

Creating a Nation



In December 1790, the national government moved from New York to Philadelphia, where it stayed until moving to the new capital in the District of Columbia in 1799. While in Philadelphia, the House and Senate met in Congress Hall, adjacent to the Philadelphia State House depicted here. In this image, a variety of people, including several Indians, mingle in the State House yard. (*The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), The State House, Philadelphia, 1800, William Birch, [Bd 61 B 531 plate 22]*)

American Stories

Questioning Authorities

In October 1789, David Brown arrived in Dedham, Massachusetts. Born about 50 years earlier in Bethlehem, Connecticut, Brown served in the Revolutionary army. After the war, he shipped out on an American merchantman to see the world. His travels, as he

reported, took him to “nineteen different . . . Kingdoms in Europe, and nearly all the United States.” For two years before settling in Dedham, he visited scores of Massachusetts towns, supporting himself as a day laborer while discussing the troubled state of public affairs with local townspeople.

Initially, the people of Dedham took little notice of Brown, but he soon made his presence felt. Though he had little formal schooling, he was a man of powerful opinions and considerable natural ability. His reading and personal experience had persuaded him that government was a conspiracy of the rich to exploit farmers, artisans, and other common folk, and he was quick to make his opinions known.

The object of his wrath was the central government recently established under the new national constitution. Though he could cite no evidence, he accused government leaders of engrossing the nation’s western lands for themselves. “Five hundred [people] out of the union of five millions receive all the benefit of public property and live upon the ruins of the rest of the community,” he fumed in one of his numerous pamphlets. Such a government, he warned, would soon lose the confidence of the people.

In the highly charged political climate of the 1790s, Brown’s exaggerated attacks on the new government brought a sharp response. In 1798, John Davis, the federal district attorney in Boston, issued a warrant for Brown’s arrest on charges of sedition, while government-supported newspapers attacked him as a “rallying point of insurrection and disorder.” Fearing arrest, Brown fled to Salem, where he was caught and charged with intent to defame the government and aid the country’s enemies. Lacking \$400 bail, he was clapped in prison.

In June 1799, Brown came before the U.S. Circuit Court, Justice Samuel Chase presiding. Chase’s behavior was anything but judicious. Convinced that critics of the administration were enemies of the republic, Chase was determined to make Brown an example. Confused and hoping for leniency, Brown pleaded guilty to the charges against him.

Ignoring Brown’s plea, Chase directed the federal prosecutor to “examine the witness . . . so that the degree of his guilt might be duly ascertained.” Before passing sentence, Chase demanded that Brown provide the names of his accomplices and a list of subscribers to his writings. When Brown refused, protesting that he would “lose all my friends,” Chase sentenced him to a fine of \$480 and 18 months in jail, no matter that Brown could not pay the fine and faced the prospect of indefinite imprisonment.

In rendering judgment, Chase castigated Brown for his “disorganizing doctrines and . . . falsehoods, and the very alarming and dangerous excesses to which he attempted to incite the uninformed part of the community.” Not all citizens, Chase thought, should be allowed to comment so brashly on public affairs. For nearly two years, Brown languished in prison. Not until the Federalist party was defeated in the election of 1800 and the Jeffersonian Republicans had taken office was he freed.

David Brown discovered how easy it was for critics of the government to get into trouble in the early republic, one of the most tumultuous eras in American political history. Though independence had been won, the struggle over political power and control of the revolutionary heritage continued. As Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia physician and revolutionary patriot, explained: “The American War is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed. It remains [for us] . . . to establish and perfect our new forms of government.” Events would soon demonstrate how difficult, and how important to the nation’s future, that task would be.

Controversy between Federalist supporters of the national government and the emerging Jeffersonian Republican opposition first erupted over domestic

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Conclusion: A Period of Trial and Transition

policies designed to stabilize the nation's finances and promote its economic development. Those policies revealed deep-seated conflicts between economic interests and raised urgent questions of how the new constitution should be interpreted. What was the proper balance of power between state and national governments? How should governing authority be allocated between the executive branch and Congress? Much depended on the answer to those troubling questions.

Within a few years, international events further roiled American politics. The French Revolution and a successful revolt by black Haitians against French colonial power in the Caribbean—the two most dramatic events in a larger web of democratic insurgencies against established authorities that reached from Europe to the Americas—inflamed congressional politics and roused the people at large. By the last years of the 1790s, the prospect of war with France and Federalist security measures such as the Alien and Sedition Acts brought the nation to the brink of political upheaval. That prospect was narrowly

avoided by the Federalists' defeat and Thomas Jefferson's election as president in 1800.

Having captured the presidency and control of Congress, the Jeffersonian Republicans set about the task of refashioning the government. At home, they dismantled the Federalists' war program, reduced the national debt, promoted westward expansion, and emphasized state rather than national authority. Abroad, they struggled less successfully to protect American commerce on the high seas and avoid embroilment in European war.

Adding to the political crisis was widespread anxiety over the nation's novel and still unproven "experiment" in creating a sprawling, diverse republic. The absence of fully developed political parties skilled in forging compromise among leaders at the nation's capital and organizing the surging political energy among the people compounded the problem. By the time Thomas Jefferson left the presidency in 1809, it was apparent how fragile, and yet how resilient, America's new government was proving to be.

LAUNCHING THE NATIONAL REPUBLIC

Once the Constitution had been ratified, its Anti-Federalist critics seemed ready to give the experiment a chance. They were determined, however, to watch closely for the first signs of danger. It was not many months before they sounded the alarm.

Beginning the New Government

On April 16, 1789, George Washington, unanimously elected president by the Electoral College, started north from Virginia to be inaugurated first president of the United States. His feelings were mixed as he set forth. “I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity,” he confided to his diary, “and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York . . . with the best disposition to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.” He had good reason for such foreboding.

The president-elect was the object of constant adulation as he journeyed north. In villages and towns, guns boomed their salutes, children danced in the streets, church bells pealed, and local dignitaries

toasted his arrival. On April 23, he was rowed on an elegant, flower-festooned barge from the New Jersey shore to New York City, where throngs of citizens and newly elected members of Congress greeted the weary traveler. That evening, bonfires illuminated the city.

Inaugural day was April 30. Shortly after noon, on a small balcony overlooking Wall Street, Washington took the oath of office. “It is done,” exulted New York’s chancellor, Robert Livingston. “Long live George Washington, President of the United States!” With the crowd roaring its approval and 13 guns booming in the harbor, the president bowed his way off the balcony and into Federal Hall. Late into the night, celebrations filled the air.

Though hopefulness attended the new government’s beginning, the first weeks were tense, because everyone knew how important it was that the government be set on a proper republican course. “Things which appear of little importance in themselves and at the beginning,” the president warned, “may have great and durable consequences.”

When Washington addressed the first Congress, republican purists complained that it smacked too much of the English monarch’s speech from the throne at the opening of Parliament. Congress then had to decide whether it should accord him a title.



President-Elect Washington Travels to New York This imaginative scene of President-Elect Washington's reception in Trenton, New Jersey, during his trip from Virginia to New York City for his first inauguration depicts the popular adulation that surrounded him. What other messages can you find in the picture's details? (*Library of Congress*)

Vice President Adams proposed “His Most Benign Highness,” while others offered the even gaudier suggestion “His Highness, the President of the United States, and Protector of the Rights of the Same.” Howls of outrage arose from those who thought titles had no place in a republic. Good sense finally prevailing, Congress settled on the now-familiar “Mr. President.” The belief that such decisions might determine the new government's direction for years to come gave politics a special intensity.

The Bill of Rights

Among Congress's first tasks was consideration of the constitutional amendments that several states had made a condition of their ratification. Although Madison and other Federalists had argued that a national bill of rights was unnecessary, they were ready to keep their promise that such amendments would be considered. That would reassure the fearful, fend off calls for a second constitutional convention, and build support for the new regime. “We have in this way something to gain,” Madison shrewdly observed, “and if we proceed with caution, nothing to lose.”



James Madison,
Defense of the
Bill of Rights
(June 8, 1789)

From the variety of proposals offered by the states, Madison culled a set of specific propositions for Congress to consider. After extensive debate, Congress reached agreement in September 1789 on

12 amendments and sent them to the states for approval. By December 1791, 10 had been ratified and became the national Bill of Rights. Among other things, they guaranteed freedom of speech, press, and religion; pledged the right of trial by jury and due process of law; forbade “unreasonable searches and seizures”; and protected individuals against self-incrimination in criminal cases. The Bill of Rights was the most important achievement of these early years, for it has protected citizens' democratic rights ever since.

The People Divide

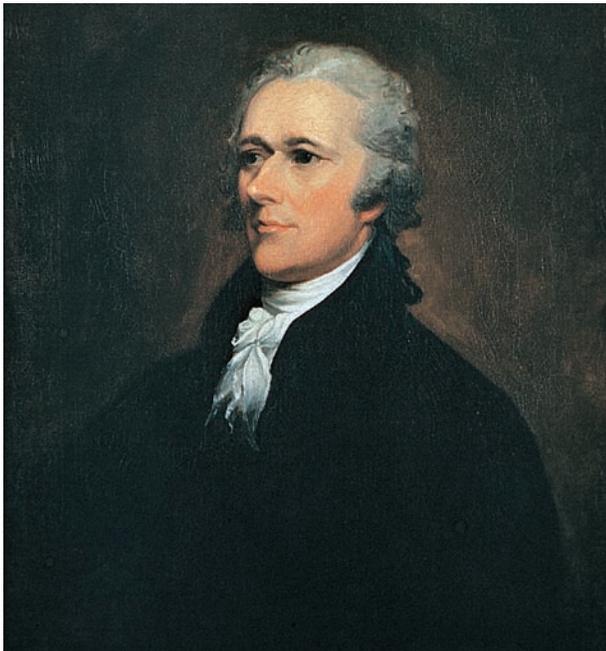
During its first months, Washington's administration enjoyed almost universal support. The

honeymoon, however, did not last long. By the mid-1790s, opposition groups had formed a coalition known as the Jeffersonian Republicans, while the administration's supporters rallied under the name of Federalists.

Disagreement began in January 1790, when Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton submitted to Congress the first of several major policy statements on the country's economic future. Seldom in the nation's history has a single official so dominated public affairs as did Hamilton in these early years. A man of extraordinary intelligence and ambition, Hamilton preferred to act behind the scenes, out of public view. His instincts for locating and seizing the levers of political power were unerring.

An ardent proponent of America's economic development, Hamilton, perhaps more than any of the nation's founders, foresaw the country's future strength and was determined to promote its growth by encouraging domestic manufacturing and overseas trade. The United States, he was fond of saying, was a “Hercules in the cradle.” Competitive self-interest, whether of nations or individuals, he thought the surest guide to behavior. He most admired ambitious entrepreneurs eager to tie their fortunes to America's rising empire, and he believed that a close alliance between them and government officials was essential to achieving American greatness.

At the same time, Hamilton's politics were profoundly conservative. He continued to be deeply



Alexander Hamilton Alexander Hamilton used the office of secretary of the treasury and his personal relationship with President Washington to shape national policy during the early 1790s. What personal qualities was the portraitist attempting to convey? (*Alexander Hamilton, The White House*, © White House Historical Association)

impressed by the stability of the British monarchy and confident governing style of the British upper class. Hamilton distrusted the people's wisdom and feared their purposes. "The people," he asserted, "are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right."

Believing the Constitution was not "high-toned" enough, Hamilton was eager to give it proper direction. His opportunity came when Washington named him secretary of the treasury. Recognizing the potential importance of his office, he determined to build the kind of nation he envisioned.

In his first "Report on the Public Credit," Hamilton recommended funding the remaining Revolutionary War debt by enabling the government's creditors to exchange their badly depreciated securities at face value for new, interest-bearing government bonds. Second, he proposed that the federal government assume responsibility for the \$21.5 million in remaining state war debts. These actions, he hoped, would stabilize the government's finances, establish its credit, build confidence in the new nation at home and abroad, and tie business and commercial interests firmly to the new administration.

Consideration of Hamilton's economic program was interrupted by the new Congress's first debate over slavery. It was stimulated by petitions from

Quakers and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society lamenting the "licentious wickedness of the African trade for slaves" and calling on Congress to end the slave trade abroad and ameliorate the conditions of slavery at home.

In the House of Representatives, southern delegates warned that claims of congressional authority over domestic slavery threatened to "blow the trumpet of civil war." The slave trade they defended as rescuing blacks from African savagery. Alarmed and seeking to put the troublesome issue to rest, northern delegates agreed that Congress had "no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or in the treatment of them." The Philadelphia Quaker John Pemberton lamented that Hamilton's funding system was so much the darling of northerners that they were eager "to obtain the favor" of southern delegates by closing their eyes to slavery.

