Jefferson’s Great Gamble By Charles A. Cerami: Louisiana Purchase

Jefferson’s Great Gamble by Charles A. Cerami, tells the incredible story of how four leaders of an upstate nation, risked the future of their country and careers. The four men, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Livingston outwitted Napoleon Bonaparte, the world’s most powerful ruler. How the four men secured a new future for the United States of America.

Cerami reveals the untold thrusts and parries of the Louisiana Purchase. An event that was not just a land sale, but thirty months of high drama, blandishment, posturing and secret maneuvers by some of the most powerful and crafty men. (Front book Flap) Charles A. Cerami proves to his readers how secretive and the distant some of these men will go by giving his readers’ examples of some of these situations.

Madison, secretary of state is one of the key players to show how shifty he can be. James sends two of America's ministers to the opposing side to see what information can be gathered. Robert Livingston is sent to France while Charles Pinckney is sent to Spain. Madison employs this plan so that each may ask” questions that might cause either the French or Spanish to give an answer that would reveal whether there was a secret deal between them giving Louisiana back to the French” (36). Madison's plan goes to show the lengths he will take to find the information he is searching for. Cerami gives his readers a peek as to what it means to be secretive. Another key player in the negations of the Louisiana purchase was Robert Livingston.

Livingston was another player who was just as sneaky as Madison was. Robert was sent to deceive the French by telling Napoleon's closets circle a white lie. He let them know “how seriously the United States would view any French attempt to make itself mistress of the Mississippi” (38). This rouse played a major part in making the opposite party believe the United States will go to war. This secret maneuver allowed the US to put fear into their enemy if they decided to double-cross them. Charles A. Cerami shows his readers that even a white lie can become one of your biggest assets to achieving what needs to be done. Another important and biggest player in the negations was Napoleon Bonaparte.

Bonaparte had a remarkable scandalous secret of all the men at the time. Napoleon “a man who only respected a treaty in which he was hastily writing at the moment” (20) as he was portrayed in the reading. Napoleon Bonaparte, from the beginning of the story, has been a shady and devious character. He was ruled as “a conqueror whose talents extended far beyond the military” (25). His talents are shown when Jefferson learns of the deal between France and Spain. Napoleon went to great lengths to show how secretive and deceiving he can be. “Napoleon, as it turned out, had already made the feared move over a year earlier, then kept the whole world in the dark about it” (40). He showed the entire nation how his talents are more than military strategy. Napoleon was able to withhold the truth and play both sides of the party. Bonaparte used blandishment, and secretive maneuvers to outwit his opponents.

James Monroe another minister into the negotiations into the Louisiana Purchase. Monroe had one of the biggest roles any man can have. He is “to negotiate for half a continent” (198). Monroe had to make the biggest decision alone “no American from that day to this has ever

had to make so great a decision alone, with no way to contact his government” (200). Monroe, at that moment in time, knew he had to make a decision that is going to benefit his country. He needed to think outside of the box and present himself as an important figure to his opponents. Monroe’s enemy needed to think James had every right to make the negotiations go the way he wanted. This chivalrous act gave Monroe the strength he has needed since he was “the one man in full charge of America’s destiny” (200).

Charles A. Cerami paints a picture his readers are able to envision themselves. Cerami goes into details about many of the players in the negotiations of the Louisiana territory. The lengths they would go to deceive their opponents, secretive maneuvers to fool the opposition, the drama that unfolds with each player. Also, the blandishment of others so that one person may gain more power over the other. “The perfect way that Congress unwittingly played its part, and the interaction among, nine remarkable men who did indeed do “the noblest work” of their lives” (277).

Overall, the book was a good read with many details of the Louisiana purchase. There are both positive and negative aspects of the book. One of the positive aspects of the book are the in-depth knowledge of the inner workings of the Louisiana Purchase. The book accomplishes the goal of outlining the direct and indirect characters involved. It also includes the shenanigans and manipulation methods of both parties from the competing countries. Cerami’s work also has a negative aspect to it. The writing in some points was very dried and lacked suspense. Overall, the book is a great read for a beginner to understand and to learn why the Louisiana Purchase shaped America.