

emerged as one option among many that might explain Branch's fits. Some suspected she had been bewitched; some suspected she was mentally ill; some suspected she was faking the whole thing. Perhaps, as he suggests, readers should think long about whether or not the Salem episode created a "distorted perception" about New Englanders and witchcraft. Perhaps the Stamford crisis was more the norm than the events that took place in Salem. The sporadic outbreaks of witchcraft in other colonies certainly suggest this view.

Godbeer's success is due in part to the goals of the series of which *Escaping Salem* is a part, Oxford's New Narratives in American History. The authors chosen to write for this series have been asked both to experiment with new methods and to forego the "detached, often Olympian manner of much historical prose." In Godbeer's retelling of their tale, the men and women of Stamford emerge as real human beings possessed of real feelings, convictions, and emotions, not as so many characters in a lab experiment gone awry, analyzed until their humanity disappears in a fog of jargon.

The seventeenth-century world Godbeer recreates is filled with ambiguity and paradox—not insignificant themes for students to consider when thinking about the past. This stands out as one of the strongest facets of a strong book. Godbeer clearly demonstrates that the past was not simple, that the past did not speak with one mind, and that the people whom he wrote about are, more often than not, in many ways very much like the students who will be assigned *Escaping Salem* for their U.S. survey or American colonial history courses.

*Escaping Salem* also contains a helpful and instructive "Afterword" that not only allows Godbeer the opportunity to discuss his research and narrative methods, but also introduces readers to important elements of the historiography of magic and witchcraft—magic in the early modern world, women and witchcraft, and neighborhood tensions and witchcraft.

The irritating absence of an index notwithstanding, *Escaping Salem* is a very fine narrative that should find its way onto the reading lists of many classes.

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**Richard Buel, Jr. *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. 310. Paper \$17.50; ISBN 1-4039-6238-3.**

It is ironic that the early republic's party of centralization, the Federalists, opposed what Walter Borneman has recently called "the war that forged a nation." Richard Buel explores this irony and analyzes the political struggle surrounding the War of 1812 in *America on the Brink*. Drawing from Federalist newspapers, private correspondence, and Congressional records, Buel asserts a revisionist interpretation of the war and events leading to it. He argues that self interested Federalist ideologues

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caused the war by rejecting the alternative course of economic coercion and undermined U.S. war efforts, nearly destroying the republic.

Buel begins his analytical narrative at the republic's founding and details the objectionable activities of New England Federalists through the end of the war. Buel questions Federalists' loyalty and integrity for their unscrupulous newspaper campaigns against Embargo Act supporters and for their divisive tactics in Congress. Even more, Buel criticizes New England Federalists for withholding their militia and their funds during the war. Whereas many historians have emphasized the moderate temper of Hartford Convention delegates, Buel reminds readers of the meeting's subversive nature. Federalist obstructionism, he argues, served as the model for South Carolina nullifiers and secessionists.

Buel's meticulous research provides readers with a sophisticated understanding of Federalist opposition, but his work is compromised by his one-sidedness. His major points are well taken: Venomous Federalist opposition might have pushed moderate Republicans toward war. However, emphasis on this point gives the impression that Republicans could do nothing other than declare war when Federalists denounced economic coercion and taunted their lack of military preparation. Republicans acted as freely as Federalists and Buel could challenge their actions more judiciously. The wisdom of the Embargo Act and Non-Intercourse Act, policies that were detrimental to the American economy, could certainly be called into question. So could Buel's argument that Republicans were more ideologically flexible than Federalists. Republicans compromised their strict opposition to centralized government, standing armies, the national bank, and the loose interpretation of the Constitution out of necessities arising from the war. Their modified positions, it must not be forgotten, resembled earlier Federalist principles. Finally, Buel should point out in his conclusion that South Carolina was inspired to nullify a national tariff in 1832 and secede from the union in 1860, not only by New England Federalists' resistance to the national government during the War of 1812, but first by the Republican-sponsored Kentucky and Virginia resolutions. Buel is justified in taking the Federalists to task, but he should not leave Republicans unchallenged.

Despite this imbalance, Buel's work has great potential value in upper-level college courses on American political or diplomatic history or those on the early republic. His unashamed defense of the Republicans and attack on the Federalists could easily inspire lively class discussions. His book is especially timely now as the U.S. is divided politically over war. Buel's work causes one to ponder a question all students should consider: When does dissent become treason or subversion? At the very least, Buel's detailed explanation of the political maneuver surrounding the War of 1812 will inform and improve instructors' lectures as it has done for this reviewer.