When debate on Hamilton's report resumed, the proposal to fund the foreign debt aroused little controversy, but Hamilton's plans for handling the government's domestic obligations generated immediate opposition. In the House of Representatives, James Madison, Hamilton's recent ally in the ratification process, protested the unfairness of funding depreciated securities at face value because speculators, some anticipating Hamilton's proposals, had acquired many of them at a fraction of their initial worth. Madison and his southern colleagues knew as well that northern businessmen held most of the securities and that funding would bring little benefit to the South.

Hamilton was not impressed. The speculators, he observed, "paid what the commodity was worth in the market, and took the risks." They should therefore "reap the benefit." If his plan served the interests of the wealthy, that was exactly as he intended, for it would further strengthen ties between wealth and national power. After considerable grumbling, Congress endorsed the funding plan.

Federal assumption of the remaining state debts aroused sharper criticism. States with the largest unpaid obligations, such as Massachusetts, thought assumption a splendid idea. But others that had already retired much of their debt, such as Virginia and Pennsylvania, were adamantly opposed. Critics also warned that assumption would strengthen the central government at the expense of the states, since wealthy individuals would now look to it rather than the states for a return on their investments. Moreover, with its increased need for revenue to pay off the accumulated debt, the federal government would have strong reason to exercise its newly acquired power of taxation. That was exactly what Hamilton intended.



Drawing Inspiration from the Republican Past

The revolutionary generation found inspiration in the republican eras of ancient Greece and Rome. This bust of Thomas Jefferson, cast in the classical style, was completed in 1789 by the French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon. (*Jean-Antoine Houdon, Thomas Jefferson, portrait bust, 1839.1, Collection of the New-York Historical Society*)

Once again, Congress endorsed Hamilton's bill, in good measure because Madison and Jefferson supported it as part of an agreement to move the seat of government from New York to Philadelphia, and eventually to a new federal district on the Potomac River. Southerners hoped that moving the government away from northern commercial centers would enable them to align it with their own agrarian interests.

Opposition to the funding and assumption scheme, however, did not die. In December 1790, the Virginia assembly passed a series of resolutions, framed by that old Anti-Federalist Patrick Henry, warning that southern agriculture was being subordinated to the interests of northern commerce, and that the national government's powers were expanding dangerously. In response, Hamilton confided privately that "This is the first symptom of a spirit which must either be killed, or will kill the Constitution."

As the controversy grew, Hamilton introduced the second phase of his financial program, a national

bank capable of handling the government's financial affairs and pooling private investment capital for economic development. He had the Bank of England and its ties to the royal government in mind, though he was careful not to say so publicly.

Opposition to the bank came almost entirely from the South. The bank's southern critics protested that the Constitution did not authorize the creation of a national bank. The bank, moreover, would serve the needs of northern merchants and manufacturers far better than those of southern agrarians. Still, in February 1792, Congress approved the bank bill.

When Washington asked his cabinet whether he should sign the bill, Hamilton said yes. Following the constitutional doctrine of "implied powers"—the principle that the government had the authority to make any laws "necessary and proper" for exercising the powers specifically granted it by the Constitution—he argued that Congress could charter such a bank under its power to collect taxes and regulate trade. Secretary of State Jefferson, however, urged a veto. He saw in Hamilton's argument a blueprint for the indefinite expansion of federal authority and insisted that the government possessed only those powers specifically listed in the Constitution. Because the Constitution said nothing about chartering banks, the bill was unconstitutional and should be rejected. To Jefferson's distress, Washington took Hamilton's advice and signed the bank bill into law.

In December 1790, in his second "Report on the Public Credit," Hamilton proposed a series of excise taxes, including one on the manufacture of distilled liquor. This so-called Whiskey Tax signaled the government's intention to use its taxing authority to increase federal revenue. The power to tax and spend, Hamilton knew, was the power to govern. The Whiskey Tax became law in March 1791.

Finally, in his "Report on Manufactures" issued in December 1791, Hamilton called for tariffs (taxes) on imported European goods as a way of protecting American industries; bounties to encourage the expansion of commercial agriculture; and a network of federally sponsored internal improvements such as roads and lighthouses. These were intended to stimulate commerce and bind the nation more tightly together. Neither northern merchants nor southern agrarians, however, wanted tariffs that might reduce overseas trade and raise the cost of living, so Congress never endorsed this report.

All the while, criticism of Hamilton's policies continued to grow. In October 1791, opposition leaders



Alexander Hamilton, "Bank" (1791)

in Congress established a newspaper that vigorously attacked the administration's policies. Hamilton responded with a series of anonymous articles in the administration's paper accusing Jefferson (inaccurately) of having opposed the Constitution and (also inaccurately) of fomenting opposition to the government. Alarmed, Washington pleaded for restraint. The month-long debate revealed how acrimonious politics had become at the nation's capital.

Political conflict was now spreading beyond the circle of governing officials in Philadelphia. In northern towns and cities, artisans and other working people turned out in support of Hamilton's efforts to improve credit and stimulate economic development. With their economic circumstances improving, they seemed undisturbed by constitutional issues or the special benefits his policies brought to a privileged few. Within a few years, many of them would move into the Jeffersonian opposition, but for the moment their support of the administration was secure.

The Whiskey Rebellion

The farmers of western Pennsylvania voiced their opposition to government policies in dramatic fashion. Their anger focused on the Whiskey Tax. Ever since the trouble with England 30 years earlier, Americans had been suspicious of the connections between taxation and governmental power. Farmers had special

reason to dislike this particular tax. Their livelihood depended on transporting surplus grain over the Appalachians to eastern markets. Shipping it in bulk was prohibitively expensive, so they distilled the grain and moved it more efficiently as whiskey. The Whiskey Tax threatened to make this trade unprofitable. The farmers also protested that people charged with tax evasion had to stand trial in federal court hundreds of miles away in Philadelphia.

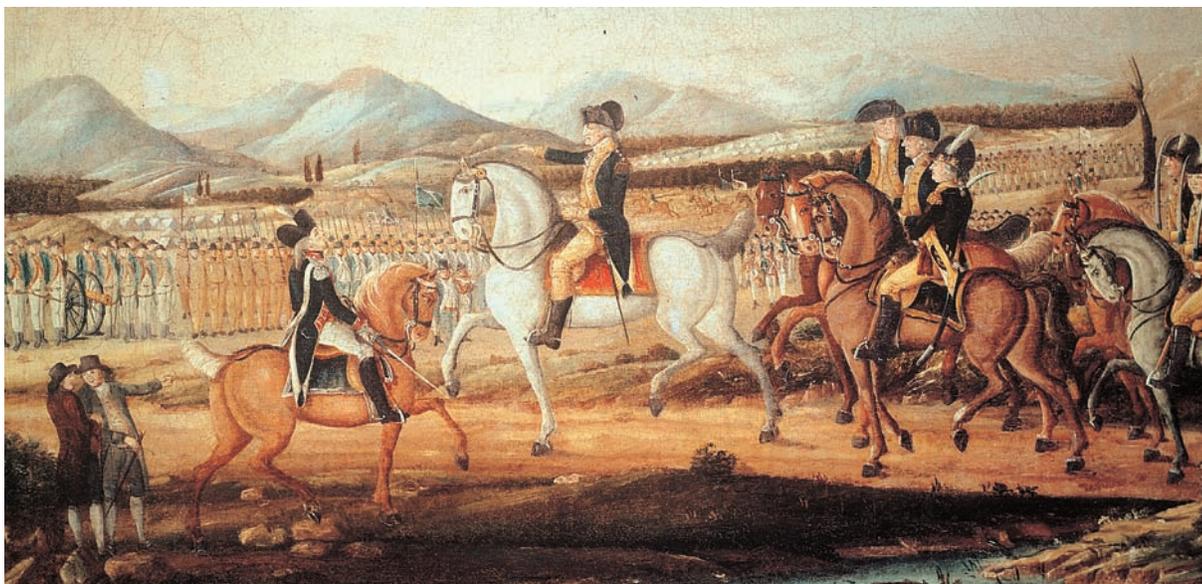
Westerners also sensed control of their local affairs slipping away, as the backcountry was increasingly absorbed in a market economy and system of politics dominated by the more populous, commercialized areas to the east. In southern states such as South Carolina, the integration of coastal and interior regions went smoothly because of similar agricultural interests and a shared anxiety over the region's black majority. In the more economically diverse and racially homogenous states of the north, however, conflicts between coastal and backcountry regions sharpened.

Hamilton cared little what western farmers thought about the Whiskey Tax. The government needed revenue, and the farmers would have to bear the cost. Angered by Federalist arrogance as much as by the tax, farmers quickly made their resentment known.

Trouble was brewing by the summer of 1792 as angry citizens gathered in mass meetings across



Whiskey
Rebellion Tax
Protest-1794



Washington and Hamilton Lead a Federal Army Against the Whiskey Rebels

President Washington and Treasury Secretary Hamilton led a federal army of nearly 13,000 troops into western Pennsylvania in 1794. Rebellious farmers, protesting the government's excise tax on whiskey, dispersed as the army approached. What political story is the artist trying to tell? (*Frederick Kemmelmeier, Washington Reviewing the Western Army at Fort Cumberland, Maryland. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1963 [63.201.2] Photograph © 1983 The Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

western Pennsylvania. In August, a convention at Pittsburgh denounced the Whiskey Tax and vowed to prevent its collection. Like opponents of the Stamp Act in 1765 and the Shays rebels in 1786, they decided that liberties would be lost if resistance did not soon begin. Alarmed, Washington issued a proclamation warning against such “unlawful” gatherings and insisting that the tax would be enforced. As collections began, the farmers took matters into their own hands.

In July 1794, when federal marshal David Lennox and John Neville, a local excise inspector, attempted to serve papers on several recalcitrant farmers near Pittsburgh, an angry crowd of 500 armed men cornered a dozen federal soldiers in Neville’s home. After an exchange of gunfire, the soldiers surrendered and Neville’s house was put to the torch. Similar episodes, some of them involving the erection of liberty poles reminiscent of the Revolution, erupted across the state. At Parkinson’s Ferry, a convention of more than 200 delegates debated armed resistance.

Fearing that the protests might spread through the entire backcountry from Maine to Georgia, and concerned by rumors that Spanish emissaries and western adventurers were plotting secession in Kentucky and the western Carolinas, Washington called out federal troops to restore order. For more than a year, Hamilton had been urging the use of force against the protesters. To him, the insurrection was not evidence of an unjust policy needing change but a test of the administration’s ability to govern. He eagerly volunteered to accompany the troops west.

In late August, a federal force of nearly 13,000 men, larger than the average strength of the continental army during the Revolutionary War, marched into western Pennsylvania. At its center was Colonel William McPherson’s “Pennsylvania Blues,” a strongly Federalist cavalry regiment. At its head rode the president and secretary of the treasury. Persuaded of the danger to his safety, Washington returned to Philadelphia, but Hamilton pressed ahead. When later criticized for accompanying the army to Pittsburgh, he replied that he had “long since . . . learned to hold public opinion of no value.” The battle for which Hamilton hoped never materialized, however, for as the federal army approached, the “Whiskey Rebels” dispersed. Of 20 prisoners taken, two were convicted of treason and sentenced to death. Later, in a calmer mood, Washington pardoned them both.

As people soon realized, the “Whiskey Rebellion” had never threatened the government’s safety. “An

insurrection was . . . proclaimed,” Jefferson scoffed, “but could never be found.” Even such an ardent Federalist as Fisher Ames was uneasy at the sight of federal troops marching against American citizens. “Elective rulers,” he warned, “can scarcely ever employ the physical force of a democracy without turning the moral force, or the power of public opinion, against the government.” The American people would have additional reason to ponder Ames’s warning in the years immediately ahead.



George Washington, Whiskey Rebellion Address to Congress (1794)



George Washington, Proclamation Regarding the Whiskey Rebellion (1794)

THE REPUBLIC IN A THREATENING WORLD

Because the nation was so new and the outside world so threatening, foreign policy generated extraordinary excitement during the 1790s. This was especially so after the tumultuous events of the French and Haitian Revolutions burst onto the international scene. The revolution in France and the European war that accompanied it threatened to draw America in, while across Europe, Ireland, and the Caribbean, political insurgents, invoking the Declaration of Independence and America's colonial rebellion as inspiration for their own cause, joined in what historians call the age of democratic revolution.

