



Joel Barlow, American Diplomat and Nation Builder

Peter P Hill

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Joel Barlow was the early Republic's most tenacious diplomat, a cheerful volunteer for difficult missions. His hard-won treaties with Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli ended, at least briefly, the attacks of Barbary pirates on American shipping in the Mediterranean. And on the eve of the War of 1812, President Madison sent him to France, where he subsequently won important wartime concessions from Napoleon. Young Barlow wrote his epic poem *The Vision of Columbus* while serving as an army chaplain fresh out of Yale University. He later sold Western lands to French émigrés, ran for a seat in the French National Assembly, escaped the Terror, and ultimately made his fortune as a cargo broker. His ties with the Jeffersonian elite and longtime familiarity with the Paris political scene made him Madison's logical choice to keep the peace by trying to win enough concessions from France to demand the same of Britain. Peter P. Hill's fast-paced biography, while closing in on the intricacies of Barlow's diplomatic career, also portrays his subject as a conscious nation builder, a visionary who foresaw his country's worldwide role in spreading democratic institutions, committing itself to free trade, and involving its federal government in the cause of public education. Hill brings to life a true Enlightenment man whose love of country, democracy, and learning reveals the soul of an age.

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