ALBERT GALLATIN: MAN OF MODERATION

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As in other American colonies, civilization in Pennsylvania flowered during the eighteenth century. The most elaborate evidences of this development are available both in the histories of the Philadelphia region and on the many historic plaques that have come to dot that area. These records dramatize the milestones of that progress, a progress peculiar to that region which included the founding of the first college in Pennsylvania, the chartering of the first bank in Pennsylvania, the opening of the colony's first hospital, the building of the first legislative halls, the publication of Pennsylvania's first newspaper, and the founding of the first inland town.

To those who settled west of the Allegheny Mountains, these accomplishments had a hollow ring. They either had no meaning, or at best the relationship between the destinies of the trans-Allegheny settlers and these developments in southeastern Pennsylvania was vague and indirect. The mountains not only set off the most distinctive of all American frontiers, but also localized attitudes and modified behavior patterns. Understandably, Western Pennsylvania settlers developed a minority consciousness, a remoteness similar in character to that which the seaboard settlers felt toward Europe.

This was the atmosphere in which Albert Gallatin began his career. As long as he appeared to share these feelings of inferiority, some real and others imagined, his influence among his Western Pennsylvania neighbors abounded, but Gallatin was not the typical western settler and found it difficult at times to adjust to western reasoning. An overwhelming majority of those who made the arduous journey west placed a greater emphasis on the challenges presented by the Indians, by the land, and by the weather than he did; they also associated realism with a different set of circumstances than those in which Philadelphians can take pride; in other words, they reckoned cultural time by a totally different set of advances than those that signified coastal progress. Westerners marked the unfolding of civilization with incidents to which they could directly relate: the founding of the first college west of the mountains; publication of the first

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newspaper west of the mountains; manufacture of the first glass bottle west of the mountains; chartering of the first bank west of the mountains; and, certainly, election of the first United States senator west of the mountains.

This senatorial distinction went to Albert Gallatin, a Swiss-born immigrant who came first to Boston in 1780, but within a few years moved to Virginia to become a western land speculator. Part of this land was in Fayette County, and he reserved 400 acres for his own use, where he ultimately built his Friendship Hill homestead which still stands. Although it was not uncommon for Americans of the late eighteenth century to be immigrants, Gallatin’s background is particularly noteworthy because his later public career, which spanned more than forty years, was strongly influenced by his European experiences and relationships. John Stevens spelled out some of the significance of this heritage in the opening lines of his biography of this immigrant when he wrote: “Of all European-born citizens who have risen to fame in the political service of the United States, Albert Gallatin is the most distinguished.”

The Gallatins were one of the most respected and cultured families from the beginning of the Swiss Republic; the family contributed diplomats, administrators, military professionals, business leaders, and physicians, whose services were foremost in Geneva, but whose power and influence touched most of Europe. With this kind of tradition behind him, it is not surprising that upon his arrival in America, Gallatin, in spite of numerous obstacles, contributed a career of public service to his adopted country. Orphaned at age nine, valedictorian of his college class at eighteen, an American immigrant a year later, an instructor in French at Harvard at twenty-one, a western land speculator at twenty-three, Albert Gallatin launched his public service career in 1788 at age twenty-seven.

Although Pennsylvania had already ratified the Constitution of 1787 before Gallatin became actively involved in state affairs, he did realize that there was considerable sentiment within the state against this new form of government. When other states delayed, hassled, and debated the need for amendments to the Constitution in order to safeguard human rights, a group of Pennsylvanians who opposed ratification assembled for a conference in Harrisburg. Although he had reservations about certain clauses in the Constitution, Gallatin certainly did not oppose it, but he did attend this conference of dissidents where he attempted to allay their fears. He called for a speedy ratification of the document in all states while admitting that major
amendments were needed to preserve and defend the rights of individuals. Gallatin's argument for amendments not only marks a main thrust within Pennsylvania for the nation's Bill of Rights, but also launched his twelve continuous years of public service to Pennsylvania. He followed this by another twelve-year stint as secretary of the treasury and then by an even longer period as a diplomat.

