

Americans coped with the chaotic monetary system. In *Bank Notes and Shinplasters* Joshua R. Greenberg does so in a superbly innovative and engaging way. He considers not only how bankers “constructed the bank note system to maximize personal gain” but also how “all Americans materially, culturally, and politically utilized that system to navigate the market” (pp. 2–3).

The navigation was risky. Bankers were concerned about the welfare of their customers, but many were little more than hucksters or con artists. Greenberg describes how people who accepted bank notes or shinplasters (paper issued by nonbanks) in payment acquired information to control their risk. His analysis of this process is admirably ambitious, including compelling examination of how race, gender, and status influenced the acquisition and evaluation of that information.

The appearance of a bank note could be decisive in discounting notes, and Greenberg’s most original chapters take up “the material culture of paper money” (p. 73). He applies his impressive knowledge of the notes themselves to demonstrate and analyze “how paper money was the physical and visual face of early republic banking where each bill possessed an identity of its own” (p. 104). He demonstrates how “Americans physically engaged with paper money and manipulated bank notes by ripping them in half, lighting them on fire, or writing all over them” (p. 105). Writing on the notes transformed them into a social medium. “Rather than isolating or atomizing individuals in the growing market economy,” Greenberg writes, “bank notes and shinplasters helped facilitate associations” (p. 131).

In the book’s last chapters Greenberg examines how people “used their lived experiences and understanding of the paper money economy when they entered into political debate and action” (p. 132). He shows how, during the Civil War, the Union’s creation of greenbacks and national bank notes helped redefine “the tenuous relationship between the individual and the state” (p. 158). Ironically, under the new regime, “Americans gained equity and peace of mind with a stable and uniform currency, but they lost some of the tools they needed to understand and shape vital financial decisions” (p. 188). He offers two ex-

amples of the consequences—the difficulty most Americans have in comprehending either the top-down quantitative easing of the Federal Reserve or the libertarian-driven Bitcoin markets. At the conclusion of this provocative and important book, readers might wonder how Greenberg would propose rekindling “the accumulation of widespread monetary information and subsequent deployment of that knowledge through political engagement” that prevailed during early America but is now “a distant memory” (p. 198).

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*Criminal Dissent: Prosecutions under the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.* By Wendell Bird. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020. x, 546 pp. \$55.00.)

Rich with stories of common people and with well-documented descriptions of the many cases that arose from the enforcement of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, Wendell Bird’s book is a reflection on the suppression of civil liberties in the early republic. It enlarges our knowledge of the clash between political administrations and citizens, a confrontation that has often reemerged in U.S. history. Well versed in legal archives as well as in the history of the first battle against the First Amendment, Bird is able to expand on his previous book *Press and Speech under Assault: The Early Supreme Court Justices, the Sedition Act of 1798, and the Campaign against Dissent* (2016). This time, there are not only the actions of the Supreme Court but also confrontations between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, or simply Republicans.

Bird divides the book in three campaigns of officials who tried to implement the Alien and Sedition Acts. The first concerns the suppression of the press (1798), the second deals with the military campaign against dissent after Fries Rebellion in Pennsylvania (1799), and the third discusses the final prosecutions in New York and New England, creating what

Thomas Jefferson described as “the reign of witches” (1800). If some of these federal prosecutions (all listed in an accurate appendix), failed—for example, the prosecution against the poet Joel Barlow for supporting the French Revolution—others resulted in indictments for conspiracy, arrests, sentencing, and jail. In the end, though, all the trials ended in acquittals or a presidential pardon. Two people died in prison: Benjamin Franklin Bache, the thirty-one-year-old editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora*, but his cause of death was yellow fever, and Thomas Adams, the forty-three-year-old editor of the Boston *Independent Chronicle*, who “had long been unwell” (p. 115).

The Federalists’ opposition to newspapers had grown after the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, which is why editors were the primary targets of Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. Going back to original papers and federal court records, Bird gives new voice to local politicians, tavern haunters, and those who raised liberty poles. The politics of the streets was targeted by Federalist officials who preferred other themes such as patriotism and military valor. But, in the end, freedom of the press and speech prevailed and were assured by the new administration led by Jefferson and James Madison. The book closes with two questions that still remain unsettled today: “Will governments have authority to criminalize dissent” and to punish printed and spoken words critical of the administration? or “Will governments only have the authority to restrict words that actually incite violence?” (p. 370).

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*The Federalist Frontier: Settler Politics in the Old Northwest, 1783–1840.* By Kristopher Maulden. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019. xxviii, 261 pp. \$40.00.)

In *The Federalist Frontier* Kristopher Maulden tracks the power and influence of the Federalist vision for governance from the late 1700s through the mid-1800s in the Old Northwest. Maulden’s analysis emphasizes the ideologies

and institutions that he asserts demonstrate the enduring legacies of Federalism beyond the period of the early American Republic. Whereas most scholars speak to the demise of Federalist influence in the early nineteenth century, he describes the principles of “energy in government, neo-mercantilist economics, and well-ordered republican liberty” as the foundation upon which Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were built and flourished in the 1810s and beyond (p. 10).

Five of the six primary chapters cover developments in the region up to 1815, which means the bulk of the analysis occurs within the commonly understood lifespan of the Federalists, if we consider their final surge in the War of 1812. Examinations of land speculation and state building ground the narrative in what the Federalists and their ideological descendants were creating in the Old Northwest. As Maulden explains, the War of 1812 “may have killed Federalism in other places, but in Ohio it presented an opportunity for Federalists to shine” (p. 149). The book’s analysis is influenced by and in conversation with the recent scholarship of Andrew R. L. Cayton, David A. Nichols, Bethel Saler, and others who have worked on American expansion. The argument has a clear framework that indicates where the author sees the principles of Federalism appearing in the constitutions of new states and the words of western politicians. Central to his emphasis on continuity is that the transition from the Federalist John Adams to the Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson did not alter the trajectory of governing principles in the Old Northwest. “Rather than a period of drawing down the state in the West,” Maulden writes, “the Revolution of 1800 brought a new era of state growth and a new life for the institutions that lay beneath the Federalist frontier” (p. 91). The Americans who moved into the region supported that vision because they saw benefits in a stronger governing presence, and that support fostered the survival of Federalist principles well into the antebellum era.

In tracing the life of Federalist ideas in the Old Northwest, *The Federalist Frontier* finds a niche but does not break significantly from the historiography. At times, too, the influence of the Federalists may not be as conclusive as the