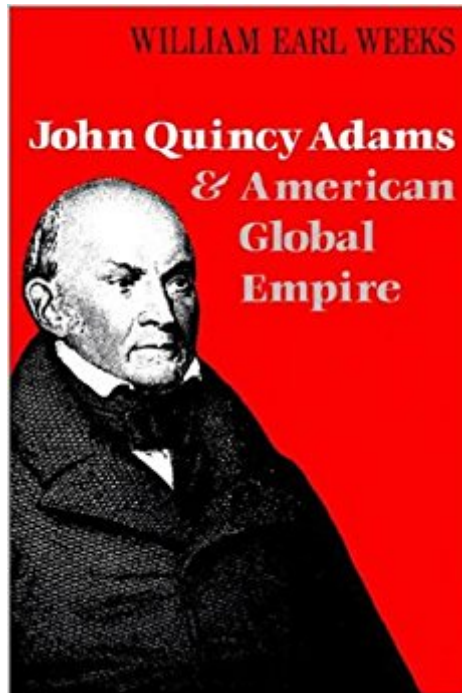




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# John Quincy Adams And American Global Empire



## Synopsis

This is the story of a man, a treaty, and a nation. The man was John Quincy Adams, regarded by most historians as America's greatest secretary of state. The treaty was the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, of which Adams was the architect. It acquired Florida for the young United States, secured a western boundary extending to the Pacific, and bolstered the nation's position internationally. As William Weeks persuasively argues, the document also represented the first determined step in the creation of an American global empire. Weeks follows the course of the often labyrinthine negotiations by which Adams wrested the treaty from a recalcitrant Spain. The task required all of Adams's skill in diplomacy, for he faced a tangled skein of domestic and international controversies when he became secretary of state in 1817. The final document provided the United States commercial access to the Orient—a major objective of the Monroe administration that paved the way for the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Adams, the son of a president and later himself president, saw himself as destined to play a crucial role in the growth and development of the United States. In this he succeeded. Yet his legendary statecraft proved bittersweet. Adams came to repudiate the slave society whose interests he had served by acquiring Florida, he was disgusted by the rapacity of the Jacksonians, and he experienced profound guilt over his own moral transgressions while secretary of state. In the end, Adams understood that great virtue cannot coexist with great power. Weeks's book, drawn in part from articles that won the Stuart Bernath Prize, makes a lasting contribution to our understanding of American foreign policy and adds significantly to our picture of one of the nation's most important statesmen.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Weeks (American history, San Diego State Univ.) paints a detailed and ultimately unflattering portrait of John Quincy Adams in his role as U.S. secretary of state (1817-25). While touching on Adams's life and personality, the book focuses on his successful negotiations with Spain to acquire Florida and a U.S. claim to the Pacific. His able diplomacy made possible Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, but Adams came to regret the machinations he used to get a better deal. The ironies of the affair haunted him, and he decided later that he had paid too high a price to satisfy the ambition he denied having. Like much good history, this book uses the story of a single event to reveal a great deal about the era in which it took place--and something about our own times as well. For all large history collections.- Gary Williams, Southeastern Ohio Regional Lib., Caldwell

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"An impressive synthesis of interpretations, personal information about Adams, his wife, and his family, and the details of the negotiations through which Florida was acquired and a borderline to the Pacific for the US and Spain was drawn." *Choice* "Uses the story of a single event to reveal a great deal about the era in which it took place and something about our own times as well." *Library Journal* "An intelligently argued and tightly written study that ably explores both Spanish-American relations and the complex and contradictory mind of John Quincy Adams." *Journal of the Early Republic* "An excellent acquisition in a period of American diplomatic history that has had too little recent scholarly attention." *Choice*

William Earl Weeks has produced a well-written, thoroughly-researched study of the Adams-Onís Treaty, also called the Transcontinental or Florida Treaty. The author gives the reader a blow-by-blow description of the ins and outs of the negotiations between Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and the Spanish minister to America, Don Luis de Onís. Weeks also shows how the insurrections in South America against Spanish rule impacted the talks as well as how Spain looked fruitlessly to Great Britain, Russia, and other European nations for help to subdue the rebels and assist in case of war with the United States. Meanwhile, Adams was seeking to improve relations with London, thereby isolating Spain and forcing Madrid to agree to Washington's terms.

terms. The author provides a good overview of John Quincy Adams's life from childhood through his early diplomatic postings prior to becoming secretary of state. Adams was well educated, knowledgeable in a half dozen languages and a master debater. The secretary was President James Monroe's most trusted adviser and given a wide latitude in conducting diplomacy. Adams was a tireless worker, which he had to be to conduct the nation's foreign policy, register laws enacted by Congress, conduct the 1820 census, and attempt to standardize the country's weights and measures among other things. What is intriguing about this work is the seemingly hypocrisy in Adams's beliefs and actions. He grew up believing in the primacy of negotiations to military conflict and living a moral life, being a devout Christian. However, as secretary of state, especially in the negotiations with Spain, he is Machiavellian as the end justifies the means. He defended Andrew Jackson's invasion of Florida where two British subjects were executed for aiding the Indians and several Spanish forts were taken. Adams manipulated the evidence to make it appear that Jackson and America were not the aggressors in this action, but in actuality they were the aggrieved parties. He used the invasion and the threat of a future incursion to try and force concessions from Madrid. As it turned out, Spain gave in, not because of American threats, but because Great Britain and the other European countries would not back them. Thus, the only solution was to cut as good a deal as possible that would protect their "borderlands" • Texas and New Mexico. To gain access to the Pacific, Monroe and Adams were willing to accept the Sabine River as the eastern border of Texas, ceding Texas, not to gain Florida, but to secure U.S. access to the Pacific Northwest. Weeks concludes with an overview of Adams's failed presidency and his resurrection as a principled congressman. Adams believed that one did not campaign for the White House, but one should let the office come to the best qualified person. However, when the 1824 presidential election was thrown into the House, he became a political animal, tirelessly seeking votes. His so-called "corrupt bargain" with Henry Clay doomed his administration. As a congressman, the author demonstrates how Adams shifted his positions on a number of issues; e.g., Native Americans, slavery, and executive power. While all might not agree that Adams was a Machiavellian secretary of state, he clearly put America's national interests first in his talks with Spain. This is a good study of the origins of the Adams-Onís Treaty, the interconnectedness of diplomatic issues, the expansion of executive power in the areas of foreign policy and war-making, and the politics of realpolitik.

An amazing study of John Quincy Adams, U.S. diplomatic history during the Monroe presidency, and the origins of Manifest Destiny. Weeks makes a great case for Adams being our nation's greatest secretary of state. Focusing on the negotiations for the Adams-Onís/Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, Weeks shows how statesmen truly negotiate and the negative consequences it may entail, as Adams would both glory in extending his nation's borders and be disgusted by the expansion of slavery he unwittingly aided. In some ways, it is also a morality tale as Weeks calls into question Adams's character, accusing "Old Man Eloquent" of tremendous hypocrisy in his dealings with Congress, Spain, and Pres. Monroe. Weeks also makes an undeniable case for seeing Adams's statesmanship as the true beginning of the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny. This should be read by all students of U.S. history and U.S. foreign policy as it offers great insights to both our country's heritage and politics.

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