There is little that was orthodox, normal, or tranquil about Gallatin's years in Pennsylvania politics. For example, he served three one-year terms in the legislature, but one of those elections was challenged, and he had to face the voters a second time in order to secure his seat. He was later elected by the legislature to a term in the United States Senate. As indicated above, he was the first Pennsylvania senator elected from the area west of the mountains; he was also the first senator in the nation's history to be denied the right to sit in that body. After these experiences, he was elected to three terms in Congress (1795-1801), but from the district comprising Washington and Allegheny counties rather than his own Fayette County district. Gallatin never sought the House seat and obviously conducted no campaign; in fact, in the first of these elections he did not even know he was a candidate. This unorthodox behavior by the neighboring counties nevertheless does attest to a widespread recognition of his abilities.

The feat is indeed remarkable. It is unique in American history for an individual to be elected on three occasions by a district other than the one in which he resided. Such an irregularity could most easily have occurred in the 1790s, when the party system was in an embryonic state. These congressional elections were clearly a case of the position seeking the man rather than the man seeking the position, as is customary under the party system. Victory outside Gallatin's home district also signified the carry-over to America of an idea popular among the English masses of the time, namely, the desire to be represented well.

In spite of these oddities in Gallatin's officeholding record, he did make an impact at every level. It was during his term in the Pennsylvania legislature that the Whiskey Rebellion challenged the powers of law and order. Gallatin was not personally involved in distilling whiskey, but many of his constituents felt that the tax burden imposed upon them was intolerable. On their behalf he took up this issue when it first appeared and assisted in drafting petitions designed to prevent the original passage of the excise legislation. When this failed, he
phrased petitions urging modifications in the law because the western counties regarded it as an unfair tax on their grain. Since whiskey was the western product that could be most readily bartered on the seaboard for the many essentials on which the west was dependent, the excise was, in reality, more than a tax on grain; it was, in fact, a tax on western money.

In spite of these arguments, the petitions failed to effect a change in the law. Gallatin then attempted to delay and temper the reactions proposed by the law's more emotional critics. His counsel was always for moderation, but Alexander Hamilton, the originator of the excise legislation, unfortunately, in Gallatin's case, interpreted involvement as complicity.

This issue took a dramatic turn when a United States marshal appeared in Western Pennsylvania to serve writs on violators. General John Neville, a well-known federal revenue inspector in the region, approvingly accompanied the marshal on his Allegheny County calls. Considering him somewhat of a traitor to his neighbors, a group of irate citizens later visited Neville and demanded that he resign. He refused. An argument followed, and Neville's men fired on the group, killing one and wounding six. The next day, in retaliation, Neville's home was burned, and to both federal and state authorities in Philadelphia the situation appeared to be raging out of control. A general meeting of western settlers was called at Parkinson's Ferry, now Monongahela, with Gallatin numbered among the official delegates. He served as secretary, although it was his original intention to be in a less visible position. The firebrands, headed by David Bradford and James Marshall, proposed that the westerners raise an army to resist the forces of the United States rumored to be on their way to the scene.

Gallatin and Hugh Henry Brackenridge presented a cogent rebuttal to this treasonous suggestion. They succeeded by degrees; they first had the resolution of the radicals referred to a committee not scheduled to deliberate until the following day when many of the inciters hopefully would have dispersed to their homes. Not certain that federal troops would be sent, Gallatin then argued before the committee that nothing should be decided until the government's position was clear. During these deliberations, however, word was received that did make it clear. President Washington had announced his intention to call out the militia to halt Western Pennsylvania's disregard for the law, but as a foil the president also appointed three commissioners to visit the western counties in an effort to restore peace. Upon
learning this, Brackenridge proposed, and Gallatin seconded, a successful motion to have a small committee negotiate with the commissioners before considering any other action.

This committee, on which Gallatin served, outlined the grievances of the west, and the commissioners countered by proposing that, if the westerners would give assurances that they would submit to the excise law in the future, amnesty for past offenses would be granted; also they promised that the militia would not march so long as negotiations were in progress. By assurances the commissioners meant that citizens of the four-county area would actually sign declarations of submission to the excise tax. This was accepted, and the issue was submitted to a referendum. In his attempt to have the people of Fayette County accept this concession, Gallatin tried to reduce the issue to the lowest common denominator; to him the alternatives were simple: wage civil war or pay a seven-cent tax on every gallon of whiskey distilled. In order to point the way to the preferred choice, he further noted that the people of the west were too few and too inadequately equipped to wage a successful war. Since only a small percentage of the taxables voted, the results were in general disappointing; only in Fayette, Gallatin's home county, did a majority vote to give written assurances. When the results were tabulated the commissioners reported to President Washington that military intervention would be necessary to enforce the excise law.

