. And while he does exonerate Madison of some of the worst charges historians have made against him, Stagg is not wholly successful in rehabilitating Madison's reputation for presidential bungling.

Stagg first defends Madison by critiquing the notion popular among some historians since the 1970s that his actions in the Floridas and Texas, including the use of special agents and the filibusters who worked with them, were precursors to post World-War II covert actions by the CIA in Latin America. Stagg disputes claims made by some historians that Madison "deliberately and purposefully adopted policies to subvert the Spanish authorities in the borderland territories as a means to accomplish his expansionist goals." (3) In this regard, he seeks to save Madison's reputation as an honorable man who sought to expand the nation's domain by legal and honorable means. Stagg insists "the United States believed it had valid claims under international law to the borderlands and conducted its diplomacy in accordance with that belief." (9) Madison merely asserted what the author argues were very plausible positions rooted in prior French claims to Louisiana. In this respect, Stagg challenges Henry Adams' rather more skeptical view of U.S. claims to Texas and the Floridas.

I take the author's point: the CIA parallels may be a bit overdrawn. The desperate moral bargains of Cold War policymakers arose in a time and in a struggle that cannot reasonably be compared to the Spanish frontier of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, it is clear that Madison was not driven by the Machiavellian win-at-any-cost mentality of the Cold War, and time and again refrained from taking actions he deemed unscrupulous.

*Borderlines in Borderlands* also seeks to recall Madison's role as a committed expansionist with a long-term engagement in the territorial disputes with Spain. The text ably demonstrates how Madison could stretch an expansionist point with the best of them, as when he advanced the notion that a successful claim to West Florida was "inseparable" from effective navigation rights on the Mississippi.

Stagg, correctly in my view, grounds the process of expansion in the unionist paradigm: ". . . the original concept of the Union as it was discussed in 1775-1776 was that it should be

the successor state to Great Britain in North America and include all the American territories of its empire as defined in the 1763 Peace of Paris. . . . To achieve that goal Congress attempted to create a federal union, or more precisely a confederated republic, that right from the outset envisaged and required future expansion, both to consolidate the nation and to reinforce an emergent sense of American identity.” (15)

Canada and the Floridas became the union’s first security threat by virtue of their positions on that union’s northern and southern boundary. More generally, the text illustrates how, from the start, U.S. national leaders aimed at complete control of the Western Hemisphere in the name of security. Equally important, Stagg frames the emergent union as a significant player in world affairs from the start, ready to use any tool at its disposal to bend the world to its model, most notably its role as a key supplier of agricultural products.

Stagg disputes the notion that expansion along the Gulf Coast was an early version of Manifest Destiny—“it will hardly do for historians to invoke the vague notion of an incipient Manifest Destiny before the fact.” (5) In its place, he proposes that the Madisonian expansion was “an outgrowth of the ideology of American continentalism” arising in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and “one that rested on the belief that a secure and independent United States. . . . should be the successor state to the rival European empires of North America.” This outlook found its first policy articulation in the Model Treaty of 1776, and Stagg foregrounds what he sees as Madison key role in pushing it forward from there.

By recovering the continentalist vision of the founders of the union, Stagg offers a persuasive counterpoint to those who would place all expansionist thrusts under the rubric of Manifest Destiny. But whatever one might call it, it seems abundantly clear that the expansionist impulse was deeply rooted in U.S. history, predating not just the 1840s but even the creation of the union. The names we attach to this impulse may be less important than is sometimes thought. It could be that continentalism was merely Manifest Destiny without the nationalist chutzpah.

Stagg’s main point is that Madison was determined to assert what he believed was a valid claim against Spain in a legal and honorable way, consistent with both U.S. and international law. This predisposition explains why he balked at offers of annexation by the West Florida filibusters, fearing that to entertain such offers might cloud the legitimacy of prior U.S. claims. But this, it seems to me, is the point: U.S. territorial claims were, depending on the circumstances, rooted in a range of justifications including security, legality, geography, or even God’s plan. All such arguments, legitimate or not, were meant to realize the overriding expansionist imperative that Stagg acknowledges was central to national existence. Insofar as Madison really believed his own arguments, i.e. did not recognize them as expedients to be asserted or ignored as necessary, it compromised his effectiveness as president. In this respect, The Great Example that Madison chose to disregard was Jefferson, whose frank recognition of the dubious constitutionalism of the Louisiana Purchase did not prevent or even slow his submission of the Purchase to Congress for ratification. In the end it was John Quincy Adams who secured East Florida for the U.S. by wrapping Andrew Jackson’s unauthorized conquest of the province in the rhetoric of patriotism and daring his political opponents to contradict him. The story Stagg

tells suggests that Madison failed to grasp that the writing of constitutions and the rule of law did not apply to the anarchic world of international relations. It may be that Madison's foreign policy successes were limited by his moral scruples as much as anything.

