WOODS: I'm so glad that you produced this course for us, and I'm so glad that in the coming weeks, we're going to have a course from your wife, Dedra, on Latin American history.

BIRZER: That's right.

WOODS: That's a tricky subject because virtually everybody who teaches it is ideologically 180 degrees from us. And even more than in the typical sorts of topics we might study, Latin American history for some reason, it just tends to attract a particular bias. So it's very, very much needed. So the Birzer name will ring down the ages in the annals of liberty —

BIRZER: I love it.

WOODS: — robustly, let's just say, for these contributions.

BIRZER: Considering how much Dedra loves Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel Paterson, I think that will mean a lot to her, so that's really great, Tom.

WOODS: Oh, indeed. Yes, she will take her place among very worthy company. All right, so 1807 to 1820 is rather an unusual choice of years, beginning and ending. Why this period as a distinct area of study?

BIRZER: Yeah, thanks, Tom. So when you and I had talked, obviously we were thinking about doing something for the whole Jacksonian or Early Republican period, which usually most scholars kind of date from about 1812 or 1815 up until 1848. And you know, we have this — I'm not exactly sure why; I guess it's just convenient, Tom. You know this as well as I do, if not better: we love to divide our time periods by wars. And I find the War of 1812 as well as the Mexican War both are incredibly fascinating, but in a lot of ways, they don't quite fit their own times. They change things, as wars always do, but they're odd in a lot of ways.

And for me, the time period, especially if we're trying to figure out when does the Founding end and when does that period right after the Founding begin. For me, that's really in Jefferson's second administration, and I think one of the most significant changes — which only economic historians take seriously, and I think that's too bad — is Jefferson's embargo. That's a massive change in the way we've dealt with the world and the way we've dealt with the US economy. And just the fact that the executive has that kind of power, to be able to implement an embargo in that fashion, these are major constitutional and republican changes.

So for me, I always think of kind of the last moment of the American founding, being the Lewis and Clark Expedition, this kind of great Enlightenment moment, where you've got Enlightenment liberals like Lewis and Clark with people like Benjamin Rush behind them and others, and then you have this new drastic thing with Jefferson's heavy hand and the embargo. I mean, what a change.

So I like to think of the Founding as ending right around 1806 and the next period really beginning right around 1807. Plus, we know that clearly there wouldn't have been a War of 1812 without the embargo, and we don't even recover from that, in terms of trade, from the embargo until the 1840s, just right on the eve of the Mexican War. So the wars still matter, but they matter in ways that I think we sometimes miss.

WOODS: Who were the personalities that you would say really dominate the years that you've chosen?

BIRZER: I love that question, Tom, because honestly — and I've been teaching this for 20 years now at Hillsdale, almost 21 — one of the things I love about Jacksonian America is how weird all these people are. You have everyone from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Margaret Fuller to James Fenimore Cooper to John L. O'Sullivan. There are just some really eccentric people. Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, all of these guys. I don't think America has ever produced a weirder set of people than Jacksonian America did. And you know, it's that great gasp of individualism, one of the most glorious gasps of individualism in American history, I think. By the time we get to the Civil War, there's more conformism in the economy, conformism in the culture. And then of course, as you well know, Tom — and I probably learned this from you — by the time we get to the Progressive period, we're in tapioca country at that point. Nobody's producing — whatever we think of Daniel Webster, the guy was his own man. That's clear.

WOODS: So let's try to make our way through the period. 1807, Thomas Jefferson's still president. Maybe we should say something about the embargo and the War of 1812. And do you as a historian — now, I shouldn't say "as a historian." Do you as a person think that the War of 1812 may have been a case where war was necessary?

BIRZER: Oh, no. I think it's definitely — I mean, sorry, I shouldn't be so strong in my opinion on that, Tom, but it is strong. That seems to me like one of the most unnecessary wars we've ever been in. And it's a confluence of really crazy historical events, all in the 1800s and in the 1810s. So you have the really serious problems on the frontier with the American Indians and the great question of whether or not the American Indians are acting on their own or if they're just simply pawns of the British. And then you have the question of trade on the seas. How open is our trade? And does America have the right to trade with both England and France at the same time? And then of course, you have the British arrogance, in which they're impressing sailors.

