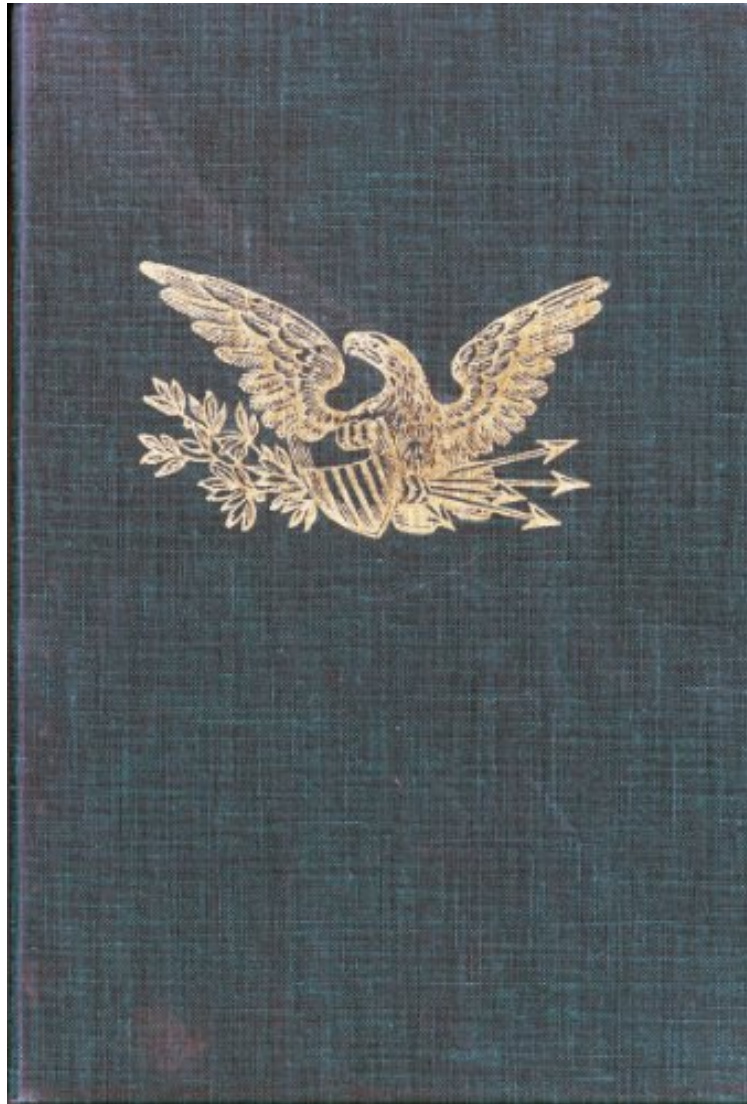


The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison

James Morton Smith

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James Morton Smith : The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerWonderful24 of 33 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but overpriced collectionBy Barrie W. BrackenI bought this set back in 1995 before I had a computer or know what the Internet was all about. That's my rationalization for spending \$150 for three

volumes. If you're looking for a nice looking attractively bound set with a slip-case to impress your visitors this set is fine for you; if you're interested in content, and you know a little bit even about Jefferson and Madison, you can find much of this material on the Internet free of charge. The three volumes containing over 2000 pages are handsomely bound, sewn signatures, and readable type. Each section of letters is accompanied by 10 to 14 pages of introduction. If I were to compare this set with the letters between Jefferson and Adams this collection would fall far short. Probably its only real value is the letters of Madison which are more difficult to locate than the works of Jefferson. Since I consider Jefferson to be overrated I must admit my reason for buying this set was an interest in Madison. And perhaps this colors my own evaluation of the set and readers should take this into account. What are the benefits of this set the volumes? The letters are presented in periods of activity and each period is introduced rather well. It offers a convenient way of comparing the thoughts of these two individuals on any single topic that is covered. The major problem as I see it is the limitation of topics. They seem to have been cherry picked for popular consumption. I can see an important use for this set in a library where history 101 students can find resources for a term paper. I believe the serious scholar of American history will be disappointed in this.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison have been called the two greatest philosopher statesmen of the American Enlightenment. For the first fifty years of the new nation's existence, they formed a personal and political partnership, jointly working out the ideology of democracy and the practice of representative government. The collaboration began in 1776, when Jefferson and Madison met as members of the Virginia House of Delegates, and ended fifty years later, when Jefferson died. They exchanged nearly 1,250 letters, running the gamut from short notes ("Will you come and sit an hour before dinner to-day?" Jefferson scribbled to Madison in 1791) to Madison's remarkable seventeen-page letter on the results of the Constitutional Convention. Whether every letter was a faultless work of art may be debated. But their correspondence reveals, in precision and complex detail, what Jefferson called "freshness of fact." Since neither Jefferson nor Madison kept a diary, their innermost thoughts went directly into their letters, deeply revealing the loyalties and genius of both men. These volumes present for the first time all of the letters, annotated and in chronological order, organized into chapters by year. In addition to the general introduction to the correspondence, introductory essays to each chapter establish context and identify persons and events for the general reader. James Morton Smith is Director Emeritus of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and a past director of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. In addition to his many books, he was the general editor of the Bicentennial Series, *The States and the Nation*, published by Norton.

From Library Journal Editor Smith gathers together in three volumes the entire surviving correspondence of these two American giants. As neither man "ever reduced his thought to a systematic presentation" and as most of Jefferson's political thinking can only be found in his letters, this collection of nearly 1250 letters, covering a great variety of subjects, is a valuable contribution to the study of Jefferson, Madison, and their times. The editor renders this massive collection of letters useful to students and researchers of American history by dividing it into some 50 historical periods, each introduced by an overview that places the correspondence in its proper historical context. Essential for academic libraries and for any library that wishes to strengthen its collection of these two individuals. Robert A. Curtis, Taylor Memorial P.L., Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Astonishingly enough, never before have the surviving 1200-plus letters exchanged by the third and fourth presidents been collectively published, and thus the public library that blanches at the steep price for this three-volume set will be shortchanging itself. The letters Jefferson sent during his ambassadorship to France (1785-89) constitute valuable eyewitness summaries of a crucial historical period, as is the case with most of the topics covered in their 50-year correspondence. Editor Smith sorts the epistles chronologically: Madison's confiding to Jefferson, often in their private cipher, here italicized in the text, about the Constitutional Convention of 1787; the duo's opposition to the Federalists in the new government; Jefferson's triumph in the 1800 election; Madison's own two terms as president; and their final collaboration in creating the University of Virginia. The letters are significant, and even the parsimonious library should invest in a little seed corn. Gilbert Taylor