But if Stagg is successful in saving Madison's reputation from charges of subversion and dishonor, he cannot absolve the president of maladministration. Indeed, Madison seems alternately disengaged and indecisive, distracted from the East Florida issue at a crucial moment by Secretary of State Robert Smith's resignation and not seeming to grasp that timing was critical to successful diplomacy. The author goes on at some length to absolve Madison from tacit acquiescence in the Mathews scheme to revolutionize East Florida, but it is not persuasive to claim, as the author does, that the president's silence in response to Mathews' request to proceed with his plan did not constitute tacit permission. Having sent an agent on such a delicate mission, it was incumbent upon the president to exercise proper supervision. Madison's failure to restrain Mathews had embarrassing consequences for the United States and unnecessarily delayed East Florida's acquisition. We will never really know what Madison intended in regard to General Mathews filibuster into East Florida. It was the president's good fortune that Mathews had neither the political stature nor, as it turned out, the physical resilience (Mathews died en route to Washington to plead his case that the administration had given him permission to subvert Spanish authority) to challenge his claim.

The picture that emerges is that "Little Jemmy's" presidency was poorly administered. At times disengaged, at other times overwhelmed, and for the most part not well served by his cabinet (especially his secretaries of state), Madison's skills as a political theorist were not well-adapted to the presidency, and really, there is no reason to assume they should have been. Constitutional theorizing and presidential leadership are wholly different tasks, and it is wrong to assume that success in one area necessarily translates to success in the other.

While *Borderlines in Borderlands* is but partially successful in salvaging Madison's reputation as president, it does persuasively make the case that he played a key role in establishing the U.S.'s first transcontinental claim. It is a bit anomalous that this is the case, in that Stagg notes that Madison "paid little or no attention to Jefferson's enthusiasm for finding a route to the Pacific" until 1816 (186). Stagg also makes the provocative claim that throughout the period, Madison and Jefferson both believed that Texas "mattered relatively little." (203) And yet by 1816, Madison "had also come to realize that [the Pacific Northwest] was of far greater potential importance to the United States than Texas." (203) The author also puts forth the questionable argument that the slave issue emerged as a bone of contention after Madison and Monroe had decided to drop the claim to Texas in 1816, a decision "almost certainly not related to that consideration." (208)

One significant criticism: although Stagg acknowledges the complex nature of international affairs along the Gulf Coast and the need for the narrative to include "various populations, including. . . African slaves and indigenous Indian peoples" (10), such groups are not prominent in the story that follows. In his chronicle of the adventures of Madison's special agents, Indians are mere backdrops and slaves are virtually non-existent. This diminishes the narrative insofar as the author does not seem to take seriously the ongoing claims that

Indians had to the lands at issue. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the unbiased historian should count those claims as much (if not more) than those of Europeans. Ultimately they had the best claims to the lands along the Gulf Coast did they not?

Notwithstanding this objection, *Borderlines in Borderlands* should take its place as an essential text in the emerging reconsideration of early U.S. expansionism.

Response by J.C.A. Stagg, University of Virginia

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Let me record my thanks to Tom Maddux for his efforts in organizing this roundtable. To the four participants, I am equally grateful for the careful thought and consideration they put into their reviews. Often I found myself thinking that they had summarized some of my ideas better than I had been able to express them myself. I particularly appreciated James Cusick's observation that James Madison, in dealing with his Spanish problems, had to play "a game of bridge, a game of chess, and a game of dice all at the same time." That is certainly true. I am also glad that Dr. Cusick does not seem to think that Madison ever tried to play poker (at least not with Spain).

Metaphors of games, moreover, touch in interesting ways on my central, and most difficult, question: just how do we assess Madison's tenure as president? Do we write it off as little more than an ongoing series of bumbling disasters or can we find other important themes that transcend an undue concentration on the limitations of an individual? In Madison's case, this problem has always been dominated by the requirements of having to make sense of the apparent nonsense of the War of 1812, and that subject, unfortunately for any historian's career, is one in which it is impossible to become a successful "revisionist" by standing the conventional wisdom on its head. (Believe me, I know). For that reason, in writing *Borderlines in Borderlands*, I tried to avoid the familiar and constrictive dichotomies that have always plagued studies of Madison's administrations: was he a "strong" or a "weak" chief executive; was he a "failure" or a "success" as a president? To do so, I concentrated on constructing the story as Madison himself might have seen it, without resorting to an excess of explicit value judgments at the same time. That tactic may not satisfy everybody, but we do need to find new ways to write about the fourth president. This need will only increase with approach of the bicentennial of the War of 1812, and the historical profession should try to avoid releasing a flood of books after 2012 that do no more than rehash the conventional wisdom about Madison's years in the White House.