Now, all of those things come together to kind of help create the War of 1812, but I don't think there's really any — at least in my mind, Tom, I don't think there's much question Madison was using the War of 1812 as a way to solidify his own power and the power of his followers. I think they really had a very strong vision of what America should be, and they were willing to do almost anything, including what I would consider to be some very constitutionally questionable things, in getting us into the war. But I think they were willing to do that in order to solidify their power against the opposition.

So there's a lot of politics as usual, but then you add in, you've got these sincere believers in the war. You've got all these guys like Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun is a hardcore nationalist at this point. They absolutely want war. And at some level, being a small R republican, I can understand their frustration. I mean, Tom, can you imagine being John Quincy Adams and trying to live up to your dad [laughing]? No matter how great John Quincy Adams is, he'll never be his father. Even if his father's one of the lesser figures of the American Revolution, his dad was a founder, and I think that whole generation, everybody from Webster to Calhoun to Clay to Quincy Adams, I think they all had — and I don't blame them. I just think they had a bit of an inferiority complex, and when they were trying to imagine, *How can we live up to our dads?* I think war was the easy answer. And the war hawks develop in large part out of that desire to really kind of show, yeah, we're worthy of a republic and we're worthy of our fathers.

WOODS: I had never thought of it that way, actually. That's an interesting perspective.

BIRZER: Yeah, maybe too psychological, but I do think there's something to it.

WOODS: Yeah, but people act that way all the time. People act out of motives like that all the time, I think. The standard response here is to say that the United States, as this fledgling republic, needed to demonstrate that it could withstand, let's say, major indignities at the

hands of other countries. And the impressment of sailors into the British Navy was one such indignity, not to mention the various obstacles placed in the way of American trade and the like. And so without war, this would not have been accomplished. But yet, another way you could look at it is the war was such a disaster, that if anything, the war had the opposite effect.

BIRZER: That's right.

WOODS: And if you were to ask the average person, let's say, in London in 1813, how do you think the war with the United States is going? I bet the average person didn't even know they were fighting the United States. That was the least of their concerns.

BIRZER: Yeah. Yeah, especially, we were the North American theater of the Napoleonic Wars in their mind. So yeah, we were a really minor theater in all of that, and they had much bigger problems at home to deal with, which also makes it odd that the British would choose to fight us at that point and that we would fight them too. But of course, they had sent us an official apology right before we declared war; it's just that apology didn't arrive until about a week after we'd already declared war [laughing]. Again, crazy confluence of events, and modern communication would have prevented a lot of that.

WOODS: So this is, of course, happening while James Madison is president, and to my mind — maybe I'm too provincial and I'm always just thinking about things that interest me or that are important to me, but to my mind, the best thing Madison did was the veto of the Bonus Bill. Just the text even more than the veto itself, more than the act of vetoing it, the reasoning behind the veto was very impressive, which, it's not read that much in a typical class. Maybe a college classroom might come across it, but you don't read it that much, and it's very simple yet persuasive. What do you think? Do you think I'm putting too much emphasis on this?

BIRZER: Not at all, Tom, and I'll give you two responses to that. First of all, whatever you think is interesting, that's why you're Tom Woods, so don't ever sell yourself short on that one. I'm glad that you find these things interesting. The second thing I would say, and you sound a lot like my friend and former colleague Burt Folsom, anytime I would criticize Madison — and I probably have a tendency to criticize him too much — but Burt would always remind me, almost word for word for what you just said, that, "Don't ever forget the Bonus Bill." And in I agree. I think Madison really was at the top of his form when it came to the Bonus Bill. And his willingness not only to veto it, but to veto it for the right reasons, I think was great. Just unfortunately, it's such an exception in his two administrations, that I wish it were the norm, but it really wasn't.

WOODS: Well, can we tell people with the Bonus Bill is? I don't want to sound like we're talking inside baseball among historians here. Can we tell people what the Bonus Bill more or less consisted of?