The Promise and Peril of the French Revolution

France's revolution began in 1789 as an effort to reform an arbitrary but weakened monarchy. Pent-up demands for social justice, however, quickly outran attempts at moderate reform, and in 1793, when the recently proclaimed republican regime beheaded Louis XVI, France plunged into a genuinely radical revolution. By the end of 1793, Europe was locked in a deadly struggle between revolutionary France and a counterrevolutionary coalition led by Prussia and Great Britain.

For more than a decade, the French Revolution dominated European affairs. Before it was finished, it would transform the course of Western history. The revolution also cut like a plowshare through the surface of American politics, threatening the nation's security and dividing Americans deeply against each other.

The outbreak of European war posed thorny diplomatic problems for Washington's administration. By the mid-1790s, American merchants were earning handsome profits from neutral trade with both England and France, while American shipbuilding was



Urban Prosperity in the Late 1790s This scene of bustling commercial activity in New York City in 1797 reveals the benefits that expanded neutral trade brought to the nation's major seaports. On the right of the painting is the elegant Tontine Coffee House, which served as a tavern, housed the New York Stock Exchange, and boasted of such amenities as water closets, a bell system for communication between rooms, and an inside bath. (Guy Francis, *Tontine Coffee House*, N.Y.C., oil on linen, 1907.32, Collection of the New-York Historical Society)

booming. In 1800, American ships carried an astonishing 92 percent of all commerce between America and Europe. The economic benefits were most evident in cities along the Atlantic coast but radiated as well into the surrounding countryside, where cargoes of agricultural and forest goods, as well as the provisions required by ships' crews, were produced.

America's expanding commerce, however, generated problems. While England and France sought access to American goods, each was determined to prevent those goods from reaching the other, if necessary by stopping American ships and confiscating their cargoes. When locked in such a deadly struggle, neither belligerent was willing to bind itself by the formalities of international law guaranteeing neutral trade.

America's relations with England were additionally complicated by the Royal Navy's practice of impressing American sailors into service aboard its warships to meet the growing demand for seamen. This posed the difficult problem of protecting American citizens without getting drawn into the European conflict.

The French treaty of 1778 compounded the government's dilemma. It appeared to require that the United States aid France much as France had assisted the American states against England a decade and a half earlier. Americans sympathetic to the French cause argued that the commitment still held. Others, fearing the consequences of American involvement and the political infection that closer ties with revolutionary France might bring, insisted that the treaty had lapsed when the French king was overthrown.

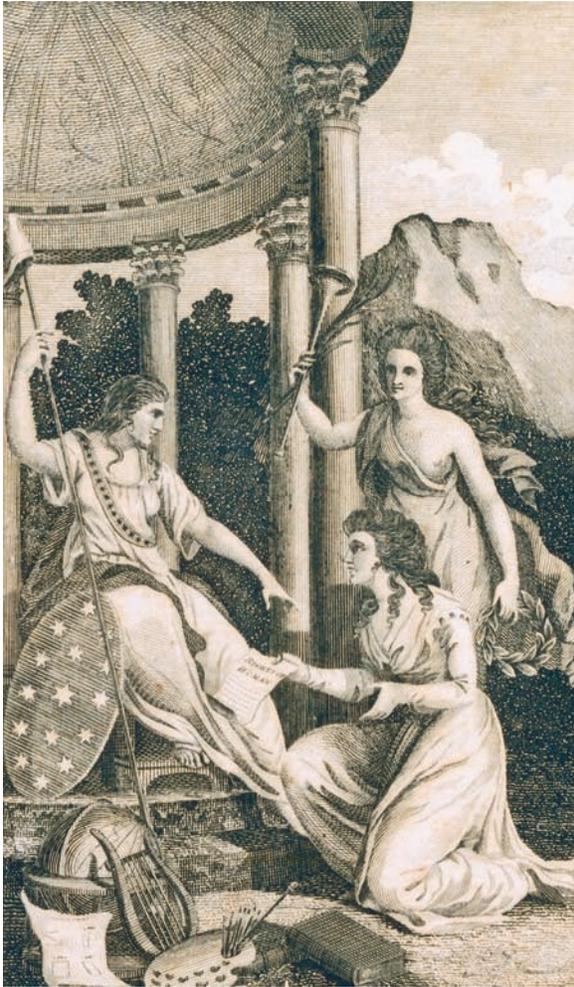
The American people's intense reaction to the revolution in France further complicated the situation. At

first, it seemed an extension of America's own struggle for liberty. Even the swing toward social revolution did not immediately dampen American enthusiasm. By the mid-1790s, however, especially after France's revolutionary regime launched its attack on organized Christianity, many Americans pulled back in alarm. What connection could there possibly be between the principles of 1776 and the chaos so evident in France? The differences were indeed profound.

For the Federalists, revolutionary France symbolized social anarchy and threatened the European order on which they believed the nation's commercial and diplomatic security depended. With increasing vehemence, they castigated the revolution, championed England as the defender of European civilization, and sought ways of linking England and the United States more closely together.

Many Americans, however, continued to support France. While decrying the revolution's excesses, they believed that liberty would ultimately emerge from the turmoil. Though Jefferson regretted the shedding of innocent blood, he thought it necessary if true liberty was to be achieved. John Bradford, editor of the *Kentucky Gazette*, thought similarly. "Instead of reviling the French republicans as monsters," he wrote, the "friends of royalty in this country" should admire their patience in suffering so long under their monarch. In Bradford's judgment, England was not a bastion of civilized order, but of political privilege and oppression.

The turmoil in France challenged American assumptions about the gendered basis of politics as well. There, women participated in revolutionary



Women Affirm Their Rights In this 1792 print from *The Lady's Magazine* of Philadelphia, a kneeling woman presents Columbia with a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," one of the most outspokenly feminist writings of the time. Note the Liberty Cap on Columbia's pole. The cap was a potent political symbol in both the American and French revolutions. (*The Library Company of Philadelphia* [Per: 5.7.51708.0])

crowds and joined in arguments over issues of political equality. When word of radical feminist activity reached North American shores, it echoed loudly in the political consciousness of many American women.

In August 1794, Philadelphia citizens gathered to celebrate the progress of French liberty. Mimicking the public festivals popular in revolutionary France, a crowd of women and men paraded down Market Street to the French minister's residence. There, women dressed in gowns emblazoned with the French tricolor gathered around an "altar of liberty," reciting patriotic odes before finally dispersing.

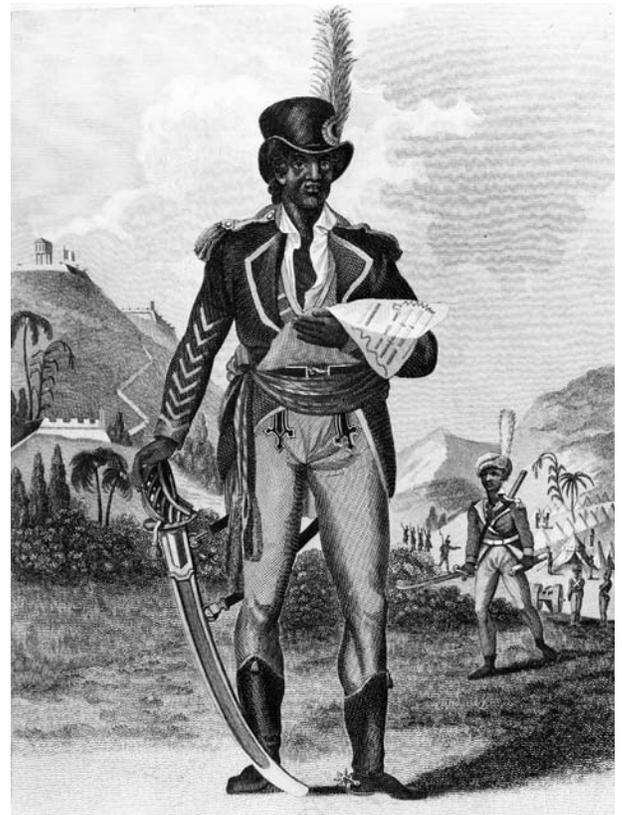
Upper-class women such as Anne Willing Bingham, wife of a Federalist senator and daughter of a socially prominent Philadelphia family, opened their

dinner parties and social salons to political talk, a practice that became a common part of civic life at the nation's capital. In all of these ways, women explored the boundaries of American citizenship and claimed a wider presence in the public sphere.

Democratic Revolutions in Europe and the Atlantic World

The revolution in France was but the most dramatic among an array of political insurgencies that challenged aristocratic power and promoted democratic values throughout Europe and the Atlantic world during the 1790s. As with the French revolution, they generated dispute among the American people.

Supported by invading armies from revolutionary France and inspired by the doctrine of natural rights voiced during the American and French revolutions, rebellions against long-entrenched privilege erupted from the Netherlands to the Italian peninsula. Though some of these movements were repressed, others resulted in the creation of new states, such as the Batavian and Cisalpine Republics.



Toussaint L'Ouverture This swashbuckling portrait of the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture appeared in *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Haiti*, published in London in 1805. Is the portrayal intended to be complimentary or mocking? (*R Snark/Art Resource, NY*).

The Outbreak of Democratic Insurgencies

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, numerous democratic insurgencies erupted in Europe and the Caribbean. **Reflecting on the Past** What connections did these insurgencies have with the American and French revolutions?



Democratic insurgencies broke out as well in Latin America and the Caribbean. The most important occurred on the island of San Domingue, soon to be known as Haiti. Beginning in 1791, a multiracial coalition, emboldened by events in revolutionary France, rose in rebellion against French colonial rule. Conflict quickly developed between white landowners seeking to preserve their privileges while throwing off the colonial yoke, poor whites demanding access to land, mixed-race mulattoes chafing under years of discrimination, and black slaves angered by brutal repression. For more than a decade, black and white Haitians conducted a furious struggle against a combined French and British force of 30,000. (Though France's mortal



Slave Revolt, Saint-Domingue, 1791

enemy in Europe, England feared rebellion among the 300,000 slaves on Jamaica, its nearby possession, and offered military support.) The conflict devastated Haiti's sugar economy and caused more than 100,000 casualties among whites and blacks alike.

In 1798, the island's black majority, led by the charismatic Toussaint L'Ouverture, seized control of the rebellion, making the abolition of slavery its primary goal. Six years later, the victorious Haitian rebels established Haiti as the first black nation-state in the Americas.

While Haitian rebels celebrated the Declaration of Independence as a manifesto of universal freedom, North American whites followed events on that troubled island with a mixture of enthusiasm and dread. The Haitian revolt appeared to affirm the



universal relevance of the U.S. struggle for liberty, and struck another blow against European colonialism in the New World. During the height of the Haitian insurgency, American warships ferried black troops from one part of the island to another in preparation for battle.

U.S. citizens, however, contemplated with dread the effect on North American slaves of a successful black rebellion so close by. The Haitian achievement, moreover, cast doubt on the racial assumption that blacks were incapable of comprehending liberty's true meaning. White southerners were especially anxious. The governor of North Carolina issued a proclamation warning Haitians fleeing the

island's chaos to stay away. When Haitian officials appealed in "the name of humanity" for "fraternal aid" in their liberation struggle, Congress demurred. If Haiti became an independent state, warned Pennsylvania senator Albert Gallatin, it might become "a dangerous neighbor" offering asylum to runaway slaves. When the Haitian republic was proclaimed in 1804, the U.S. government withheld recognition. Not until after the American Civil War were diplomatic relations finally established.

Though each of the democratic insurgencies that erupted during the 1790s was inspired by local experiences of injustice, they shared a common

RECOVERING THE PAST

Foreign Travel Journals

Historians utilize many different kinds of sources in their quest to recover the American past. Among the most revealing are travel accounts penned by foreign visitors eager to learn about the United States and record their impressions of it. From the days of earliest explorations to our own time, travelers have been fascinated by the people, customs, institutions, and physical setting of North America. Out of this continuing interaction between America and its foreign visitors has



Charles William Janson, *The Stranger in America* (1807)

emerged a rich and fascinating travel literature that reveals much not only about America but about the travelers who have visited it as well.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a stream of perceptive European visitors—Alexis de Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau, and Francis Grund among them—toured the United States, eager to record their impressions of what Jacksonian America was like. Fifty years earlier, the American Revolution fanned similar interest in the minds of Europeans fascinated by the newly independent nation and anxious to discern its implications for them. Among the most opinionated and engaging of these earlier commentators was the Frenchman Moreau de Saint Méry.