Nevertheless, it will seem to some that I have committed myself too deeply to the role of being a defender of every aspect of Madison's behavior. I might disavow that intention, even at the risk of appearing to protest too much. I might also have risked taking positions that, on the face of it, seem untenable, especially with respect to the exceedingly controversial matter of how Madison handled, or mishandled, George Mathews in East Florida. Here I predict that William Weeks will not be alone in finding my arguments on this subject "unpersuasive." It is incredible that Madison should have neglected to monitor the activities of Mathews—a precursor of Andrew Jackson if ever there was one—and I did concede the point that the episode called Madison's skills as an administrator into serious question. The real issue goes to the plausibility of my claim that Madison's failure to repudiate outright the irresponsible schemes that Mathews had outlined in some of his letters meant that the president had declined to sanction them. The criticism here operates on the unexamined assumption that silence necessarily implies consent in the absence of explicit remarks to the contrary, but this itself is an assumption that should be subjected to closer scrutiny.

In our more assertive and garrulous culture of today, it is difficult to believe that silence does not indicate consent, but even so a request ignored remains a request denied and silence can have very different meanings in different contexts and cultures. (From my own background in a British colonial culture, I can assure American readers that silence more often means disapproval than it does its opposite). But my argument here rested on a stronger point, namely that it is now quite clear that in January 1811 neither Madison nor Mathews believed that the end of Spanish rule in East Florida would require external intervention in the form of a rebellion led by an American agent.<sup>1</sup> We need not, therefore, accept Professor Weeks's unduly pessimistic view that we can never know what Madison's intentions for Mathews were. It also makes no sense—if we push Professor Weeks's position to its logical conclusion—to suppose that Madison might be acquitted of the charge of intending to subvert the Spanish regimes in West Florida and Texas while being guilty of it in East Florida. I can think of no plausible reason why he should have behaved in that way. It might, perhaps, be argued that the administration's sharp rebuke to William Shaler in June 1813 to prevent him from taking over the filibuster into Texas only highlights the complicity that many have seen in its failure to do the same with Mathews in 1812, but it could equally well be maintained that the administration reacted so rapidly in 1813 precisely because it had come to a belated realization of the harmful consequences of its inaction in the previous year.

On balance, therefore, it seemed to me preferable to conclude that Madison took a more broadly consistent approach in his dealings with all of the potential uprisings in the Spanish-American borderlands as they affected American interests and claims in the region. Certainly, that still leaves us with a complicated problem of how to assess the president's overall conduct. To recur to Dr. Cusick's analogy, we might say that Madison had a strategy for the chess game but that he did not always hold the strongest of hands and Napoleon was hopeless as a bridge partner anyway. And if the roll of the dice produced an outcome that ultimately favored Madison's wishes in the case of West Florida, it did not do the same in East Florida. To argue thus is not to exonerate Madison from making what proved to be a serious error in judgment; it is only an attempt to understand better the reasons for his making it. Readers remain free to reach their own verdicts about the wisdom of Madison's actions.

Another significant issue—raised directly by both Professors Cayton and Weeks—is the amount of attention devoted to some of the more “inarticulate” players in the borderlands, such as slaves and Indians. This is undeniably an important matter, but nothing in my account should be construed to mean that I do not think that the Indians had a better claim to their lands than Europeans and Anglo-Americans or that I would deny that the dispossession of the Indians in the American Southeast was a “major story” in the history of this period. But it is only one of a number of stories that might told here, so it is a question

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<sup>1</sup> I might emphasize here that I addressed this point more explicitly in two of my articles than I did in the text of *Borderlines in Borderlands*. See the essays “James Madison and George Mathews: The East Florida Revolution of 1812 Reconsidered,” *Diplomatic History* 30 [2006]: 23-55, and “George Mathews and John McKee: Revolutionizing East Florida, Mobile, and Pensacola in 1812,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 85 [2007]: 269-96.

of which stories we chose to tell and why and how we might conceive of the relationships between them.