BIRZER: Yeah, well, the Bonus Bill had a lot to do with what soldiers were doing, what they had done, and what was going on with public lands. So there was a lot of speculation and a lot of fear that government monies and lands were going to be used for personal gain. And as far as I understand it — and Tom, feel free to jump in, but as far as I understand it, Madison's veto of the Bonus Bill derailed a lot of schemes, especially in the West, for serving and trying to gain control of property.

WOODS: Well, what I have in front of me is, thanks to the internet, the full text of the Bonus Bill veto And the thing that I want to talk about is the internal improvements aspect here.

BIRZER: Sure.

WOODS: The building of roads and canals and improving "the navigation of watercourses in order to facilitate, promote, and give security to internal commerce and render more easy and less expensive provisions for the common defense," stuff like that. And what's interesting to me about it is that, today, this would be the least controversial bill around. No one would

care. No one would think there was a constitutional objection. But Madison is very clear that — these are his words — "the legislative powers vested in Congress are specified and enumerated in the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution, and it does not appear that the power proposed to be exercised by the bill is among the enumerated powers or that it falls by any just interpretation within the power to make laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution those" — so in other words, he's saying: don't even try to come at me with the necessary and proper clause because I'm already covering it.

BIRZER: He gets the Ninth and Tenth Amendments into it, which is great.

WOODS: That's right. That's right. So he says that the interstate commerce clause cannot include this power to construct roads and canals. It can't be that the general welfare clause can be cited, because then there'd be no point of having enumerated specific powers if we then say, *Oh, and by the way, in addition to the ones we specifically said, there's also this unlimited reservoir of additional power*. That would make the whole document make no sense, so he rejects that. So it's a hardcore, strict constructionist thing. Now, he says — he doesn't put it quite this way, but this is his argument — if this is something you people really, really want, we do have provision in the Constitution for you to get it, and that's through the amendment process.

BIRZER: That's right.

WOODS: And this is just like what Jefferson had said about the national bank, that in effect, if we just go ahead and do this, even though it's not authorized expressly in the Constitution, then we are making the Constitution into a blank piece of paper. And that's what he's arguing there. So it's an astonishing text, I think.

BIRZER: Yeah, Tom, I think you're absolutely right to bring it up and to focus on it. And of course, it is in the last days of his presidency that this comes about, and I do think that there is a shift. He's becoming more concerned about these things at the end of the war and especially as the war's over. During the war, he was pretty loose about constitutional issues, but certainly at the end, I'm glad that he made this kind of last-ditch effort to kind of preserve the Constitution. And he sets the stage, of course, for James Monroe, because Monroe will take many similar views about what could be done. And if they do want to have these internal improvements, they have to use a constitutional amendment as well, which of course is why we typically refer to Monroe as a constitutionalist Republican rather than a national Republican. But yeah, I think your point is very well taken, Tom.

WOODS: Monroe is — well, I guess — yeah. Yeah, I mean, Monroe is part of the period which we're talking about. Yeah, I don't know why, temporarily my brain failed me there. But yet I would say the average person doesn't know a single thing about James Monroe. Maybe they know Monroe was from Virginia. Do you have any thoughts about Monroe as a person and as a president?

BIRZER: I've always thought of him as a deeply honest figure, unlike so many politicians. I think this was a man of integrity. And I don't always agree with a lot of his politics. His enthusiasm for the area of good feelings and his own nationalism is way too strong for me, even though I think at the time, he was fairly moderate, but it's way too strong for me. But I think he was a deeply honest man, and the fact that Washington had thought so highly of him, especially during the Revolutionary War, and had really considered him one of his most important aides. And Monroe was a great artillerist during the war. He and Hamilton were both experts at understanding artillery, which was not an easy science to get down by any means. So I don't know if that's necessarily praise for everything Monroe did, but I think there were some very good qualities to him, certainly, and I do think he was far more moderate than either Madison or Jefferson was — moderate in the best sense, Tom.

WOODS: Okay.

BIRZER: Not in the wishy-washy sense, but in the best sense.

