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Linklater, Andro. *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Life of General James Wilkinson*. New York: Walker & Company, 2009.

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If a reader has never heard of James Wilkinson, which is likely, this reviewer recommends *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Life of General James Wilkinson* by Andro Linklater. Wilkinson is probably the most interesting—and least recognized—figure from the American Early Republic era. Wilkinson’s divided loyalty, as told by Linklater, offers a unique perspective on the early period of the American Republic. It reminds the reader that the struggle to create the United States was an uncertain proposition.

James Wilkinson served in the Continental Army during the early part of the Revolutionary War before he resigned. In 1783, he moved to Kentucky where he advocated Kentucky’s separation from Virginia and established trade relationships with the Spanish in New Orleans. In 1791, he returned to federal military service, was promoted to brigadier general, and fought in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Linklater provided sixteen pages of black and white illustrations and two maps of the areas discussed in the book to aid the reader in understanding Wilkinson’s military actions and travels.

Wilkinson became the senior officer of the United States Army in 1796 until 1798 when George Washington replaced him. In 1800, he again became the senior officer in the Army, a position he maintained until 1812. During his time in the army he faced three court-martials and four congressional investigations; it was said that, “He had never won a battle but never lost an inquiry” (p. 312).

Throughout his career, political opponents, including General Anthony Wayne, accused Wilkinson of being in the pay of the Spanish and working against the interests of the United States. At the time, many people also believed he was involved in the Burr Conspiracy to seize the western portion of the country and parts of Mexico, but he betrayed Burr by revealing his plot to Jefferson and denying all involvement in the conspiracy.

At the time of his death in 1825, the American public considered him a distinguished soldier. History would have remembered him as a minor member of the founding generation, or at least that is how history might have remembered him. However, in 1888, the Spanish government sent two hundred thousand

documents pertaining to the Spanish-American Empire from Havana to Madrid. In the early part of the twentieth century, historians proceeded to sort through them.

Among the papers sent to Madrid, historians found confirmation of some of the old allegations regarding Wilkinson's relationship with Spain. Wilkinson, or as he was known to the Spanish, Agent 13, was on the Spanish payroll. These documents included hundreds of letters, reports, and assessments exchanged between Wilkinson and his handlers in New Orleans, their supervisors in Havana, and Imperial officials in Madrid. Linklater included two appendixes to his book, the first of which gives the reader an opportunity to study one of the condemning documents. It is a transcribed copy of the payments made to Wilkinson by the Spanish government. The second appendix is a brief analysis of the code Wilkinson used to transmit messages.

General Wilkinson not only passed on his country's strategic secrets, he sought to detach Kentucky from the Union and ally it with Spain. He also wrote detailed plans that advised the Spanish authorities on the best way to prevent American expansion beyond the Mississippi River. He alerted Spanish authorities to the expedition mounted by Lewis and Clark to explore the American West. In response to his information, the Spanish dispatched cavalry patrols to intercept the expedition but were unable to locate it. Presumably, the Spanish believed that if they could stop exploration of the territory, they could also stop expansion into the territory.

Wilkinson's life was quite a story and Linklater's treatment reads like a novel, but a novel with footnotes. This is the first modern biography of Wilkinson, and it is a compelling book that is not only accessible to the general reader, but also well footnoted. Linklater made good use of the many available sources. This is fortunate for the English-only scholar because, until *An Artist in Treason*, much of the available source material was written in Spanish. Linklater's book comes with a high recommendation to anyone with an interest in early American history or the early U.S. Army.