Later in 1794 the army did appear in Western Pennsylvania, but no major incidents occurred. Alexander Hamilton accompanied the troops and seemed more intent upon interrogating individuals about Gallatin's role in the disturbance than in any of its other aspects. Admittedly Gallatin had been a participant in most of the meetings dealing with the excise, but at all points he worked for moderation and, perhaps, did as much as anyone to stave off civil strife. Hamilton had apparently concluded circumstantially that Gallatin was one of the inciters, and through the interviews it seemed that he was looking for evidence that could blacken Gallatin's reputation, because, in the midst of this excise excitement, the Pennsylvania legislature had surprisingly elected Gallatin to the United States Senate. There he was welcomed by Hamilton's critics since there was none among them who spoke the technical language of finance and who could intelligently phrase the questions to which they sought answers from the secretary of the treasury.

Under Gallatin's leadership, Republicans in the Senate promptly passed a motion requesting import-export information from Secretary
of the Treasury Hamilton. Irritated by the request, Hamilton recognized that its passage was made possible only by the presence of Gallatin, who had earlier criticized his financial measures from the floor of the Pennsylvania legislature. He further identified this action as a ploy to make the secretary of the treasury accountable, in part, to the Senate. Disagreeing with this interpretation and viewing it as an invasion of his "private domain" and as a reflection on his integrity, Hamilton never provided the Senate with a direct response. To Gallatin's partisans the Pennsylvania senator's ultimate expulsion sufficed as Hamilton's indirect reply.

In spite of its other ramifications, Gallatin's election to the Senate was a genuine tribute on the part of his Republican colleagues in the Pennsylvania legislature. He had been among them less than three years, made no effort to secure the post, and resided in a sparsely settled section of the state. In the face of these handicaps, his selection must be viewed as a recognition of individual merit — but not one that could have occurred without the Federalists, who held a majority of the seats in the legislature and were divided at the time over a jurisdictional matter. Although enough Federalists voted for Gallatin to elect him, there was a loophole by which his Senate seat could still be challenged. This was the question of his citizenship.

Gallatin had become a citizen of Virginia in 1785 and was elected to the Senate in 1793; these dates are significant since the Constitution stipulates that a United States senator must be a citizen for at least nine years before he is eligible to hold that office. No matter how often 1785 is subtracted from 1793, the answer is less than nine. Gallatin's chief rival for the Senate seat had been the Federalist candidate, Henry Miller of York County. His followers believed that they could count to nine and did not find that number between these two dates. As a result, shortly after Gallatin took the oath of office as a senator, Vice-President John Adams read a petition from nineteen residents of York protesting Gallatin's election on the basis of his failure to satisfy the residence requirement.

The question was referred to a Federalist-dominated committee from which no comment was heard until after the Senate's request for financial information, phrased by Gallatin, had been sent to Hamilton. Since he had been told that he could retain his seat until a decision was rendered, the lack of prompt action can be interpreted as a tacit suggestion to Gallatin that, if he did not become a thorn to the Federalist leadership, the citizenship issue would die in committee. He either did not interpret the message in this way or refused
to be bound by it. Thus the matter of his citizenship lay dormant for almost two months, but when he sought to provide grist for the Republican mill, he became that thorn, and the issue was quickly moved to a vote. He was unseated by a strict twelve to fourteen party vote, with Robert Morris of Philadelphia, his Pennsylvania colleague in the Senate, casting what might be considered the deciding vote against him.

Of course, the Senate's interpretation of citizenship is open to question, and Hamilton probably realized that. He also realized that, if Gallatin's reputation could be blackened by his whiskey excise activities, he should not miss the opportunity to do so since Gallatin seemed predestined for a political future unless an obstacle were put in his path. Hamilton not only had failed through his interviews in Western Pennsylvania to establish that Gallatin was an inciter, but his worst fears were already becoming reality. In the final stages of the whiskey excitement, the 1794 elections were held. Not only did Gallatin regain his assembly seat in Fayette County, but it was on this occasion that the neighboring counties of Washington and Allegheny elected him to Congress by a decisive margin.