Born on the French island of Martinique in January 1750, de Saint Méry established a successful legal practice before moving to France, where relatives introduced him to polite Parisian society. In the late 1780s, he became an ardent champion of political reform during the early days of the French Revolution. As the revolution entered its radical phase, however, he was forced to flee to the United States for safety. Arriving at Norfolk, Virginia, with his wife and two children, de Saint Méry settled in Philadelphia, where he remained from October 1794 to August 1798. While there, he mingled with civic and cultural leaders, opened a bookstore that served as a rendezvous for French émigrés who also had fled the revolution's turmoil, and published a French-language paper that reported the latest news from home. In the late summer of 1798, de Saint Méry returned safely to France.

As with all such travel accounts, de Saint Méry's commentary must be read with a critical eye, for travelers disagreed over what they thought important and worth reporting, and interpreted what they saw in very different ways. In nearly 400 pages of commentary, de Saint Méry touched on numerous aspects of American life, but none in more frank and compelling fashion than relations between the sexes. The selections that follow (somewhat rearranged for greater continuity) provide tantalizing insights into the behavior and sexual mores of American men and women in the early years of the republic.

What did de Saint Méry find most interesting about gender relations in Philadelphia? How did religion, class, and ethnicity shape men's and women's behavior? of what forms of behavior did he approve and disapprove?

The explicit commentary of de Saint Méry is unique among the numerous accounts left by foreign travelers in the early republic, most of whom showed far more interest in America's racial makeup, political practices, and physical environment. Thus, de Saint Méry's observations may be idiosyncratic and should be approached with caution.

What other kinds of sources might enable us to evaluate the accuracy of such travel accounts? In what ways is a traveler's own nationality, gender, religion, or class likely to shape his or her impressions of the United States? Similarly, how important is it to know travelers' motives for coming, how long they stayed, which parts of the country they visited, and with whom they associated while here?

REFLECTING ON THE PAST Does the gendered world of late eighteenth-century Philadelphia, as described by de Saint Méry, seem strange or familiar, attractive or distasteful to your own sensibilities? If you were to visit another country today, how accurate do you think you could be in assessing the social behavior and cultural values of its people? To what extent would your values, perhaps like those of Moreau de Saint Méry, color your impressions? Might it be more difficult to understand some foreign cultures than others? Why?

Moreau de Saint Méry's American Journal

American men, generally speaking, are tall and thin . . . [and] seem to have no strength . . . They are brave, but they lack drive. Indifferent toward almost everything, they sometimes behave in a manner that suggests real energy; then follow it with a "Oh-to-hell-with-it" attitude which shows that they seldom feel genuine enthusiasm.

Their dinner consists of . . . English roast surrounded by potatoes . . . baked or fried eggs, boiled or fried fish, salad which may be thinly sliced cabbage . . . [and] sweets to which they are excessively partial. . . . The entire meal is washed down with cider, weak or strong beer . . . [and] wine . . . which they keep drinking right through dessert, toward the end of which any ladies who are at the dinner leave the table and withdraw by themselves, leaving the men free to drink as much as they please . . . Toasts are drunk, cigars are lighted, diners run to the corners of the room hunting night tables and vases which will enable them to hold a greater amount of liquor . . . Finally the dinner table is deserted because of boredom, fatigue or drunkenness . . .

American women are pretty, and those of Philadelphia are prettiest of all . . . Girls ordinarily mature in Philadelphia at the age of fourteen, and reach that period without unusual symptoms . . . But they soon grow pale . . . After eighteen years old they lose their charms . . . Their hair is scanty, their teeth bad . . . In short, while charming and adorable at fifteen, they are faded at twenty-three, old at thirty-five, decrepit at forty or forty-five . . .

American women carefully wash their faces and hands, but not their mouths, seldom their feet and even more seldom their bodies . . . They are greatly addicted to finery and have a strong desire to display themselves—a desire . . . inflamed by their love of adornment. They cannot, however, imitate that elegance of style possessed by Frenchwomen . . .

One is struck by the tall and pretty young girls one sees in the streets, going and coming from school. They wear their hair long, and skirts with closed seams. But when nubility has arrived they put up their hair with a comb, and the back of the skirt has a placket. At this time, they . . . become their own mistresses, and can go walking alone and have suitors . . .

They invariably make their own choice of a suitor, and the parents raise no objection because that's the custom of the country. The suitor comes into the house when he wishes; goes on walks with his loved one whenever he desires. On Sunday he often takes her out in a cabriolet, and brings her back in the evening without anyone wanting to know where they went . . . Although in general one is conscious of widespread modesty in Philadelphia, . . . the disregard . . . of some parents for the manner in which their daughters form relationships to which they . . . have not given their approval is an encouragement to indiscretions . . .

A young woman trusts in her suitor's delicacy and charges him with maintaining for her a respect which she is not always able to command. Each day both of them are entrusted to no one but each other . . . Her servant . . . leaves the house as soon as night has arrived . . . Her father, her mother, her entire family have gone to bed. The suitor and his mistress remain alone; and sometimes, when the servant returns, she finds them asleep and the candle out, such is the frigidity of love in this country . . .

When one considers the unlimited liberty which young ladies enjoy, one is astonished by their universal eagerness to be married . . . When a young woman marries, she enters a wholly different existence. She is no longer a . . . butterfly who denies herself nothing and whose only laws are her whims and her suitor's wish. She now lives only for her husband, and to devote herself without surcease to the care of her household and her home . . . The more her husband is capable of multiplying . . . the pleasures of matrimony . . . the more her health may suffer, most of all when she has a child; for sometimes while nursing it, or as soon as it is weaned, she has already conceived another . . .

In spite of conjugal customs which would seem to indicate a state of happiness, they do not produce the happiness which would be expected to result . . . This is evidenced by the multiplicity of second marriages . . . The men in particular remarry oftenest . . . Divorce is obtained with scandalous ease. From this alone one can judge the extent of loose habits . . .

Bastards are extremely common in Philadelphia. There are two principal reasons for this. In the first place, the city is full of religious sects, but none of them give their clergymen any authority to enforce obedience. Consequently there is no way of inspiring shame in women who become mothers for no reason except the pleasure they get out of it. In the second place, once an illegitimate child is twelve months old, a mother can disembarass herself of him by farming him out for twenty-one years. This makes it possible for her to commit the same sin for a second time. It never occurs to her that her child can never know her, and that the whole business is shameful . . .

There are streetwalkers . . . in Philadelphia. These are very young and very pretty girls, elegantly dressed, who promenade two by two, arm in arm and walking very rapidly, at an hour which indicates that they aren't just out for a stroll . . . Anyone who accosts them is taken to their home . . . [where] they fulfill every desire for two dollars, half of which is supposed to pay for the use of the room. Quaker youths are frequent visitors in the houses of ill fame, which have multiplied in Philadelphia and are frequented at all hours. There is even a well-known gentleman who leaves his horse tied to the post outside one of these houses, so that everyone knows when he is there and exactly how long he stays . . .

Source: Moreau de St. Méry's American Journey, 1793–1798, trans. and ed. Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts (New York: Doubleday, 1947), 265, 281–283, 312–313.

AMERICAN VOICES

A Member of the Boston African Society, Celebrating the End of the African Slave Trade

Free blacks followed the Haitian Revolution and emergence of a black republic in Haiti with great interest. They also celebrated the official end of the slave trade in the United States, as the excerpts from this address reveal.

Did not America think it was a privilege truly desirable to be enjoyed, when her mother nation was about to invade her land, and bring her under her dominion; did she not greatly regret the thought of a deprivation of her freedom when she asked the assistance of her sister nation, France, to vindicate her cause against Britain with her? If desirable, I say, to America under such circumstances, why not to any or all the nations of the earth . . . ?

Slavery hath ever had a tendency to spread ignorance and darkness, poverty and distress in the world. Although it hath advanced a few, yet many have been the sufferers; it was first invented by

men of the most malicious dispositions, and has been carried on by men of similar character

Freedom is desirable; if not, would men sacrifice their time, their property, and finally lose their lives in the pursuit of it? If it was not a thing that was truly valuable, should we see whole nations engaged in hostility, to procure it for their country, wives and children? Yea, I say there is something so dreadful in slavery that some had rather die than experience it.

- *Why did the North American slave trade officially end in 1808?*
- *Was the speaker primarily addressing the all-black audience of the Boston African Society, or the larger Boston community?*

dedication to human liberty and drew on principles articulated in revolutionary America and France. And though they were widely scattered across Europe and the Atlantic basin, news about them circulated in the United States via newspapers, networks of personal correspondence, and an expanding human traffic of soldiers, émigrés, and political idealists who crisscrossed the Atlantic during these tumultuous years.

During the mid-1790s, Joel Barlow and other Americans, motivated by curiosity and democratic principle, journeyed to France, eager to witness the further unfolding of universal liberty. The American expatriate Thomas Paine was granted honorary French citizenship and served briefly in the revolutionary Convention before running afoul of the Terror. At the same time, a stream of French émigrés (among them Moreau de Saint Méry (see the “Recovering the Past” essay, pp. 260–261), sought sanctuary in the United States.

As the 1790s progressed, growing numbers of English and Irish radicals fleeing the deepening political conservatism in Britain also took passage for North America. When they arrived, many joined the Jeffersonian opposition as newspaper editors and activists, adding to the party’s democratic commitment and anti-British stance.

The emerging transatlantic web of radical dissent was strengthened as well by a multiracial underclass

of sailors, runaway slaves, and other common folk—restive men, and occasionally women, from the far corners of the Atlantic world who circulated in and out of North American ports. Their rough appearance, vivid tales of injustice, and readiness to challenge local authorities added to the country’s political clamor.

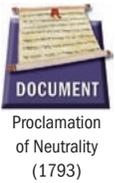
The Democratic–Republican Societies

Political clubs, providing safe havens where dissidents could gather to read political tracts and plot political change, served as weapons of democratic reform throughout the Atlantic world during the 1790s. The Jacobin clubs in France were the best known, but similar groups sprouted up in the United States.

As early as 1792, ordinary citizens began to form “constitutional societies” dedicated to “watching over the rights of the people” and giving the alarm in case of governmental encroachments on American liberty. Several dozen societies, modeled after the Sons of Liberty and Committees of Correspondence that had mobilized patriots against England 20 years earlier, formed in opposition to Hamilton’s financial program. The French Revolution stoked the fires of democratic enthusiasm and spurred the societies’ growth, as did the arrival in 1793 of Citizen Edmund Genêt, the French minister to the United States.

Genêt landed at Charleston, South Carolina, to a tumultuous reception. His instructions were to court popular support and negotiate a commercial treaty with the United States. Shortly after his arrival, however, he began commissioning American privateers to attack British shipping in the Caribbean and enlisting American seamen for expeditions against Spanish Florida, clear violations of American neutrality.

As he traveled north toward Philadelphia, Genêt generated more enthusiastic receptions. His popularity, however, soon led him into trouble. In open defiance of diplomatic protocol, he urged Congress to reject Washington's recently issued Neutrality Proclamation and side with revolutionary France. On August 2, the president demanded Genêt's recall, charging that his conduct threatened "war abroad and anarchy at home."



Proclamation of Neutrality (1793)

Though Genêt failed as a diplomat, he succeeded in fanning popular enthusiasm for revolutionary France. With his open encouragement, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the largest and most influential of the new popular associations, called for the support of France abroad and the "spirit of freedom and equality" at home. President Washington and his Federalist colleagues might wonder whether that second challenge was aimed at them.

About 40 popular societies scattered from Maine to Georgia sprang up during the next several years. Working people—artisans and laborers in the cities, small farmers and tenants in the countryside—provided the bulk of membership. Federalist critics derided them as "the lowest orders of . . . draymen . . . broken hucksters, and trans-Atlantic traitors." That final canard referred to the growing tide of Irish immigrants, fleeing hard times and political repression at home, who combined demands for Irish independence from England with a



Cartoons as Newspaper Politics Cartoons became powerful weapons in the rapidly expanding, superheated political press of the 1790s. This Jeffersonian cartoon lampoons William Cobbett, one of the Federalists' most acid-penned pamphleteers who wrote under the pseudonym Peter Porcupine. While Columbia swoons over the political turmoil, the English Lion urges Cobbett to "sow the seeds of discord" and the Devil mutters "More scandal. Let us destroy this Idol Liberty." (*The Historical Society of Pennsylvania [HSP], "Caricature against William Cobbett, editor of the Porcupine Gazette," 1796, [Bb612Se31]*)

commitment to political equality and a relish for rough-and-tumble politics.