WOODS: Right. In just this short period of time that you're covering in this course — and by the way, of course, everybody listening, you've got to be a member of Liberty Classroom. You're killing me here. This thing has been running successfully for seven and a half years. It's the kind of product that people would say, there's no way this thing is going to fly, and man, has it flown. So all the cool people are in it. It's at LibertyClassroom.com, and you can talk to Brad while you're there. The courses are available any time you want to listen to them. It's not like Brad says, "At 5:30 p.m. today we're going to talk" — who wants that? You can consume it whenever you want.

BIRZER: [laughing] My kids want that.

WOODS: Yeah, that's right. And Brad's kids come before you, dear listener, okay? So he's going to do that with them. But in that period, what would you say that maybe America today — I know this is such a goofball question, but I can't resist asking — could stand to learn? What does this period have to teach us in terms — well, I'll let you answer that however you wish.

BIRZER: Oh, I think that's a great question, Tom. I don't think that's goofball at all, especially when we consider just exactly what you said, the fact that Madison was so willing to look at the text of the Constitution, was willing to cite Article 1 Section Eight and figure out what that meant. You know, I would give so much for the Green New Deal to see what could be done constitutionally and what couldn't. [laughing] And of course, I would guess that 99.9% of it wouldn't fit. But you know, and you would know that better than I do, Tom. But I think that's a really critical question.

I think the fact that these people — and of course, they did know the Founders, and many of the Founders are still alive — but that they tried so desperately to live up to what the Founding was about. I think it is beautiful. And it almost sounds like the time period, we've got a bunch of little Hillsdales running around, that there's so much concern with that in the Constitution. But I really do appreciate that.

And none of these people — even when I think — for example, Henry Clay is wrong and Henry Clay had his moral problems to be sure. He's still a really interesting person. He's someone that I would take seriously even when I disagree with. And I think that's part of this time period, that not only were these people willing to stand up for what they believed, but they had interesting beliefs. I mean, they're far more interesting than almost anyone we have in Congress today. Just imagine when you have people like Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, whether we agree with them or not, they were serious men. They knew how to lecture. They knew how to research. They knew how to speak. They knew how to do everything in terms of what it was like to be a statesman. And they also knew what it was like to be a politician, but they balanced those things, and I think they tried very hard to make America something worthy of the Founding.

WOODS: Well, even though this gets us about a decade beyond the period you're talking about, I can't help mentioning an example: the Webster-Hayne debate, which was also Webster and Calhoun discussing the nature of the Union. Now, it doesn't even matter what side you're on. You have to be impressed at the level of argumentation from both sides about a theoretical issue. I mean, frankly, it's a theoretical issue. Now, it has practical implications, of course, because you could see how nullification could follow from one theory or the other, you could see how secession could — so it's not entirely theoretical, but it is more theoretical than anything that's discussed in the US Senate today. And I would say most US senators would have trouble even following the argument, much less being able to participate in the debate themselves.

BIRZER: Yeah, Tom, I shouldn't be so cynical, but that just cracks me up. I mean, absolutely. Can you imagine? There may be one or two senators who could follow it, and that's it.

WOODS: Yes, and you and I can name them, right?

BIRZER: [laughing] That's right. One is from Nebraska, and one is from Kentucky, and that's about it, right?

WOODS: Yeah.

BIRZER: Yeah, without naming names. But no, I mean, I think that's a huge thing. consideration. And just the fact when you go back — and Webster at times was just full of hot air, but it was interesting hot air. It was full of classical references and mythology. And yeah, I would — and I do this with my students, Tom. This is really cynical of me, but I'll just take one or two sentences from the Webster-Hayne debate, and particularly from Webster, and I'll read it to my students, and I ask them: name at least ten politicians in Congress today who could even understand the vocabulary. And of course, they can't do it, because they're not there.

WOODS: No.

BIRZER: And when you imagine we've got 535 people in the House and Senate, and they can't even match themselves at all to this great time period, yeah, that's depressing, really depressing.

