

**owens:** I wanted to start by asking you about the project you're working on in particular. What inspired you to think about James Madison, and what was interesting in particular about the Convention and his work there that led to this book project?

**bilder:** I've been interested for a long time in cultural history and particularly, the History of the Book, and the way in which thinking about how people take notes—to use Walter Ong's phrase, the way in which technology structures thought—allows us to think better about the relationship of memory and experience to our own understanding. And that's been a theme that's mediated a lot of my own work.

I originally was going to write a project on founding lawyers. It was going to be my best seller and I was going to sell out! I started becoming obsessed with whether or not Madison actually was a lawyer, and I had a long list [of lawyers]. He was the first one, and I never moved beyond Madison.

After that, I became very interested in Madison and very interested in his note taking and the way in which there's been no significant work on the notes of the Convention as a product of history. There's been a lot of work on constitutional interpretation, but interestingly,

very little work on how do we think about the notes in the way we might think about other important texts, for example, the Bible.

The more I became interested in this topic, the more I began to understand that Madison mediates the Convention for us in ways that we fail to appreciate.

**owens:** Say a bit about that. Why are the notes, his personal notes, relevant beyond a concern for his own work and the technology factor? What public impact have they had?

**bilder:** The notes are the most significant way that we understand the Convention. The notes would be published. In fact, they're in his will. It has directions as to how his notes should be published.

**owens:**

began to understand the notes as if they were an official record of the Convention something Madison himself was very ac-

hard to criticize other people's notes, so he ensured that certain ideas about what were legitimate notes and what were not legitimate notes also became part of our understanding.

He forms, in this way that we're not conscious of, our understanding of how we should experience the Convention.

**owens:** What was his complaint about other people's notes?

**bilder:** First, he thought he had been badly represented. The most famous person whose Convention notes were published in Madison's lifetime was Robert Yates. Yates' notes were published in 1788.

Madison helps him do it. So, Madison is behind the scenes in many respects.

Madison is also the last of the founders to be alive. He outlives Jefferson, who wasn't at the Convention, and Adams. He outlasts a couple less famous people by a number of years, and he knew this. By the end of his life—there's a wonderful book by Drew McCoy about this—everyone traveled to see him as the last founder. And so he becomes identified with the Constitution because, quite frankly, he outlived the rest of the Framers. If somebody else had lived longer, maybe they would be more famous.

Madison is the primary author of the Bill of Rights, and that's probably, as a drafter, his more central contribution to the Constitutional tradition.

**owens:** Contemporary civic Republicans of the kind of neo-sort have sometimes claimed Madison as a Republican forefather. As Madison represented a sort of blend of liberal and Republican thought at the time—especially in his concern for deliberation and his repre-

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