Gallatin spent the next six years in Congress where his energies were directed primarily to the task of improving the House procedures for handling money bills. His recommendations were accepted by Republicans, and his grasp of the subject attracted the attention of Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him secretary of the treasury in 1801. Gallatin was not a political disciple of Jefferson, but an independent statesman who as secretary of the treasury was permitted to formulate his own policies. Jefferson's relationship with Gallatin and his other top adviser, James Madison, was remarkably close and intimate. The president believed that many issues could more easily be solved by personal conversations than by written reports. Thus to the discomfiture of their rivals much was done at the dining table.

Madison and Gallatin frequently had informal dinners with the president, while their political enemies bemoaned the fact that the government had fallen into the hands of two planters and a foreigner. All three agreed at the outset that excise taxes should be swept away, and in order to compensate for the loss in revenue, less defense spending seemed to be the answer. Gallatin and Jefferson had no difficulty convincing themselves of the wisdom of this on the theory that preparations against the possibility of war tend only to encourage wars and
that sound principle would not justify the taxing of United States citizens to accumulate armaments for wars to take place "we know not when." At various times in our more recent history such sentiments have been applauded as the essence of statesmanship; on other occasions they have been denounced as a harbinger of isolationism and even of national cowardice. The two planters and a foreigner were merely among the first American political leaders to wrestle with the double-edged issue of defense budgets.

Gallatin, the immigrant, had no intense state loyalties and prejudices such as those that characterized the thinking of Jefferson and Madison. His vision encompassed the nation as a whole; thus his allegiance was to the United States, not to Virginia, or Pennsylvania, or New York. While many prominent Americans, especially in the nation's first seventy-five years, found it difficult to place national interest before state or sectional advantage, Gallatin did not. In this regard he was more like a fellow immigrant, Alexander Hamilton, than like Jefferson. Both were strong nationalists with no "hang-ups" about the dangers of a strong central government. Hamilton emphasized an industrial society supported primarily by a wealthy class, a central bank, and a foreign policy oriented toward Britain. Gallatin did not quarrel with Hamilton's industrial concepts in general nor with his central bank, but preferred a foreign policy that showed a greater balance between Britain and France than Hamilton advocated; he did not, however, see the need to show deference for an aristocratic few. In spite of Gallatin's own aristocratic background, he did not endorse the concept of a privileged class, and on the basis of his European experience with monarchs, he was inclined to restrain executive power more drastically than was called for in the Constitution.

On the more positive side, Gallatin expressed his own view of nationalism in more direct terms when the Senate asked him as secretary of the treasury to devise a plan for internal improvements. He recommended a four-part federal program which called for:

(a) a system of canals paralleling the seacoast to provide an inland waterway along the Atlantic from New York to North Carolina (more than 150 years in advance of reality)

(b) a turnpike network from Maine to Georgia (but not realized until the interstate system of our generation)

(c) improvements in travel between east and west by better navigation of the Susquehanna, Potomac, James, and Santee rivers
(d) improvements in the rivers of the west, namely, the Allegheny, Monongahela, Tennessee, and the Kanawha. Unfortunately the Chesapeake Affair and the deterioration of diplomatic relations with Britain caused Gallatin's forward-looking proposal to be abandoned in his time.

Although Hamilton and Jefferson both became intoxicated with the party spirit, Gallatin tried hard not to imbibe at all. More than any other Jeffersonian leader, Gallatin stood above party and generally had a clear vision of the national good which was often blurred in the minds of those who were rabid party organizers. In forsaking a party orientation, Gallatin was more like George Washington than was either Jefferson or Hamilton.

When the Jeffersonians came to power in 1801, Gallatin was not blinded by the party factor in filling the various public service positions. Like Washington, he believed that government functioned on a higher plane than finding positions for the party faithful. Without either equivocation or hesitation his decisions always favored government efficiency over party interests. At the risk of his own political prestige, he argued that holdover employees from the Federalist years should not be removed for partisan purposes.