WOODS: Now, as somebody who's written a book on Andrew Jackson, you would be particularly well placed to answer this. As you said, we originally envisioned you doing a course on Jacksonian America, that when people think Jacksonian America, they think President Andrew Jackson.

BIRZER: That's right.

WOODS: But we don't get President Andrew Jackson until 1828, but that doesn't mean that Andrew Jackson is an unknown figure before then. I mean, how would he become president if he were totally unknown? So he is known to some degree, and no doubt in great measure for his military exploits, including during the period under study right now in the course that we're talking about. But in what ways do this period kind of point toward the period of time that we would more expressly think of as Jacksonian America? Is there something germinating in this period?

BIRZER: Yeah, Tom, and of course, I do plan on finishing this course, so we'll have a part two, and we'll get up into this, specifically into the Jacksonian presidency. I'd like to spend quite a bit of time on that. But in this time period that we're talking about from 1807 to 1820, we are definitely seeing the seeds of a healthy individualism that I think we'll see best expressed by — and I don't always agree with him, but I think when it comes to individualism, he's excellent — expressed by Henry David Thoreau, and to a certain extent, though much more critically, by Alexis de Tocqueville. And they will both play really important roles in the second part of this course, and they're both really excellent thinkers.

But you know, and you and I have talked about this before, as much as we might disagree with much of what Jackson was doing, one of the things that I found in my own research of him — and this was true in the War of 1812 as it was in his attacks on Florida in 1818 — this was a deeply, if not constitutionally incapable, man in terms of being able to lie. That is, I think he was not made to lie. He is so honest in everything that he does. I don't think people like Clay and Calhoun are at that level, but I think that there was a real respect for being open and being honest at this time.

So those are the two things that probably impressed me most, Tom, to try and answer your question. Number one, I think this kind of nice, healthy, eccentric individualism; and number two, a capacity at least, even by politicians, to be open about their own views. That's going to change, but I think that there is something about that.

And I found, not that I would advocate a society of violence and dueling, but even in the kinds of things I found with dueling, I was really impressed in my own research with how open these people were. You never duel someone who was a lesser. You never duel someone without them knowing you're going to duel them. Yes, it is a violent society, but it was a violent

society with very proper order and orders that were rooted in manners. And I realize that sounds a bit contradictory, but there were some fascinating things that I found in my own research on that.

WOODS: Let's go back now — I got away from the War of 1812 a little bit too quickly. I want to know from you: how does American society change as a result of the war, and what are the overall goods and bads?

BIRZER: Yeah, great question, Tom. You know, it's interesting because I don't know if you've had a chance to read Brian Kilmeade's book on the *Miracle at New Orleans*. Brian Kilmeade the Fox guy, not someone I would have expected necessarily to be a really good scholar, but he is. His books, at least the ones I've read, I've been very impressed with.

And one of the points he makes — and others had made it. Paul Johnson had made this at the beginning of *The Birth of the Modern*, too. But one of the great points that comes out of the War of 1812 is that with our success at the Battle of New Orleans, America really does kind of gain the type of respect that she had at hankered after for a very, very long time. And there is automatically this kind of, *okay, America is a serious power and a republic to be reckoned with*, something that I think we had desired, for good and bad, right? We had both wanted to be a national power, but we'd also just want to be recognized as a legitimate and serious republic. All of that really happened with the Battle of New Orleans.

On the downside, though, we also — and I would think from a libertarian perspective, especially — we see a real opening in ways that we never did under Washington or Adams. We're going to see a real opening towards government being involved in the economy. Now, as you brought up earlier, we have restrictions. You've got people like Madison, and then later James Monroe, really pulling back and saying, *No, is this in the constitution? Is it not? We've got to follow the letter of the Constitution, not just the spirit*. So I think there's a healthy aspect to that. But the kinds of things that we'll do — for example, the Second Bank of the United States — is about ten times as intrusive and disruptive and large as the First Bank of the United States. That Second Bank, of course, comes into being during Madison's second administration. So I do think when it comes to the slippery slope of government interventionism, that the war of 1812 unfortunately contributes significantly to the growth of Leviathan.