The societies' leaders were most often doctors, tradesmen, and lawyers, men of acknowledged respectability. Leaders and followers alike were united by a common determination to preserve the "principles of '76" against the "royalizing" tendencies of Washington's administration. Committed to an awakened citizenry, the societies organized public celebrations, issued ringing addresses filled with democratic principles, and fired off petitions sharply critical of administration policies to the president and Congress. Washington's proclamation of neutrality they labeled a "pusillanimous truckling to Britain, despotically conceived and unconstitutionally promulgated." Several of the societies openly urged the United States to enter the war on France's behalf.

West of the Appalachians, local democratic societies agitated against England's continuing occupation of frontier posts south of the Great Lakes and berated Spain for closing the Mississippi River at New Orleans to American shipping. Everywhere they protested the Excise Tax, opposed the administration's overtures to England, and called for a press free from control by Federalist "aristocrats." William Manning, a Massachusetts farmer who had marched to the "Concord fight" in 1775 and who continued to praise the principles for which he had earlier fought, declared that a laboring man may as well "hunt for pins in a haymow" as try to collect accurate knowledge from the "promiscuous piles of contradictions" appearing in Federalist newspapers.

President Washington was incensed by the societies' support of Genêt and their sharp criticism of the government, while the arch-Federalist Fisher Ames thundered against these "nurseries of sedition" that threatened to revolutionize America as the Jacobins had revolutionized France. In January 1794, a Virginia Federalist berated Kentucky's Democratic Society as "that horrible sink of treason, that hateful synagogue of anarchy, that odious conclave of tumult, that frightful cathedral of discord, that poisonous garden of conspiracy, that hellish school of rebellion and opposition to all regular and well-balanced authority!" Such polemics indicated how inflamed public discourse had become.

As controversy escalated, another circumstance added to the anxiety gripping politicians at the Philadelphia capital. Through the summer of 1793, an unrelenting heat wave descended on southeastern Pennsylvania, searing trees and gardens, threatening supplies of potable water, and raising a stench in the refuse-filled streets. Even more alarming, from early August to mid-October a deadly epi-

demic of yellow fever gripped the city, sending wealthier citizens fleeing for safety to the countryside and taking a terrible toll on those forced to stay behind. The poor and elderly fared worst. Blacks also died in large numbers when the Free African Society, responding to appeals from the mayor, volunteered nurses to tend the sick and labor to bury the dead. The belief that blacks were naturally immune to the fever's ravages proved tragically false.

Before early frosts finally destroyed the swarms of mosquitoes that carried the deadly pestilence through the city's crowded streets, well over 4,000 black and white Philadelphians, more than 10 percent of the city's population, had died. Yellow fever would return before the decade was out, but never again did it reap such a deadly harvest.

Jay's Controversial Treaty

The uproar over Jay's Treaty with England further heightened political tensions at mid-decade. Alarmed by deteriorating relations with England, Washington sent Chief Justice John Jay to London in the spring of 1794 to negotiate a wide range of issues carried over from the Revolutionary War. The treaty that the chief justice brought home in early 1795 contained British promises to withdraw from the western posts and provide American ships selective access to British West Indian ports. However, it totally ignored a host of other lingering problems. When its terms were made public, they triggered an explosion of protest.

The administration's pleas that the agreement headed off an open breach with England and was the best that could be obtained failed to pacify its critics. In New York City, Hamilton was stoned while defending the treaty at a mass meeting. The "rabble," sniffed one Federalist, attempted "to knock out Hamilton's brains to reduce him to an equality with themselves." Southern planters were angry because the agreement brought no compensation for their lost slaves. Westerners complained that the British were not evacuating the military posts, while merchants and sailors railed against Jay's failure to stop impressment or open the West Indies to American trade. After a long and acrimonious debate, the Senate ratified the treaty by a narrow margin.

The administration made better progress on the still-volatile issue of free transit of the Mississippi River. In the Treaty of San Lorenzo, negotiated by Thomas Pinckney in 1795, Spain for the first time recognized the United States' boundaries under the peace treaty of 1783 (the Mississippi River to the



The Treaty of San Lorenzo (1796)

west and the thirty-first parallel to the south) and gave up all claim to U.S. territory. Spain also granted Americans free navigation of the Mississippi and the right to unload goods for transshipment at New Orleans—but only for three years. What would happen after that remained uncertain.

By mid-decade, political harmony had disappeared as divisions deepened on virtually every important issue of foreign and domestic policy. Jefferson, increasingly estranged from the administration, resigned as secretary of state, joining Madison and others in open opposition to Washington's policies.

In September 1796, in what came to be called his Farewell Address, Washington deplored the deepening political divisions, warned against entangling alliances with foreign nations,



George Washington's Farewell Address (1796)

and announced that he would not accept a third term. He had long been contemplating retirement, for he was 64 and wearied by political attacks. "As to you, sir," fumed Thomas Paine in a letter published in an opposition newspaper, "treacherous in private friendship . . . and a hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide . . . whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any." Few American presidents have been subjected to such public abuse.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS DEEPENS

By 1796, bitter controversy surrounded the national government. It intensified during the last half of the decade until the very stability of the country seemed threatened.

The Election of 1796

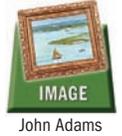
With Washington out of the picture, the presidential election quickly narrowed to John Adams versus Jefferson. They knew each other well. Both had played distinguished roles during the Revolution, when they had shared in the electrifying task of drafting the Declaration of Independence. They had joined forces again during the 1780s, when Adams served as first U.S. minister to Great Britain and Jefferson as minister to France. They had come together a third time in Washington's administration, Adams as vice president and Jefferson as secretary of state.

Though they had earned each other's respect, they now differed sharply in their visions of the nation's future. While fearing Hamilton's ambition and distrusting his infatuation with England, Adams was a committed Federalist. He believed in a vigorous

national government, was appalled by the French Revolution, and feared "excessive democracy." Jefferson, while firmly supporting the Constitution, was alarmed by Hamilton's financial program, viewed France's revolution as a logical if chaotic extension of America's struggle for freedom, and hoped to expand democracy at home. By 1796, he had become the leader of an increasingly vocal opposition, the Jeffersonian Republican party.

The election of 1796 bound Jefferson and Adams together once again, this time in a deeply strained and ill-fated alliance. Adams received 71 electoral votes and became president. Jefferson came in second with 68 and, as then specified in the Constitution, assumed the vice presidency. The narrowness of Adams's majority—his enemies gleefully reminded him that he was only a "President of three votes"—foreshadowed the troubles that lay ahead.

Adams later recalled his inaugural day: "A solemn scene it was indeed, and it was made more affecting by the presence of the General [Washington], whose countenance was as serene and unclouded as the



John Adams



John Adams John Adams, Washington's vice president, won a narrow victory over Jefferson for the presidency in 1796. His administration foundered on conflicts over foreign policy abroad and the suppression of political dissent at home. (Portrait of John Adams. Adams National Historic Site/U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)

day. He seemed to enjoy a triumph over me. Methought I heard him say, 'Ay! I am fairly out and you fairly in! See which of us will be the happiest.'" The answer was not long in coming.

The War Crisis with France

Adams had no sooner taken office than he confronted a deepening crisis with France, generated by French naval vessels interfering with American merchant ships in the Caribbean. That crisis would push the nation to the brink of civil conflict.

Hoping to ease relations between the two countries, Adams sent three commissioners to Paris to negotiate an accord. When they arrived, agents of the French foreign minister Talleyrand (identified only as "X," "Y," and "Z") made it clear that the success of the American mission depended on a loan to the French government and a \$240,000 "gratuity" (more accurately, a bribe) for themselves. The two staunchly Federalist commissioners, John Marshall and Charles Pinckney, indignantly sailed home. The third commissioner, Elbridge Gerry, alarmed by Talleyrand's intimation that France would declare war if all three Americans left, stayed on.

When Adams reported the so-called XYZ Affair to Congress, Federalists quickly exploited the French blunder. Secretary of State Pickering urged an immediate declaration of war, while Federalist congressmen thundered against the insult to American honor and promised "millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute." Caught up in the anti-French furor and emboldened by the petitions of support that flooded in from around the country, the president lashed out at "enemies" at home and abroad. Emotions were further inflamed by the so-called Quasi War, a series of encounters between American and French ships on the high seas.

For the moment, the Republicans were in disarray. Publicly, they deplored the French government's behavior and pledged to uphold the nation's honor. But among themselves, they voiced alarm over Federalist intentions—with good reason, because the Federalists soon mounted a crash

program to repel foreign invaders and root out "traitors" at home.

The Alien and Sedition Acts

In May 1798, Congress called for a naval force capable of defending the American coast against French attack. In July, it moved closer to an open breach with France by repealing the treaty of 1778 and calling for the formation of a 10,000-man army. The army's stated mission was to repel a French invasion, but this seemed an unlikely danger given France's desperate struggle in Europe. The Jeffersonians, remembering the speed with which the Federalists had deployed troops against the Whiskey Rebels only a few years earlier, feared the army would be used against them.

As criticism of the army bill mounted, Adams had second thoughts. He was still enough of an old revolutionary to worry about the dangers of standing armies. "This damned army," he burst out, "will be the ruin of the country." He was further angered when members of his party sought to put Hamilton in command of the troops. To the dismay of hard-line Federalists, Adams issued only a few of the officers' commissions that Congress had authorized. Without officers, the army could not be mobilized.

Fearful of foreign subversion and aware that French and Irish immigrants were active in the Jeffersonian opposition, the Federalist-dominated



Political Emotions Run High A fight erupted in the House of Representatives in 1798 when Matthew Lyon, a Jeffersonian from Vermont, spat on the Federalist Roger Griswold. As the two congressmen battle, other representatives and a dog look on. (Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

AMERICAN VOICES

Samuel Miller, from *Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*

In this 1803 publication, Samuel Miller describes the remarkable transformation of American journalism in the early republic.

It is worthy of remark that newspapers have almost entirely changed their form and character. . . . For a long time . . . they were confined, in general, to the mere statement of facts. But they have gradually assumed an office more extensive, and risen to a more important station in society. They have become the vehicles of discussion, in which the principles of government, the interests of nations, the spirit and tendency of public measures, and the public and private characters of individuals, are all arraigned, tried, and decided. Instead, therefore, of being considered . . . of small moment in society, they have become immense moral and political engines,

closely connected with the welfare of the state, and deeply involving both its peace and prosperity. . . .

By means of this powerful instrument, impressions on the public mind may be made with a celerity, and to an extent, of which our remote ancestors had no conception, and which cannot but give rise to the most important consequences in society. Never was there given to man a political engine of greater power; and never, assuredly, did this engine before operate on so large a scale. . . .

- *What is the revolution in print communication that Miller describes?*
- *What were the connections between this revolution in print and American politics of the late eighteenth century?*

Congress acted to curb the flow of aliens into the country. In June 1798, the Naturalization Act raised the residence requirement for citizenship from 5 to 14 years, while the Alien Act authorized the president to expel aliens whom he judged “dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States.” Another bill, the Alien Enemies Act, empowered the president in time of war to arrest, imprison, or banish the subjects of any hostile nation without specifying charges against them or providing opportunity for appeal. The Federalist congressman Harrison Gray Otis explained that there was no need “to invite hordes of Wild Irishmen, or the turbulent and disorderly of all parts of the world, to come here with a view to distract our tranquility.”

The implications of these acts for basic political liberties were ominous enough, but the Federalists had not yet finished. In mid-July, Congress passed the Sedition Act, aimed directly at the Jeffersonians. The bill made it punishable by fine and imprisonment for anyone to conspire in opposition to “any measure or measures of the government” or to aid “any insurrection, riot, unlawful assembly, or combination.” Fines and imprisonment also awaited those who dared to “write, print, utter, or publish . . . any false, scandalous and malicious writing” bringing the government, Congress, or the president into disrepute. The Federalist moves stunned the Jeffersonians, for they threatened to smother all political opposition.



The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)

Under the terms of the Alien Act, Secretary of State Pickering launched investigations intended to force foreigners to register with the government. The act’s chilling effects were immediately apparent. Toward the end of July, Pickering noted approvingly that large numbers of aliens, especially people of French ancestry, were leaving the country. As prosecutions under the Sedition Act went forward, 25 people, among them David Brown of Dedham, were arrested. Fifteen were indicted, and ten were ultimately convicted, the majority of them Jeffersonian printers and editors.

Representative Matthew Lyon, a cantankerous, acid-tongued congressman from Vermont, learned the consequences of political indiscretion, even for members of Congress. Born in Ireland, Lyon had come to America as a young indentured servant, bringing with him undying enmity toward England and disrespect for privilege of every sort. A veteran of the war for American independence, he took his revolutionary principles seriously.