Violent opposition to this argument was first voiced by William Duane, editor of Philadelphia's Aurora, but it quickly extended to include other Republicans; the series of disputes which followed ultimately claimed Gallatin's political life in Pennsylvania. Duane and his Philadelphia colleagues such as Senator Michael Leib never forgot that Gallatin, in their opinion, had demonstrated by such sentiments that he was not a complete Jeffersonian. This issue of patronage, as we would call it today, prompted Gallatin's enemies within the state to conduct a "personal contest" against him, which, according to Henry Adams, was "more determined, more ferocious, more mischievous" than any in American history. Because of this turmoil, Gallatin's interest in local and state issues waned, and without looking back, he turned his attention to national problems associated with the Treasury Department.

Within a short time, Gallatin again struck a Republican nerve center when he mentioned the Bank of the United States without denouncing it with a string of epithets. To Republicans that institution connoted a whole series of evils. Not only did they deem it an instrument for the commercial few at the expense of the American masses, but they also considered it an example of a powerful central government at work as the result of what they dubbed "unconstitutional"
legislation. After a bitter battle in Congress in which the Jeffersonians had eloquently stated these arguments, the bank had been established in 1791 with a charter to run for twenty years. Unable to forget their defeat on the bank issue, Republicans never lost an opportunity to remind the nation of the horrible mistake that had been made on that occasion.

Now, shortly after the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, Gallatin proposed the establishment of a branch of the Bank of the United States at New Orleans in order to facilitate the collection of funds from taxes and the sale of public lands. Although these were worthy purposes, Republicans, including Jefferson himself, opposed the idea. They interpreted the establishment of the New Orleans branch to imply a reversal of position and Republican acceptance of an institution which had come to be recognized by the party rank and file as a symbol of Federalist mismanagement of the government. Gallatin did not recant or succumb to this kind of partisan thinking, although Jefferson did write to him to convey his disapproval of the proposed bank extension. The president expressed his fear that the bank would become such a powerful force in the economy that it might at times even dominate government decisions.

Gallatin persisted, and Jefferson, who had great respect for his judgment, quietly acquiesced in the establishment of the New Orleans branch, but within a few years the issue reappeared to torment the Republicans. The bank charter was due to expire in 1811, and the Senate appropriately asked Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin for his recommendation concerning recharter. His report, a logical follow-up to his New Orleans proposal, strongly recommended that the bank be rechartered. This recommendation sent a shock wave through the Republican party because it allied Gallatin with Federalist philosophy. Old-style Republicans like Duane and Leib in Pennsylvania were joined by others such as William Branch Giles and the Smith brothers (Samuel and Robert) in a race to sharpen their political knives. Their avowed purpose was to cut the string that tied Gallatin to the Republican party. Many Republicans now agreed with this course; until this time they had not been anti-Gallatin, but to continue that stand would identify them with support for a bank resting on Hamiltonian principles.

Obviously many others were converted to the merits of the bank over the two decades of its existence. President Madison, who had been a leading bank antagonist in the House in 1791, was among the Republicans who had modified their positions. He would have ap-
proved recharter if it had reached him in 1811, but he did not openly advocate that course of action because he was aware of the many who had not been converted. Even former President Jefferson no longer raised his voice in opposition to Gallatin's advocacy; perhaps through his years of practical experience he had gained at least a tolerant appreciation of the bank's function. The unconstitutional arguments of 1791 were nevertheless repeated by many in 1810-1811, but Gallatin regarded his appeal for recharter as nonpartisan and in the national interest. After a long debate, the bank issue was defeated in the House by one vote and in the Senate by a similar margin after the legislatures of at least three states (Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Virginia) instructed their senators to vote against it; in fact, Vice-President George Clinton's vote was needed to break a 17-17 tie.

Within six years the United States was virtually bankrupt. Although it cannot be concluded that the failure to endorse recharter in 1811 was solely responsible for the financial debacle, it did contribute to the severity of the nation's economic problem. Under these circumstances, Congress authorized the recharter that Gallatin had requested. Perhaps Gallatin found a little solace in this ultimate turn of events, but, disappointed with congressional action in 1811, he submitted his resignation. Madison did not accept it at the time. A declaration of war with Britain followed shortly, and Gallatin was needed to work out the complicated task of negotiating the loans that had been authorized by the Congress. With this completed in May 1813, Gallatin asked Madison to send him on a diplomatic mission to Russia. The president agreed, and Gallatin joined James Bayard and John Quincy Adams in St. Petersburg where the Czar had offered to mediate the United States-British differences. This appointment ended Gallatin's career in domestic politics and cast him in the role of a diplomat for the next fourteen years.