Now, there'll be a pulling back, and Murray Rothbard, of course, does such a brilliant job in looking at the depression of 1819. There has to be a retrenchment to a certain degree. But of course, we don't get rid of the Second Bank of the United States until the 1830s. And, Tom, you could speak about this probably better than anyone in the world: what does that do, then, 100 years later, in terms of its relationship to the Fed? I would assume that there's a pretty serious relationship between the First and Second Banks of US and the Fed later on, especially in terms of inspiration and model, and just precedent, the fact that the progressives can have something in our pas — and again, I think you can speak to that much better than I could. But I would guess that there has to be something in that.

The other thing I would say that I find interesting about all of this, and especially in terms of the war, is that with Jefferson's embargo and going back to the beginning of our talk with the embargo in 1807 and in the war that we find ourselves in during 1812 to 1815, we see some really serious divides in America. New England against the rest of America; New England, of course, is the first to contemplate secession, what they would have called disunion, with the Hartford Convention. So you're going to start seeing some real divisions.

And you brought up the Webster-Hayne. And I think it's always hilarious looking at the Webster-Hayne, where those on the side of Hayne make the point that, *Daniel Webster, there was a point where you were actually a part of the Hartford Convention and you were advocating disunion. And what happened to that Daniel Webster?* I mean, there's some really great things that come out of all of that. So yeah, Tom, I think the War of 1812 has some huge

influences, and it really is a war I don't like using that often, but there's definitely a major impact that the War of 1812 has on American society.

WOODS: It's been a while since I looked at it, and yes, I realize it's my own book and I should remember it no matter how long it's been, but in the Documents section of my book *Nullification*, I believe I have Daniel Webster's speech from I think 1814 —

BIRZER: It'd be December 1814. That's right.

WOODS: Yes. Okay — about the prospect of a military draft.

BIRZER: Yeah.

WOODS: And he was arguing the unconstitutionality of such a thing. And then he has this foreboding language in there about, that if they should attempt this, then it would be up to the states to interpose their authority to protect their citizens against this. So there's Daniel Webster basically saying, if they try to conscript people, we should tell them to take a hike. So it's a little hard for him 20 years later to say, now, *Wait a minute, you people can't use this power. Only we in New England can*.

BIRZER: Yeah, he and Calhoun almost completely switched sides. Calhoun is the most serious nationalist in 1817. Webster is a real big disunion, states' rights guy. But of course, after everything that happens with the Missouri Compromise and things just get so messed up, and to see that complete reversal and both of those guys to switch sides is really astounding.

WOODS: Well, I obviously want people to enjoy this course. You've got ten lectures in it. You can watch them on video, or you can just listen to the audio files. You can consume them on the go. I mean, whatever you want to do, you can consume them at three o'clock in the morning, if you like. Whatever you want, they're there waiting for you. And we have discussion forums. You can get your questions answered by our faculty. And we even do a live question-and-answer once a month, so we encourage people to participate in that. A lot of goodies you get over at LibertyClassroom.com, so go check that out. And you're going to love Brad Birzer and his courses. He's got numerous ones up there. And Brad, all I can say is thank you for your service. We appreciate it very much. And when that next book of yours comes out, we're going to get you back on to talk about it.

BIRZER: Oh, that'd be great. I would love that. Yeah, you're mentioned in that book several times.

WOODS: Well, then we're definitely talking about [laughing].

BIRZER: Yeah, Tom, I had a blast with these classes, so I hope people enjoy them. I really was honored to be a part, of course, as always, everything with Liberty Classroom and with you. So there's a lot — there was a labor of love that went into these courses, no doubt about that.

WOODS: You are one of the kindest people I know. In fact, I specifically remember in lecture five of your course, you begin by saying, you know, "This is lecture five in this course for Tom Woods' Liberty Classroom." And you said something like, "Thank God for Tom Woods and all the good he does in the world." And I thought, *God bless America* [laughing].

BIRZER: I'm not short on loyalty. Tom, I will say that. I have other faults, but yeah.

WOODS: Well, thanks again, Brad. I appreciate it.

BIRZER: Thank you, Tom.