



Embracing Madison

Constitution Day 2002 features a new James Madison statue for campus, book and speakers

The spirit and character of James Madison was palpable on campus Sept. 17, as the JMU community marked Constitution Day with a symposium on the fourth president and two unveilings.

The Cato Institute, a public policy research foundation in Washington, D.C., unveiled its book of essays, *James Madison and the Future of Limited Government*, with lectures by contributing writers John Samples and Tom G. Palmer. Essays from the collection were first presented at the Cato Institute's 2001 celebration of James Madison's 250th birthday. The institute chose to unveil the book at JMU because of the university's visible effort to celebrate and honor James Madison. The scholars' lectures were followed by a luncheon, panel discussion, book signing and lecture by JMU history professor Chris Arndt.

During the day's second unveiling, SGA President Levar Stoney said, "I'm proud to be part of an institution

that embraces education and community service. We do Mr. Madison's legacy a great justice today."

On behalf of JMU students, Stoney thanked Bruce and Lois Forbes ('64), their son Jeff ('90, '92M) and their daughter-in-law, Stephanie ('92, '93M), who were on hand for the dedication of a bronze life-sized statue of James Madison that the family contributed to JMU. An active alumna, Lois Forbes serves on the university's Madison Day committee, JMU Foundation board of directors and the Duke Club.

Stoney added, "I'm proud to be part of the only university in the nation named for James Madison because of the quality of our students from every generation. I was able to witness the opening of JMU's interfaith chapel this week, thanks to the quality of students from the class of 1954. They give us a true glimpse of Mr. Madison's legacy of service.

JMU President Linwood H. Rose said, "By their faithful support, the Forbes family has given JMU a place of prominence on this campus. And it is fitting for this university to dedicate a piece of artwork and honor a man who turned 18th-century ideals into the spectacularly successful political artwork of the Constitution."

The life-size Madison statue stands in front of Varner House at the south end of the pedestrian plaza that stretches from Bluestone Drive to Burruss Hall. The statue dedication featured the Colonial Williamsburg Fifes and Drums, led by drum major Lance Pedigo ('96). The group performed music Madison may well have heard more than 200 years ago. The music included Constitution March, Constitution Hornpipe and other period selections.

Madison Day Speakers

Constitution Day's featured speakers applied James Madison's ideas and vision to issues and dilemmas of the 21st century. John Samples, who directs Cato's Center for Representative Government, asked, "How powerful should the presidency be?"

In his address, John Samples indicated that differences among conservatives and [varieties of conservatism] are more than a matter of degree. The differences are ones of substance and style.

Samples contrasted two well-known conservatives of distinct presidential ilk - quiet and diminutive James Madison and roughrider Teddy Roosevelt - and brought them to bear on President George Bush's call for a regime change in Iraq. Samples said the difference comes down to how much power should be exercised by the executive.

Madison, a Constitutional conservative, believed that the grant of power from the American people to the government was limited to the powers enumerated in the Constitution. That was why he initially thought a Bill of Rights superfluous, Samples explained.

"Madison felt that politics and government were an unfortunate necessity, 'because men aren't angels,'" Samples added. "He believed that you don't need government to reach some higher ideal. Higher ideals of life lay elsewhere, outside of politics and government - in economics, religion or family, perhaps. ... He had a circumscribed view of the presidency."

He called Roosevelt, on the other hand, a conservative of national greatness, and the start of an idea that came to be known in the 1970s as the imperial presidency. "Roosevelt believed that the Constitution is not a straitjacket. He thought the presidency was empowered to do what's necessary. Through his action and his words, Roosevelt showed he believed that the presidency was the steward of the people. He had not a right, but a duty to do what was necessary unless prohibited by the Constitution."

George Bush's rhetoric over Iraq, especially intervening for a regime change, puts him squarely in Roosevelt's camp, Samples said. His remarks to the United Nations "of a great world cause" were reminiscent of TDR's "the cause must be righteousness ... the answer from a strong and virile people." For Madison, however ready to participate in just wars and to defend the nation, Samples explained, war was "something to be skeptical about" and "among the most dangerous of all enemies of liberty... because it increases the power of the executive."

Samples was clear that Madison would support a war against Iraq if it were pre-emptive of attack or action by Iraq, but not if it were aimed solely at remaking the country in the United States' image.

Tom Palmer

Tom Palmer, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and director at Cato University, discussed multiculturalism and Madison, whom he called "one of the most important political thinkers of all time." Palmer expressed concern over a growing trend to "improve" on Madison's system and correct historical imbalances and oppression with "differential rights based on discrete social groups and group voices."

But Madison's concept of equality based on individual rights doesn't need improvement, Palmer said. Madison "embraced pluralism. ... He extolled diversity and extended diversity of particularized interests so that no one group or sect can gather enough power to dominate the others."

When there was differentiating to be done, Madison did so between interests and passions on one hand and rights and the public good on the other, Palmer said. "Interests are not the same thing as rights. Interests might be opposed to rights. ... Under Madison, the common good is a very thin thing. It's liberty. Under liberty each can pursue interests and passions. Interests and passions are not the common good. No form of government has any other object."

Today, more than 150 years after Madison's death, and in the face of terrorism and international conflict, Palmer said, "Our republic is worthy of being defended despite its many flaws and failings over history. Equality is unique. Inequality is not. There are many regimes of unequal rights. Our republic secures more liberty and more prosperity for more people than any other in human history," he concluded.

Chris Arndt

JMU history professor Chris Arndt described the Constitutional Convention as a "work in progress. The Articles of Confederation in 1777 left much power to individual states, but convention member Benjamin Franklin said, "'We're here to change these venerable old ideals.'"

Constitutional framers argued state vs. individual rights, much as today's politicians argue about the 2001 Patriot's Act, which changes the balance between individual rights and national security. Do the checks and balances afforded in the constitution go away in times of crisis like Sept. 11?

"The framers used a convention format so a standing legislature would not set its own power," Arndt explained. "There are all sorts of checks and balances afforded in the Constitution. The framer's Constitution is a skeleton that gives muscle and sinew to each new generation. It's a continuing work in progress."

Story by Pam Brock and Michelle Hite ('88), Photos by Matt Carasella ('03)