During a heated debate over the Sedition Act, Lyon spat in the face of Federalist congressman Roger Griswold of Connecticut, thus earning the derisive sobriquet of the “Spitting Lion.” Two weeks later, Griswold exacted revenge by caning Lyon on the House floor. Later that year, Lyon was hauled into court, fined \$1,000, and sentenced to four months in prison. His crime? Reference in a personal letter to President Adams’s “unbounded

thirst for ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation, and selfish avarice.”

Local Reverberations

David Brown was not the only ordinary citizen to experience the enmity of Federalist authorities, for the simmering political conflict penetrated deep into American communities. On July 27, 1798, President and Mrs. Adams passed through Newark, New Jersey, on their way from Philadelphia to their home in Quincy, Massachusetts. As the nation’s first couple moved along Broad Street around 11 o’clock that morning, they were greeted by firing cannon, ringing church bells, and cheering citizens.

Not all Newark’s residents shared in the moment’s enthusiasm. Luther Baldwin was in John Burnett’s dram shop when one of the tavern’s other customers, noting that the cannon continued to fire after the president had passed by, commented acidly, “There goes the President and they are firing at his a—.” A “little merry with drink,” Baldwin replied that “he did not care if they fired thro’ his a—.” Whereupon the Federalist tavern keeper cried out that

Baldwin had spoken sedition and must be punished. Within a year he was hauled before a federal circuit court, convicted of speaking “seditious words tending to defame the President and Government of the United States,” fined, and committed to jail until both fine and court fees were paid.

Jeffersonian Republicans made a field day of Baldwin’s trial. The *New York Argus* wondered in mock astonishment whether the “most enthusiastic Federalists and Tories” supposed that anyone “would feel . . . justification in firing at such a disgusting target as the a—of J. A.?” However, there was danger as well as humor in the Federalists’ overreaction. When so much is made of such a “ridiculous expression” as Baldwin’s, the *Argus* warned, the “malignancy of the federal faction” was plainly revealed.

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions

With little prospect of reversing the actions of the Federalist-dominated Congress, Jeffersonians turned to the states for redress. On November 16, 1798, the Kentucky Assembly passed a resolution declaring that the national government had violated the Bill of

Divisive Issues of the 1790s		
Issues	Federalist Party	Jeffersonian Republican Party
<u>Domestic Policy</u>		
Paying the national debt	Favors—Fund remaining debt at face value.	Favors—But wants discrimination between original holders and speculators.
Assumption of remaining state debts	Favors—As way of strengthening central government.	Opposes—As unfair to Southern States and source of power for central government.
Bank of the United States	Favors—To stabilize national economy, promote economic growth, and enhance power of central government.	Opposes—As exceeding central government’s constitutional authority, and adding to consolidation of central authority.
Whiskey Tax	Favors—To provide revenue for central government.	Opposes—Warns of dangers in taxing power of central government.
Whiskey Rebellion	Favors—Suppression of rebellion as challenge to central government.	Opposes—Use of federal force to suppress protest.
Alien and Sedition Acts	Favors—As necessary to protect national security.	Opposes—As infringement of constitutional rights and threat to political opposition.
Federal army	Favors—As necessary to defend against possible French invasion.	Opposes—As dangerous enhancement of federal authority and threat to political opposition.
<u>Foreign Policy</u>		
French Revolution	Initially endorses political reform in France, but alarmed by radicalism following 1793. Fears French influence in U.S. Cheers England as bastion of political order.	Endorses political reform in France. Continues cautious support following 1793. Suspicious of British motives.
Jay’s Treaty	Supports as best agreement possible, and as promoting trade with England.	Opposes—Criticizes treaty’s silence concerning impressment, return of confiscated slaves, etc.
XYZ Affair	Expresses outrage over affront to American dignity.	Also expresses outrage, though worries over domestic political fallout.
Declaration of war with France	Favors, following XYZ Affair—Badly divided when Adams opts for peace.	Opposes—As unnecessary and threatening dangerous domestic repercussions.

Rights. Faced with an arbitrary exercise of federal power, each state had “an equal right” to judge of infractions and decide on the proper “mode and measure of redress.” Nullification (declaring a federal law invalid within a state’s borders) was the “rightful remedy” for unconstitutional laws. Similar resolutions, written by Madison and passed the following month by the Virginia assembly, asserted that when the central government threatened the people’s liberties, the states were “duty bound to interpose for arresting the progress of the evil.” It would not be the last time in U.S. history that state leaders would claim authority to set aside a federal law.

The Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions received little support elsewhere and, as it turned out, the Alien and Sedition Acts were not enforced in the South. Still, the resolutions indicated the depth of popular opposition to the Federalist program.

As the Federalists pressed ahead, the Virginia assembly called for reorganization of the militia and formation of a state arsenal at Harpers Ferry. In Philadelphia, Federalist patrols walked the streets to protect government officials from angry crowds. As a precaution, President Adams smuggled arms into the White House. As 1799 began, the country seemed on the brink of upheaval.



The Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions (1798, 1799)

Within a year, however, the political cycle turned again, this time decisively against the Federalists. From Europe, the

president’s son, John Quincy Adams, sent assurances that Talleyrand was prepared to negotiate an honorable accord. Fearful that war with France “would convulse the attachments of the country,” Adams seized the opening and determined to appoint new peace commissioners. “The end of war is peace,” he explained, “and peace was offered me.” He had also concluded that his only chance of reelection lay in fashioning a peace coalition from elements of both parties.

Adams’s cabinet was enraged, for the Federalist war program depended for its legitimacy on continuation of the French crisis. After Secretary of State Pickering ignored the president’s orders to dispatch the peace commissioners, Adams dismissed him and instructed them to depart. By year’s end, the envoys secured an agreement releasing the United States from the 1778 alliance and restoring peaceful relations.

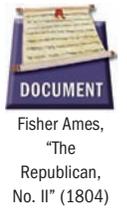
The “Revolution of 1800”

As the election of 1800 approached, the Federalists were in disarray, having squandered the political advantage handed them by the XYZ Affair. With peace a reality, they stood before the nation charged

with exercising federal power unconstitutionally, suppressing political dissent, and threatening to use a federal army against American citizens. Adams’s opponents within the Federalist party were furious at his “betrayal.” When he announced his intention to seek reelection, they plotted his defeat.

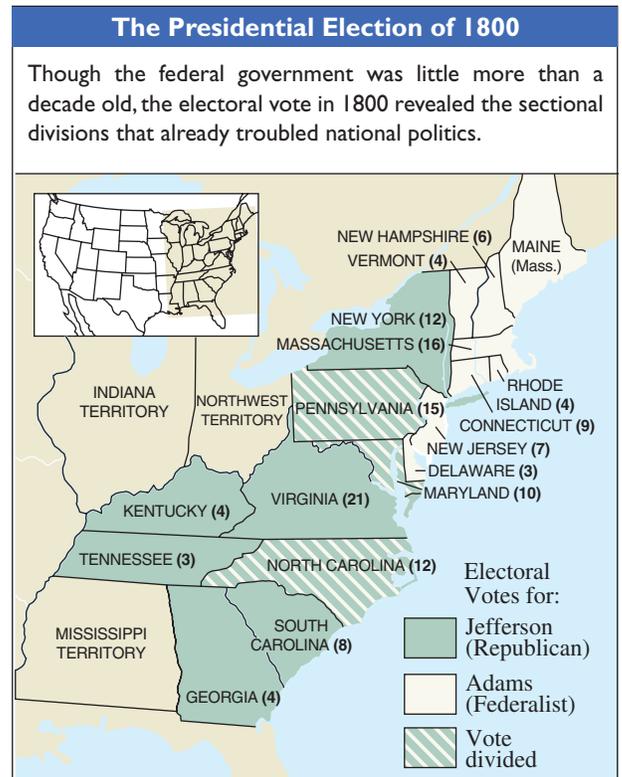
Emotions ran high as the election approached. In Philadelphia, gangs of young Federalists and Jeffersonians clashed in the streets. “A fray ensued,” one observer reported, “the light horse were called in, and the city was so filled with confusion . . . that it was dangerous going out.”

The Federalist Fisher Ames berated the Jeffersonians as “fire-eating salamanders” and “poison-sucking toads,” while they returned the abuse in kind. In Virginia, rumors of a slave insurrection briefly interrupted the political feuding, but the scare passed and Federalists and Jeffersonians were soon at each others’ throats once again. This election, Jefferson declared, will “fix the national character” by determining whether “republicanism or aristocracy” will prevail.



Fisher Ames, “The Republican, No. II” (1804)

Election day was tense throughout the country, but passed without serious incident. As the results were tallied, it became clear that the Jeffersonians had handed the Federalists a decisive defeat. The two Jeffersonian candidates for president, Jefferson





The Death of Washington Washington's death in 1799 generated a surge of public mourning as countless eulogies celebrated him as the "Father of his Country." The picture is rich in religious and patriotic symbols. How many can you identify, and what meanings are they intended to convey? (Photograph Courtesy Peabody Essex Museum [AE81885])

and Aaron Burr, each had 73 electoral votes. Adams trailed with 65.

Because of the tie vote, the election was thrown into the House of Representatives, as provided in the Constitution, where a deadlock quickly developed. After a bitter struggle, the House finally elected Jefferson, 10 states to 4, on the thirty-sixth ballot. (Seeking to prevent a recurrence of such a crisis, the next Congress passed and the states then ratified the Twelfth

Amendment, providing for separate Electoral College ballots for president and vice president.) The magnitude of the Federalists' defeat was even more evident in congressional elections, where they lost their majorities in both House and Senate.

The election's outcome revealed the strong sectional divisions now evident in the country's politics. The Federalists dominated New England because of regional loyalty to Adams, the area's

commercial ties with England, and fears that their opponents intended to import social revolution from France. From Maryland south, political control by the Jeffersonians was almost as complete. In the middle states, the election was more closely contested.

The Federalist–Jeffersonian conflict was rooted as well in socioeconomic divisions among the American people. Federalist support was strongest among merchants, manufacturers, and commercial farmers situated within easy reach of the coast. In New York City and Philadelphia, Federalists were most numerous in wards where houses were largest and addresses most fashionable. All had supported the Constitution in 1787–1788.

The Jeffersonian coalition included most of the old Anti-Federalists but was broader than that. The Jeffersonians found support among urban workers and artisans, many of whom had once been staunch Federalists. The coalition, moreover, was led by individuals such as Madison and Jefferson who had helped create the Constitution and set the new government on its feet. Unlike the Anti-Federalists, the Jeffersonians were ardent supporters of the Constitution, but insisted that it be implemented in ways consistent with political liberty and a strong dependence on the states.

Not all Jeffersonians were democratic in sympathy. Some continued to argue the importance of leadership by a “natural aristocracy of talent.” Most southern Jeffersonians found no inconsistency between black slavery and white liberty, and virtually all continued to believe that politics should remain an exclusively male domain. Still, the Jeffersonian coalition included countless individuals committed to the creation of a more democratic society. Motivated by a combination of electoral self-interest, political principle, and the determination of ordinary people to claim their rights as republican citizens, the Jeffersonian Republicans mounted elaborate parades, organized get-out-the-vote campaigns in New York City and other urban centers, and utilized the popular press to mobilize the people. In the process they contributed to a growing tide of popular politics.



Jefferson and Liberty

In the election of 1800, control of the federal government passed for the first time from one political party to another, not easily but peacefully and legally. The “Revolution of 1800,” Jefferson claimed, was “as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form.” The years immediately ahead would reveal whether he was correct.

RESTORING AMERICAN LIBERTY

The Jeffersonians took office in 1801 determined to calm the political storms, consolidate their recent electoral victory, rescue the government from Federalist mismanagement, and set it on a proper republican course.

The Jeffersonians Take Control

In November 1800 the government had moved from Philadelphia to the District of Columbia, located on the Potomac River. To the consternation of the arriving politicians, the new capital was little more than a swampy village of 5,000 inhabitants. Little had yet materialized of the grand design of plazas and boulevards radiating outward from the Capitol that had been created by the Frenchman Pierre L'Enfant, aided by the black American mathematician and surveyor Benjamin Banneker. The wing of the Capitol building containing the House of Representatives was finished, but the Senate chamber and president's mansion were uncompleted.

To rid the government of Federalist pomp, Jefferson planned a simple inauguration. Shortly before noon on March 4, he walked to the Capitol from his nearby boardinghouse. Dressed as a plain citizen, the president-elect read his short inaugural address, Chief Justice John Marshall (a fellow Virginian but staunch Federalist, recently appointed to the Supreme Court by John Adams) administered the oath of office, and a militia company fired a 16-gun salute.

