

**Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815.** By Gordon S. Wood. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 778 pages. \$35.00.  
**Reviewed by Colonel (Ret.) Alan Cate.**

Two diametrically opposing interpretations of our nation's founding exist. One presents the United States as especially ordained and favored by Providence, destined to be a beacon to the world. The other regards the Founding Fathers' handiwork as a noble but precarious experiment in republican self-government. The Founders themselves were conflicted. They simultaneously exalted over the possibilities, as reflected in the motto they chose for the Great Seal of the United States, *Novus Ordo Seclorum* "New Order of the Ages," yet were all too aware from their study of history that decay and destruction had been the ultimate fate of republics everywhere.

Gordon Wood brilliantly captures this sense of uncertainty, opportunity, and peril in *Empire of Liberty*, his sweeping study of the early national period from the Constitution's adoption to the conclusion of the War of 1812. This volume examines the emergence of a distinctive American political culture, illuminating not only institutions but also ideas about the conduct of political, economic, and cultural life. It treats the forging of the Constitution, the rise of political parties, the expansion of democracy, and the establishment of the fundamental tenets of American foreign policy. As Wood makes clear, this activity occurred against a backdrop of astonishing demographic, territorial, and economic expansion at home and a titanic global contest abroad between France and Great Britain that threatened to engulf the nascent American republic. Wood's theme is that by 1815, "the central impulses of the Revolution had run their course" and that Americans had transformed the way they viewed themselves and the larger world.

Wood teases out ironies and unexpected developments everywhere. The founding generation adhered to an ideology known as republicanism. Its essence was a fierce devotion to liberty and equality, which were constantly menaced by both tyranny and its opposite, anarchy. All that stood between the people and these dangers was their public virtue, understood by the Founders to include citizens' selfless willingness "to sacrifice their private desires for the sake of the public good." But, as the country grew increasingly commercial, Americans became more individualistic. In other words, liberty and equality proved in practice to be at odds not only with each other, but with republican virtue itself. A further complication arose. The Founders loathed the idea of parties or "factions" as contrary to virtue. Yet less than a decade after ratifying the Constitution, the United States had a roiling two-party system, with each claiming to be the true defenders of republicanism: Alexander Hamilton's Federalists supporting power against anarchy, and Thomas Jefferson's Republicans opposing it as an instrument of tyranny.

Wood explains how this dynamic happened through shrewd portraits of remarkable figures and arresting insight. Although not an intellectual like Hamilton or Jefferson, George Washington "always understood power and how to use it." Historians routinely contrast the two great rivals, but for succinctness, nothing matches Wood's opening to his chapter on westward expansion: "Hamilton always faced east, toward Europe . . . Jefferson faced west, toward the trans-Appalachian territory and even the lands beyond the Mississippi."

The book's most absorbing chapters cover the late 1790s, which, along with the decade prior to the Civil War, "were the most politically contentious" years in American history. The source of discord was the conflict between France and England. Although almost everyone agreed in principle that the United States should remain neutral, profound disagreement existed over specific policies. A poisonous atmosphere transformed "quarrels over policy into contests over basic principles," and invariably led to charges of treason and conspiracy on both sides. The fever broke only when President John Adams courageously defied his Federalist colleagues to negotiate an end to a naval "quasi-war" with France, and the Jeffersonian Republicans swept into office with the election of 1800.

Wood concludes with the War of 1812, a contest he labels "the strangest war in American history." The United States, under the Republican leadership of James Madison, ostensibly entered the war to end British depredations on America shipping. Yet New England, the portion of the country most invested in maritime rights, resolutely opposed the war. The Republicans prosecuted the war in republican fashion, without raising taxes or fielding a professional military, both anathemas to their vision of small, weak government. As a result, American forces were largely routed on land and, despite a brave showing by a handful of frigates in single-ship combat, the Royal Navy commanded our shores as well. Yet, Great Britain grew weary of the backwater struggle and signed a peace on Christmas Eve 1814. While the British conceded nothing on maritime rights, the agreement, coupled with Andrew Jackson's one-sided victory at New Orleans two weeks later, convinced most Americans that they had won a "second war of independence."

By 1815, Americans could turn their backs on Europe and look "westward across their own expansive continent." Much had changed in a generation. "Anyone aged 40 or older born in America had once been . . . a subject of His Majesty George III." Anyone younger born on these shores had entered the world as an American citizen, and 85 percent of the population was under 40. The terms "democrat" and "democracy" were no longer epithets, as they had been in 1789. An American national character was taking shape. Yet there was a serpent in the garden. For, as Wood concludes in his magisterial work, while the Founders had "created a Union devoted to liberty," it "contained an inner flaw that would nearly prove to be its undoing." Not until the dark shadow of slavery was lifted could the new nation achieve its promise. The great republican experiment was not over and faced further tests.

**Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs.** By Vanda Felbab-Brown. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2010. 273 pages. \$28.95. **Reviewed by Dr. Paul Rexton Kan**, author of *Drugs and Contemporary Warfare* and Associate Professor of National Security Studies, US Army War College.

Merely because counterinsurgency and counternarcotics share a common prefix and often occur in the same theater does not mean that they are mutually reinforcing operations. This truism is the essence of *Shooting Up*, a solid contribution to the growing body of literature on the nexus between illicit economies and violent conflict. Using a "political capital" model, the book explains the complexity of conducting a