

Chapter 5, Endnote 16, *The Words That Made Us*.

For a different view, see Gordon S. Wood, “Interests and Disinterestedness,” 131 (“Madison [was] the father of the Constitution if ever there was one”); Wood, “Monarchism and Republicanism in Early America,” in *The Idea of America*, 236 (“Madison...more than anyone was responsible for the new Constitution”); Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (2008), 146 (Madison was “[t]he major architect the Constitution”); Wood, *Revolutionary Characters*, 143 (same). But see *ibid.*, 156 (“we have to soften, if not discard, the traditional idea that [Madison] was the father of the Constitution”). This last-quoted aperçu is Wood’s best. In the course of a magnificent lifetime body of work on the Founding, Wood has repeatedly placed too much weight on Article I, section 10—which itemized, à la Madison, things that a state would not be allowed to do internally—and not enough weight on the rest of the Constitution as a whole. As a brilliant intellectual and cultural historian, Wood naturally enough has gravitated to Madison, himself a fascinating cultural analyst, but has thereby slighted the less intellectual and less talkative but far more consequential Washington—the true indispensable man. Perhaps because Wood’s first and path-breaking book, *The Creation of the American Republic*, focused on state constitutions, he has often exaggerated (as did Madison himself) the internal failures of state constitutions as the main engine driving the drafting and ratification of the federal Constitution. Correspondingly, Wood has failed to explain persuasively why the federal Constitution (or at least 95% of it) cannot be understood as fitting snugly within the simple Euclidian solution to the genuinely existential geostrategic threats that loomed (or at least were plausibly seen to loom) on the horizon at the Confederation level. Cf. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 15 (“the deficiencies of the Confederation...cannot account for the unprecedented nature of the Constitution created in 1787”). My analysis in this chapter of the geostrategic problem and the necessarily complex solution to that problem (in which X entailed Y and Z, requiring changes far beyond the deeply unserious New Jersey Plan) accounts for far more of the

Constitution than does Wood's emphasis on Article I, section 10 as a response to internal state constitutional failures. This chapter's focus on the national-security crisis as the key to the Constitution also better accounts for both the specific mandate of the Convention (to fix the Confederation, not the states internally) and what the Federalists themselves emphasized in the ratification period. Historiographically, my national-security story harkens back to the mainstream of historical scholarship prior to Charles Beard (much of whose work has now been discredited, as Wood himself acknowledges). For examples of this earlier orthodoxy, see George Bancroft, *History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States of America* (1882; 2 vols.); John Fiske, *The Critical Period of American History, 1783-1789* (1888). For a powerful update, see Marks, *Independence on Trial*.

On my view, the Constitution aimed primarily to solve national-security problems that obsessed leading military men such as Washington and Hamilton. It also but more incidentally and incompletely addressed cultural and state-level issues that preoccupied Madison. Throughout his writings, Wood has returned repeatedly to a passage in an Oct. 24, 1787 letter from Madison to Jefferson as the key to the Constitution: "The evils issuing from these sources [the "mutability" and internal injustice of state laws] contributed more to that uneasiness which produced the Convention, and prepared the public mind for a general reform, than those which accrued to our national character and interest from the inadequacy of the Confederation to its immediate objects." But this private letter is not the key to the Constitution—and indeed, Madison's letter went on to lament that the Philadelphia plan *failed* to solve the state-level problem that he saw as critical. The real key to the Constitution may be found not in Madison's private musings, but in Washington's most public pronouncement of all. Writing to Congress on behalf of the entire Convention in a letter accompanying the proposed Constitution itself—a letter reprinted everywhere in 1787-88, most often adjoining the text of the proposed Constitution itself—Washington explained to all America (not merely one overseas friend, as with Madison's letter to Jefferson) the essence of

the plan, the true key. “The friends of our country have long seen and desired, that *the power of making war, peace and treaties, that of levying money and regulating commerce, and the correspondent executive and judicial authorities should be fully and effectually vested in the general government of the Union*: but the impropriety of delegating such extensive trust to one body of men is evident—*Hence results the necessity of a different organization*. It is obviously impracticable in the foederal government of these States, to secure all rights of independent sovereignty to each, and yet provide for the interest and safety of all.... In all our deliberations on this subject we kept steadily in our view, that which appears to us the greatest interest of every true American, *the consolidation of our Union*, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety, *perhaps our national existence*.” *Farrand’s Records*, 2:666-67 (emphasis added). For more elaboration on how and why I break with Wood on this important set of issues, see Amar, *America’s Constitution*, 141-42, 549n.31.