Despite the modesty of the occasion, the moment was filled with significance. Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith, Washington resident and political observer, described the moment's drama. "I have this morning witnessed one of the most interesting scenes a free people can ever witness," she wrote to a friend. "The changes of administration, which in every . . . age have most generally been epochs of confusion, villainy, and bloodshed, in this our happy country take place without any species of distraction or disorder." Countless Americans shared her sense of pride and relief.

In his inaugural speech, Jefferson enumerated the "essential principles" that would guide his administration: "equal and exact justice to all," support of the states as "the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies," "absolute acquiescence" in the



The Pastoral Setting of Washington, D.C.



A View of the Capitol in 1800 by William Russel Birch



The New Capital

Unlike highly commercial, cosmopolitan centers such as New York and Philadelphia that had served as earlier capitals, Washington seemed lost in the undeveloped countryside along the Potomac River. (*Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-530*)



Jefferson, First Inaugural Address (1801)

decisions of the majority, supremacy of civil over military authority, reduction of government spending, “honest payment” of the public debt, freedom of the press, and “freedom of the person under the protection of the habeas corpus.” Though Jefferson never mentioned the Federalists

by name, his litany of principles reverberated with the dark experience of the 1790s.

The president spoke also of political reconciliation, asserting that “every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle,” and affirming that “we are all republicans—we are all federalists.” Not all his followers welcomed that final flourish, for many were eager to scatter the Federalists to the political winds. Jefferson eventually agreed that a “general sweep” of Federalist officeholders was necessary. By 1808, virtually all government offices were in Jeffersonian hands.

Politics and the Federal Courts

Having lost Congress and the presidency, the Federalists turned to the federal judiciary for protection against the expected Jeffersonian onslaught. In the last months of the Adams administration, the Federalist-controlled Congress had passed a new Judiciary Act increasing the number of circuit courts, complete with judges, marshals, and clerks. Before leaving office, Adams filled many of those offices with staunch Federalists. When the new Jeffersonian-dominated

Congress convened, it challenged the Federalist hold on the judiciary. In January 1802, by a strict party vote, Congress repealed the Judiciary Act.

As Federalists sputtered in anger, exultant Jeffersonians prepared to purge several highly partisan Federalist judges. In March 1803, the House of Representatives impeached district judge John Pickering of New Hampshire. The grounds were not the “high crimes and misdemeanors” required by the Constitution, but the Federalist diatribes with which Pickering regularly assaulted defendants and juries. Impeachment, asserted Representative William Branch Giles of Virginia, is nothing more than a declaration by Congress that an individual holds “dangerous opinions,” which if allowed to go into effect “will work the destruction of the Union.” Although Giles’s speech echoed the language of repression used by Federalists only a few years earlier, the Jeffersonian-controlled Senate convicted Pickering by a straight party vote.

Emboldened by their success, the Jeffersonians next impeached Supreme Court justice Samuel Chase, one of the most notorious Federalist partisans, charging him with “intemperate and inflammatory political harangues.” When the trial revealed that Chase had committed no impeachable offense, he was acquitted and returned triumphantly to the bench.

Chase was a sorry hero, but constitutional principles are often established in the defense of less than heroic people. Had Chase’s impeachment succeeded,

Federal Revenues and Expenditures, 1790–1810 (in thousands of dollars)

Year	Revenues		Expenditures	
1790	Customs	4,399	Military	634
	Other	19	Interest on public debt	2,349
		<u>4,418</u>	Other	<u>1,426</u>
			4,409	
1800	Customs	9,081	Military	6,010
	Internal revenue	809	Interest on public debt	3,375
	Other	793	Other	1,466
		<u>10,683</u>		<u>10,851</u>
1810	Customs	8,583	Military	3,948
	Internal revenue	7	Interest on public debt	2,845
	Sale of public lands	697	Other	<u>1,447</u>
	Other	793		8,240
		<u>10,080</u>		

Note: In constant dollars, the estimated revenue of the federal government in 2001 was \$2,136 trillion and its estimated expenditures were \$1,856 trillion.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2001*.

Chief Justice Marshall would almost certainly have been next, and that would have precipitated a constitutional crisis. Sensing the danger, the Jeffersonians pulled back, content to allow time and attrition to cleanse the courts of Federalist control. The vital principle of judicial independence had been narrowly preserved.

Dismantling the Federalist War Program

The Jeffersonians quickly moved to dismantle the Federalists' war program. They ended prosecution of newspaper editors under the Sedition Act, freed its victims, and in 1802 let it lapse. While several Federalist editors felt the government's displeasure, the Jeffersonians never duplicated the Federalists' attempts to stifle political dissent. As a consequence, freedom of the press, among the bedrock principles of American liberty, was solidly affirmed. "Error of opinion may be tolerated," Jefferson explained in his first inaugural address, "where reason is left free to combat it." This was especially important at a time when the press was becoming an essential vehicle of democratic politics. In the years ahead the American people would often struggle to reaffirm that freedom.

Jefferson also undercut the Alien Acts by dismantling the hated inspection system. In 1802, Congress restored the requirement of 5 rather than 14 years of residence before a foreigner could become a citizen. The Federalists' provisional army was also quickly disbanded; no longer would federal troops intimidate American citizens.

Jefferson was determined as well to reduce the size of the federal government, even though it had fewer than 3,000 civilian employees, only 300 of them, including the cabinet and Congress, in Washington. (That amounted to 1 federal official for every 1,914 citizens, compared with 1 for approximately every 68 citizens today.) The "principal care of our persons and property," Jefferson declared, should be left to the states because they were more closely attuned to the needs of the people and could be held more closely accountable. The federal government should do little more than oversee foreign policy, deliver the mail, deal with Native Americans on federal land, and administer the public domain. Though the Jeffersonian Republicans may not have "revolutionized" the government as they claimed, they pointed it in a new direction.

BUILDING AN AGRARIAN NATION

The Jeffersonian Republicans did more than reverse Federalist initiatives, for they were determined to implement their own vision of an expanding, agrarian nation. That vision was mixed and inconsistent, because the Jeffersonian Party was made up of conflicting groups, as American political parties have always been. Among them were southern planters, like Jefferson himself, determined to maintain a slavery-based agrarian order; lower- and middle-class southerners committed to black servitude but ardent proponents of political equality



among whites; northern artisans harboring an aversion to slavery, though rarely a commitment to racial equality, and a fierce dedication to honest toil and their own economic interests; western farmers devoted to self-sufficiency on the land; and northern intellectuals committed to political democracy. In time, this diversity would splinter the Jeffersonian coalition. For the moment, however, these groups found unity not only in their common Federalist enemies, but also in a set of broadly shared principles that guided government policy through Jefferson's two administrations (1801–1809).

The Jeffersonian Vision

Political liberty, the Jeffersonians believed, could survive only under conditions of broad economic and social equality. Their strategy centered on the independent yeoman farmer—self-reliant, industrious, and concerned for the public good. Such qualities were deemed essential to democratic citizenship.

The Jeffersonian vision was clouded, however, because industriousness generated wealth, wealth bred social inequality, and inequality threatened to destroy the very foundation of a democratic society. The solution to that dilemma lay in rapid territorial expansion that would provide land for the nation's citizen farmers, draw restless people out of crowded eastern cities, preserve the social equality that democratic liberty required, and delay, perhaps even prevent, the cyclical process of political growth, maturity, and decay that had been the fate of past nations.

Calls for expanding white settlement were strengthened by the somber writings of an English clergyman and political economist named Thomas Malthus, who in 1798 published an essay that jolted Europeans and Americans alike. Observing the increasingly crowded conditions of his native England, Malthus argued that “the power of population” was “greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.” Hopes for a steadily improving quality of life, he warned, were a delusion, for the future would be filled with increasing misery as population outran the supply of food.

Jefferson took Malthus's warnings seriously but believed that the Englishman failed to understand that the United States' vast reservoir of land would enable it to escape Europe's fate. In Europe, Jefferson explained, “the quantity of food is fixed . . . [while] supernumerary births add . . . to mortality.” In America, however,

the immense extent of uncultivated, fertile lands would support families of any size. Food could increase geometrically with births. Territorial expansion was thus indispensable to the Jeffersonian vision of the nation's future.

There were other reasons for promoting expansion. Occupation of the West would secure the nation's borders against lingering threats from Britain, France, and Spain. Finally, the Jeffersonians calculated that newly created western states would strengthen their political control and ensure the Federalists' demise.

Time would reveal that the United States' ability to avoid Europe's woes by continental expansion, a basic tenet of American exceptionalism, was more limited than Jefferson imagined. Yet from the perspective of the early nineteenth century, the Jeffersonians offered a compelling and hopeful vision of the nation's future.

The Windfall Louisiana Purchase

The goal of securing agrarian democracy by territorial expansion explains Jefferson's most dramatic accomplishment, the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. It nearly doubled the nation's size.

In 1800, Spain ceded the vast trans-Mississippi region called Louisiana to France. Jefferson was disturbed at this evidence that European nations still coveted North American soil. His fears were well grounded, for in October 1802 the Spanish commander at New Orleans, which Spain had retained, closed the Mississippi River to American commerce.



New Orleans In this 1803 panorama by Bochetto de Woiserie, the American eagle extends its wings over New Orleans following the Louisiana Purchase. Why was New Orleans such an important and controversial place? (Bochetto de Woiserie, *A View of New Orleans taken from the Plantation of Marigny, 1803*, Chicago Historical Society, P&S-1932. 0018)

Exploring the Trans-Mississippi West, 1804–1807

During his two administrations, President Jefferson sent several exploring expeditions into the vast Louisiana Territory and beyond. Why did he send them, and what did they accomplish?



Spain's action raised consternation in Washington and the West.

In response, Jefferson instructed Robert Livingston, the American minister to France, to purchase a tract of land on the lower Mississippi that might serve as an American port, thus guaranteeing free transit for American shipping. By the time James Monroe arrived in Paris in April 1803 to assist in the negotiations, the French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte, had decided to sell all of Louisiana. Faced with the threat of renewed war with England, as well as the successful black rebellion against French rule in Haiti, Napoleon feared American designs on Louisiana and knew he could not keep American settlers out. Soon the deal was struck. For \$15 million, the United States obtained nearly 830,000 square miles of new territory.

DOCUMENT
Constitutionality of the Louisiana Purchase (1803)

Federalists reacted with alarm to the news, fearing correctly that the states to be carved from Louisiana would be staunchly Jeffersonian. They worried as well that a rapidly expanding frontier would “decivilize” the nation.

Territorial expansion did not stop with Louisiana. In 1810, American adventurers fomented a revolt in Spanish West Florida and proclaimed an independent republic. Two years later, over vigorous Spanish objections, Congress annexed the region. In the Adams-Onís (or Transcontinental) Treaty of 1819, Spain ceded East Florida. As part of the 1819 agreement, the United States also extended its territorial claims to the Pacific Northwest.

Opening the Trans-Mississippi West

If America's expanding domain was to serve the needs of the agrarian nation, it would have to be explored and prepared for white settlement. In the summer of 1803, Jefferson dispatched an expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the far Northwest, make contact with the Native Americans there, open the fur trade, and bring back scientific information about the area. For nearly two and a half years, the intrepid explorers, assisted by the Shoshone woman Sacagawea,

DOCUMENT
Lewis and Clark Meet the Shoshone (Aug. 17, 1805)



Meriwether Lewis

made their way across thousands of miles of hostile and unmapped terrain—up the Missouri River, through the Rockies via the Bitterroot Valley and Lolo Pass, down the Columbia to the Pacific coast, and back again, finally reemerging at St. Louis in September 1806. Lewis and Clark’s journey, which some have called the greatest wilderness trip ever recorded, fanned people’s interest in the Trans-Mississippi West and demonstrated the feasibility of an overland route to the Pacific.



William Clark

In 1805 and 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike explored the sources of the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota, then undertook an equally bold venture into the Rocky Mountains, where he surveyed the peak that still bears his name. In the following decade, the government established a string of military posts from Fort Snelling, at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, to Fort Smith on the Arkansas. They were intended to secure the nation’s frontier, promote the fur trade, and support white settlement.



The Louisiana Purchase

A FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE NEW NATION

While Jefferson was preoccupied with refashioning the government and extending American territory during his first term of office, his second term was dominated by foreign affairs. As Washington and John Adams had discovered and Jefferson soon learned, the Atlantic world was a dangerous place.