The projected Russian conference was a disappointment to Gallatin. Soon after his arrival, he learned that he had not totally escaped his old enemies in the Senate; merely to embarrass him, they convinced the Senate not to confirm his appointment as a commissioner. This action, they said, was based not on vindictiveness but on the theory that it was unconstitutional for him to serve as a commissioner and as secretary of the treasury at the same time. From a practical standpoint the Senate vote had no meaning because the British refused to accede to Russian mediation. The British did, however, agree to treat directly with the United States.
This invitation to discuss peace directly prompted President Madison to reconsider the composition of his negotiating team. He sent the names of Adams and Bayard, who had earlier been dispatched to Russia, along with those of Henry Clay and Jonathan Russell, to the Senate for approval. Gallatin's name had been deliberately omitted from the group because Madison incorrectly assumed that Gallatin was en route home since he had not been confirmed for the Russian mission; when he learned that Gallatin was still in Europe, he accepted his resignation as secretary of the treasury written two years before and added his name to the list of commissioners. With the Senate's announced reason for his earlier rejection now removed, Gallatin was confirmed.

It was a strong American delegation; in fact, its strength was its greatest potential weakness. Strong personalities often make agreement difficult, and that was true here. In his analysis of the charged atmosphere at Ghent, one critic observed that Adams and Clay "acted upon each other as explosives." Although these two accounted for the more dramatic clashes, Russell and Bayard also contributed to the dissension. The mission was saved from possible disaster by Gallatin, whose patience, determination, and moderation enabled the delegation to present a united front at the conference table.

At the first meeting with their British counterparts, the Americans were not prepared for the aggressive demands and unnecessary insults with which they were bombarded. The British commissioners boldly requested that the whole of the Northwest Territory be ceded to various Indian tribes and that Fort Niagara and Sackets Harbor on the New York shore of Lake Ontario both be turned over to Canada. In preparing a reply to these "preposterous" demands, the American commissioners could not agree on the tone of their response. Gallatin pleaded for unity and warned that without it they could only fail. Adams particularly was incensed by the audacity of the British request. Gallatin reminded him of the need to be practical — to be firm, but to forego the use of harsh language in the reply. Lord Castlereagh, the British foreign secretary, later admitted that his commissioners had gone too far. Feeling that their avarice would only encourage the American people to continue the war with a renewed vigor, he did not want the conference to break up because of his negotiators' excessive demands.

Basic to the internal problems of the American delegation were the sectional attitudes of its members. Clay of Kentucky, for example, was primarily concerned with the Indians in the northwest
and with the navigation of the Mississippi River, while Adams of Massachusetts was preoccupied with issues of primary importance to New England, namely, fishing rights off the coast of Canada, the northeastern boundary, and the impressment of American sailors on the high seas. Here again Gallatin's lack of strong identification with a particular section assisted the United States, because he was able to reconcile the divergent positions of his colleagues; his foreign background demonstrated that, although roots must be deep, they must also radiate from the trunk if the national tree were not to be toppled by winds whipping in different directions.

From his background position, the Duke of Wellington, like Lord Castlereagh, recognized not only the role that Gallatin was playing within the American delegation, but also the reasonableness of his attitude on all issues. As a result, Wellington communicated with Gallatin by private dispatches. He even confided to him that he disapproved of the aggressiveness shown by the British negotiators and then complimented the American as follows: "your moderation and sense of justice, together with your good common sense, places you above all the other delegates, not excepting ours." With this spirit of good will on Wellington's part, the British and Americans finally reached an agreement which took the form of the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812.