Two issues are at stake. How do we write about borderlands generally and specifically in the context of the history of the nation-state; and how much “agency” should historians give to inarticulate or peripheral groups who became the “victims” of historical changes that apparently overwhelmed them? The first problem was well described by James Hijaya as the question of “how the west was lost” in narratives about the nation-state. He noted—and I quoted approvingly—that “it seems impossible for historians, even the best ones, to write both the history of the nation-state and the history of non-Anglos.... To somebody studying the nation-state, non-Anglos seem peripheral; to somebody scrutinizing non-Anglos, the nation-state seems peripheral. Thus United States history and Western U. S. history exist in separate and incompatible universes. The insights achieved by historians of Native Americans or Mexicans remain inside the ghettos of Indian or Borderlands history instead of escaping to transform American history.”<sup>2</sup>

Any appearances to the contrary, I was acutely conscious of this problem while writing *Borderlines in Borderlands*. To employ an inelegant metaphor, it seemed to me as if an historian had to try and observe subjects and objects by looking at them through both ends of a telescope simultaneously. The attempt to do so is impossible and it certainly risks the sacrifice of any sort of a coherent focus in a narrative. It also raises the question of how to deal with what Professors Cayton and Fred Anderson have recently and most interestingly described as “the problem of authority in the writing of early American history.” Do historians allow the subjectivity of their actors to provide them with threads through the multiplicity of stories from the past, or do they exercise a degree of “authority” that arises from their knowing the outcomes of the events they describe in order to relate them to larger political, imperial, and social developments that both shaped and constrained the actions of individuals and groups.<sup>3</sup> I chose to exercise some “authority” by allowing Madison’s subjectivity to provide me with a consistent focus as I tried to tell the story of how the American nation-state had obtained the boundaries that it had by 1821. Of course, this is not the only story that might have been told, but the emphases in my narrative resulted from my attempt to concentrate on that particular story and that is why some groups on the periphery do not always emerge as clearly and fully from the shadows as some specialists in borderland studies might like. I did, nevertheless, try to indicate how and where these other stories fitted into my narrative.

Perhaps I should have chosen to tell other stories at greater length, but to have done full justice to the subject of the dispossession of the Southeastern Indians or the role of potentially rebellious slaves would have required a much larger work and a more diffuse argument, or series of arguments. Moreover, I had concluded that we had already

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<sup>2</sup> See James A. Hijaya, “Why the West is Lost,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 51 [1994]: 276-93; and see *Borderlines in Borderlands*, p. 221 n. 42.

<sup>3</sup> See Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, “The Problem of Authority in the Writing of Early American History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 66 [2009]: 467-94.

developed a reasonably clear picture in recent years of what was involved in the problems of culture contact in this region, and I felt less need on that account to write all of that story into my account, as opposed to citing in footnotes the relevant literature where readers can easily find it and incorporate it into their own reading of my work.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, this decision was not without its risks - -even if I deluded myself that I had reached a sufficient age to assume them -- and some will still conclude that my tactics subverted the strategy they think I should have followed. In any event, Professor Hijaya's challenge still stands as an incentive for others to do more work on this problem.

As for the question of "agency," it was not my intent to write as if Indians and slaves had no agency in their own history or to imply that they were irrelevant to my story. We all know better than that these days. But regardless of how much agency these groups might be given and irrespective of how far we can demonstrate their influence on particular developments, at the end of the day—by 1821—their aspirations and needs had lost out to the dreams of the American Founders, such as Madison. And I also worried that had I attempted to tell multiple stories simultaneously, I might never have finished the project at all and that Madison himself would somehow have become lost in the process.

As for some other matters, I appreciate the extent to which all the reviewers have grasped my picture of a Madison who, to a very considerable degree, remained entrapped in a world view he had inherited and absorbed from the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Both Professors Cayton and Weeks are correct to point out that this world view was collapsing in the Age of Napoleon and that the emergence of Andrew Jackson can stand as an appropriate American embodiment and symbol of new world views driven by rapid cultural, economic, and social change. To Professor Lewis, I am deeply appreciative of the generosity of his remarks, particularly those that draw attention to the role played by the modern editions of the papers of the Founding Fathers and others in improving our understanding of almost every aspect of the history of the early republic. This is a subject about which there has been much unfortunate misunderstanding of late, and it was my hope that *Borderlines in Borderlands*, even if it accomplished nothing else, would remind historians of every description of just how much benefit can still be derived from a close and critical study of the documentary record that remains as the essential foundation for the work of all of us.

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<sup>4</sup> I had also already written at greater length on such subjects as the Creek War of 1813-14 (see J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton, NJ 1983), pp. 348-62.