Jeffersonian Principles

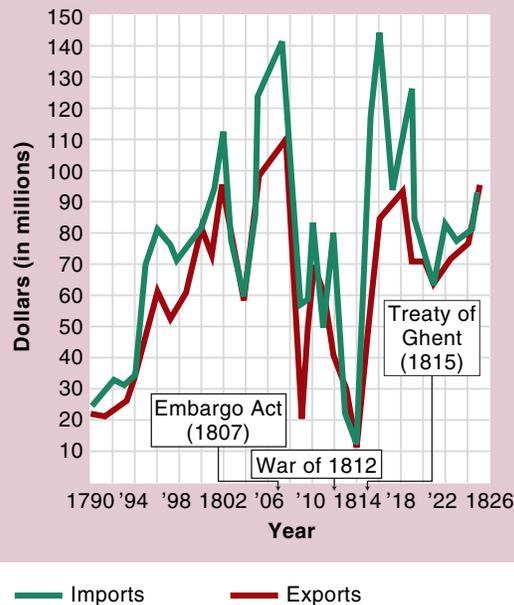
During the early years of the nineteenth century, several goals guided the Jeffersonians’ efforts to fashion a foreign policy appropriate for the expanding, agrarian nation. Chief among them were protecting American interests on the high seas, clearing the Great Lakes region of British troops, and breaking free of the country’s historic dependence on Europe.

Jeffersonian foreign policy was based on the principle of “no entangling alliances” with Europe that Washington had articulated in his Farewell Address of 1796. England remained the principal enemy, but France, now that the revolution had ended in Napoleon Bonaparte’s dictatorial rule, was suspect as well.

Second, Jeffersonians emphasized the importance of overseas commerce for the nation’s well-being. Foreign trade would provide markets for America’s

American Foreign Trade, 1790–1825

American overseas trade fluctuated dramatically as tensions with England and France ebbed and flowed.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

agricultural produce and bring manufactured goods in return. Unlike the Federalists, the Jeffersonians hoped to keep large-scale manufacturing in Europe. They feared the concentrations of wealth and dependent working classes that domestic manufacturing would bring.

Peace was the Jeffersonians’ third goal. War was objectionable not only because people were killed and property destroyed, but also because it endangered liberty by inflaming politics, stifling free speech, swelling the public debt, and expanding governmental power. Jeffersonians understood the dangers lurking throughout the Atlantic world and knew that protecting the nation’s interests might require force. Between 1801 and 1805, Jefferson dispatched naval vessels to defend U.S. commerce against the Barbary States (Algiers, Morocco, Tripoli, and Tunis) in the Mediterranean Sea. War, however, was to be a policy of last resort.

Struggling for Neutral Rights

After a brief interlude of peace, European war resumed in 1803. Once again Britain and France seized American shipping. Britain’s naval superiority made its attacks especially serious. Its continuing refusal to

stop impressment, vacate its posts south of the Great Lakes, and reopen the West Indies to American trade heightened Anglo-American tension.

In response to British seizures of U.S. shipping, Congress passed the Non-Importation Act in April 1806, banning British imports that could be produced domestically or acquired elsewhere. A month later, Britain blockaded the European coast. In retaliation, Napoleon forbade all commerce with the British Isles.

Tension between Britain and the United States reached the breaking point in June 1807, when the British warship *Leopard* stopped the American frigate *Chesapeake* off the Virginia coast and demanded that four crew members be handed over as British deserters. When the American commander refused, protesting that the sailors were U.S. citizens, the *Leopard* opened fire, killing 3 men and wounding 18. After the *Chesapeake* limped back into port with the story, cries of outrage rang across the land.

Knowing that the United States was not prepared to confront Britain, Jefferson proposed withdrawing American ships from the Atlantic. In December 1807, Congress passed the Embargo Act, forbidding American vessels from sailing for foreign ports. The embargo was one of Jefferson's most ill-fated decisions.

The embargo had relatively little effect on Britain, since British shipping profited from the withdrawal of American competition and British merchants found new sources of agricultural produce in Latin

America. The embargo's impact at home, however, was far-reaching. U.S. exports plummeted 80 percent in a year, while imports dropped by more than half. New England was hardest hit. In ports such as Boston and Providence, ships lay idle and thousands of workers were unemployed as depression settled in.

Up and down the coast, communities openly violated the embargo. As attempts to police it failed, English goods were smuggled in across the Canadian border. Throughout the Federalist Northeast, bitterness threatened to escalate into open rebellion. When federal officials declared martial law and sent in troops in an effort to control the situation near Lake Champlain in upstate New York, local citizens fired on U.S. revenue boats and recaptured confiscated goods.

In language reminiscent of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Connecticut's Federalist governor declared that states were duty-bound "to interpose their protecting shield" between the liberties of the people and oppressive acts of the general government. Faced with the embargo's ineffectiveness abroad and disastrous political consequences at home, Congress repealed the measure in 1809.

As Jefferson's presidency ended, officials found themselves in a quandary. How could American rights on the high seas be protected and the country's honor upheld without being drawn into a European war and without further inflaming American politics? The nation would continue to struggle with that dilemma in the years immediately ahead.



British Impressment, 1812



The Embargo Stifles American Commerce The tranquility of Crowninshield Wharf in Salem, Massachusetts, reveals ships idled and docks emptied by Jefferson's embargo. (George Ropes, Crowninshield's Wharf, 1806. Photograph courtesy Peabody Essex Museum, [M3459])

TIMELINE

1789	George Washington inaugurated as first president Outbreak of the French Revolution	1798–1800	Undeclared naval war with France
1790	Slave trade outlawed in all states except Georgia and South Carolina Hamilton's "Reports on the Public Credit"	1799	Trials of David Brown and Luther Baldwin
1791	Bill of Rights ratified Whiskey Tax and national bank established Hamilton's "Report on Manufactures"	1800	Capital moves to Washington
1792	Washington re-elected	1801	Jefferson elected president Judiciary Act New Land Act
1793	Outbreak of war in Europe Washington's Neutrality Proclamation Jefferson resigns from cabinet Controversy over Citizen Genêt's visit	1802	Judiciary Act repealed
1794	Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania	1803	Louisiana Purchase Napoleonic wars resume
1795	Controversy over Jay's Treaty with England	1803–1806	Lewis and Clark expedition
1796	Washington's Farewell Address John Adams elected president	1804	Jefferson reelected
1797	XYZ Affair in France	1805–1807	Pike explores the West
1798	Naturalization Act Alien and Sedition Acts Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions	1806	Non-Importation Act
		1807	Embargo Act <i>Chesapeake–Leopard</i> Affair Congress prohibits slave trade

Conclusion

A Period of Trial and Transition

The decade of the 1790s was a time of continuing political crisis. Scarcely had the new government been formed than divisions appeared, initially among political leaders at the capital, but increasingly among the people at large. Hamilton's domestic policies generated the initial conflict. It was the French Revolution, European war, Jay's Treaty, and the Federalist war program, however, that galvanized political energies and set Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans so adamantly against each other. Countless citizens such as David Brown were caught up in the confusion. The Haitian rebellion together with other democratic insurgencies in Ireland, Europe, and the Americas further inflamed the country's politics.

In control of the federal government following the election of 1800, the Jeffersonians labored to set it on

a more democratic course. At home, they fashioned domestic policies designed to redirect authority to the states and promote the country's agrarian expansion. Abroad they attempted, with more ambiguous results and at considerable political cost, to protect American rights in a hostile Atlantic world while avoiding European entanglements.

By the time Thomas Jefferson left the presidency and James Madison took office in 1809, politics at the seat of national government and in the states had drawn more closely together, as leaders perfected the techniques of democratic politics, utilizing a highly partisan press and organizing political parties better skilled in managing the expanding (white, male) electorate. These transitions, emerging in the midst of deep-seated controversy, would soon alter the very character of American political life.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Identify three foreign policy crises of the years 1790–1809, and explain why each was so controversial.
2. How did Federalists and Jeffersonians differ in their political principles? In the kind of economy they wished the nation to have?
3. Disputes over the proper balance of authority between the national government and the states have been a recurring theme of American history from 1790 to our own time. Why did the issue generate such controversy during the period covered in this chapter?
4. Tension between the demands of national security and the protection of citizens' basic rights has been another recurrent theme of our history. Why did that tension become so severe during the 1790s?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Adapted from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's prize-winning book, the docudrama *A Midwife's Tale* (1997) depicts the daily life of nurse-midwife Martha Ballard, who delivered a thousand babies and served her New England community during the closing years of the eighteenth century. The initial installment of C-SPAN's *American Presidents: Life Portraits* series (1999) effectively portrays the challenges and accomplishments of the nation's first president,

George Washington. In the novel *Fever* (1996), John Weidman offers a vivid account of the yellow fever plague that killed thousands of people and threatened social chaos in Philadelphia in 1793. The essayist and novelist Gore Vidal explores the tangled politics and personalities of the early republic via a largely sympathetic portrayal of Aaron Burr (who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804) in *Burr: A Novel* (1973).

Discovering U.S. History Online

Birth of the Nation: The First Federal Congress 1789–1791

www.gwu.edu/~ffcp/

This online exhibit “provides an overview of the work of and issues faced by this seminal Congress.”

The Bradford House—Whiskey Rebellion—Whiskey Insurrection

www.bradfordhouse.org

David Bradford was a prominent figure in the “Whiskey Insurrection.” His home has been restored as a museum; its Web site includes a description of the rebellion, its causes, Bradford's role, and the end results.

George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens

www.mountvernon.org

Pictures and documents from Mount Vernon, the home of the first president, George Washington.

The Papers of George Washington

<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu>

This richly illustrated site is the online home of George Washington's papers and includes the text of many of the documents, maps, images, and articles about Washington and his time.

The French Revolution

www.woodberry.org/acad/hist/FRWEB

This well-organized site provides an illustrated introduction to the French Revolution, its events, and its people.

John Adams

www.whitehouse.gov/WH/glimpse/presidents/html/ja2.html

This site contains biographical information about the second president and links to his inaugural address, his more quotable phrases, and information about his wife, Abigail.

The Haitian Revolution of 1791–1803

www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/revolution/revolution1.htm

This site presents a four-part historical essay on the Haitian Revolution and its significance.

Benjamin Rush, Yellow Fever, and the Birth of Modern Medicine

www.geocities.com/bobarnebeck/fever1793.html

An “online book with companion essays and primary documents,” this site offers details on issues of disease and public health in Philadelphia during the 1790s.

Learning About the Senate: Series of Historical Minutes, 1790–1850

www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/b_three_sections_with_teasers/essays.htm

This government site details some of the key issues facing the Senate including Jay’s Treaty, complaints from early constituents, and confirming Supreme Court justices.

The Alien and Sedition Acts

www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/alsedact.htm

The full text of these acts is available on this site.

Nullification Issues

www.jmu.edu/madison/nullification

This illustrated site presents the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, how James Madison responded to them, a letter from Andrew Jackson, and the Senate debate.

Building the Capitol for a New Nation

www.loc.gov/exhibits/us.capitol/s0.html

Compiled from holdings in the Library of Congress, this site contains detailed information on the design and early construction of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

Thomas Jefferson

www.ipl.org/div/potus/tjefferson.html

This site contains basic factual data about Jefferson’s election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

The Louisiana Purchase Exhibit

www.sec.state.la.us/purchase/purchase-index.htm

A colorful, illustrated presentation of the details of the Louisiana Purchase, the negotiations, documents, and a series of historical maps.

Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive

www.etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/

This site is the virtual home for numerous resources about Jefferson and his times.

Monticello: The Home of Thomas Jefferson

www.monticello.org

This site explores Jefferson’s ideas through an examination of Monticello, Jefferson’s unique home.

Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery

www.pbs.org/lewisandclark

This is a companion site to Ken Burns’s film, containing a timeline of the expedition, a collection of related links, a bibliography, and more than 800 minutes of unedited, full-length RealPlayer interviews with seven experts featured in the film.

British-American Diplomacy, 1782–1863

www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/brtreaty.htm

An online archive of important treaties and conventions between England and the United States.

Napoleonic War Series

www.wtj.com/wars/napoleonic

Exploration of this site gives context to America’s relations with Europe during the early part of the nineteenth century.

Birth of the Navy, Prelude to the War of 1812

www.mariner.org/usnavy/08/08a.htm

This illustrated chapter of the online book includes “Impressment of American Soldiers,” “The *Chesapeake* Affair of 1807,” “American Reaction to the *Chesapeake* Affair,” and “Entanglement in World Affairs,” as well as the text of original documents.

War of 1812

www.city-net.com/~markd/roots/history/us_war_of_1812.htm

A brief essay covering the foreign conflicts in the period leading up to the War of 1812.