Shortly after these negotiations were concluded, Gallatin was appointed minister to France, an assignment which was immediately followed by a similar appointment to the Court of St. James. From these two vantage points and with an incompetent minister at Madrid during part of the period, Gallatin's expertise was heavily relied upon. Along with John Quincy Adams, he played a dominant role in resolving both territorial and security problems. He was confronted with issues on most of the nation's frontiers; in the southeast he assisted with the acquisition of Florida, in the northeast with the Maine boundary determination, in the northwest with both the drawing of the Canadian boundary from the Lake of the Woods to the peaks of the Rockies and with the agreement to extend the joint occupation of Oregon, and in the southwest with the establishment of independent governments in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

Of all these probably the Florida negotiations were the most delicate and at the same time the most frustrating in which Gallatin participated. Because of Indian raids from Spanish Florida along our Georgia frontier, the protests of American citizens produced rather
diverse responses by the United States government. First, the State Department opened negotiations to purchase the territory, but then in the midst of these deliberations, General Jackson was dispatched to the area, and he ripped through Florida with questionable abandon. This obviously brought negotiations to a halt.

Gallatin’s assignment was to minimize the significance of the general’s conduct and create a climate in which peaceful negotiations could be reopened. He successfully argued that the Spanish had reneged on their agreement of 1795 to keep the Indians under control. At the same time he hastened to assure the Spanish that his government had no intention to occupy Florida permanently. Finally, he interpreted Jackson’s action to the Spanish as a defensive maneuver designed to protect United States citizens from the Indians. These arguments, plus the fact that the rest of Europe was not concerned with Spain’s American problems, prompted a resumption of the negotiations. Gallatin continued to provide information and explanations for more than three years or until the purchase was finally ratified by Spain in 1821.

Through this same period he became concerned with the future of the Latin American states which were in the process of declaring their independence from Spain. His statements, some of which predate the Monroe Doctrine by five years, were reflected in its philosophy. Not only did Gallatin argue that the United States should work to restrain any other European power from interfering in Spain’s dispute with her colonies, but he also advocated that the United States form an alliance with Britain if France in particular attempted to intervene. He further maintained that the establishment of a European prince on the throne in Mexico, Peru, or elsewhere should be viewed as an effort to compromise Latin American independence. He was in effect suggesting, as indeed the Monroe Doctrine made explicit, that Latin America must remain free of monarchical governments.

Gallatin’s earlier assurances to Spain that the United States had no intentions of forcibly occupying Florida were completely sincere. Seizure of Florida or any territory would have been a violation of his determination to resolve diplomatic differences at the conference table rather than on the battlefield. Years later, after he had retired from public life, he still pursued this principle as a private citizen. In 1844, however, he saw ominous signs that the nation was deviating. The annexation of Texas seemed imminent, and this, in his opinion, would inevitably make the United States a party to the on-going war between
Texas and Mexico because of the latter’s refusal to recognize Texan independence.

As a result of this concern, Gallatin chaired a public meeting in New York City at the age of eighty-three to protest the pending annexation, partly because it carried with it an extension of slavery, but more importantly because it would provoke a war of conquest to solve an international problem. Disturbed by this new departure for the United States, he argued that it would be a betrayal of America’s moral convictions and a blot on her national image. Gallatin could make this evaluation because he could look with pride on the peaceful resolution of such international issues as the navigation of the Mississippi, the northern limits of the Louisiana Territory, the Maine boundary, and Florida Indian raids — in all of which he had played a role.

The nation failed to heed Gallatin’s appeal and lurched forward into the war he had predicted, but he did not abandon his cause. When the Mexican War ended, he still thought in idealistic terms and in these words urged the American people to seek a just peace: “Your mission is to improve the state of the world, to be a ‘model republic,’ to show that men are capable of governing themselves.”

Obviously, these are words of optimism, words of conviction, words of responsible leadership. They also suggest that Gallatin found a greater challenge and a greater fulfillment in his diplomatic career than he did in his earlier years devoted to domestic affairs. He could not easily adjust to the changing demands and parochial views associated with the system of partisan politics that was developing around him in the United States. Although he had served successfully, even with distinction, on the domestic front, he received his greatest satisfaction from the challenges of diplomacy. This was well demonstrated at one point when he was ambivalent about accepting an assignment. For personal reasons he wanted to decline, but professionally he wanted to serve. In finally deciding to accept the appointment, he revealed the depth of his commitment to his adopted nation when he wrote to the president: “My habits are formed and cannot be altered. I feel alive to everything connected with the interest, happiness, and reputation of the United States.”

Without question these words of stewardship are symbolic of Gallatin’s total career. More importantly, they set a standard that the political leaders of any generation would do well to review and emulate.