THE FEDERALIST EMPIRE: INSECURITY AND EXPANSION IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC, 1793 - 1800

by

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Preface

Writing a dissertation is a long process and now, as I complete it, it amazes me to think how far I have come, and more remarkably, all the people that helped to get me here. Much like life, obtaining your Ph.D. is a team sport (whether you like to admit it or not). Looking back, I realize that I lucked out; at each step of the way, I met a group of people that pushed me to better myself and to challenge my preconceptions about American history.

Seven years ago, I arrived on the campus of TCU, fresh out of troop command, having spent eight years in the Army, and had no idea what I was doing. My first thanks is to Todd Kerstetter, then head of the department’s graduate program, who helped orient me towards graduate life and expectations…and who loved to rap with me about live music. I benefitted from a group of amazing professors my two years on campus, all very gracious with their time and their candor: Susan Ramirez, Rebecca Sharpless, Ken Stevens, Peter Szok, Steve Woodworth, and Peter Worthing. The quality and breadth of education I received at TCU rivaled (and excelled) most of peers at West Point and allowed me to jump immediately into teaching.

My fellow student at TCU most have thought I was lost. Older, married, a father, and with a range of life experiences so divorced from theirs, I felt incredibly self-conscious…for no reason. They welcomed me with open arms and proved nothing but inviting. Mike Green, Jamalin Harp, Mitch Klingenberg, Meredith May, and Amanda Milian — we shared countless seminar hours and I’m glad my frustration when someone couldn’t “brief” a book never noticeably rubbed them the wrong way. Special thanks to Keith Altavilla and Joe Stoltz; I benefitted from their friendship at TCU and, later, as they worked at West Point.
Arriving at West Point seemed daunting, as well, but much as at TCU, the atmosphere proved nothing but collegial, industrious, friendly, and welcoming. This starts at the top - Colonel Ty Seidule. His commitment and leadership navigated the department through a series of challenges during my three years at West Point and, suffice to say, it came out strong on the other side. The faculty — both military and civilian — are world class. Special thanks to Jenny Kiesling, Sam Watson, Rob McDonald, Chris Barth, Dave Frey, Ray Hrinko, and Rasheed Hosein for setting and maintaining an intellectual foundation within the department. Within the American Division, I had the pleasure to work with several amazing young scholars that, through their scholarship and teaching, drove me to improve. Key among these are Paul Belmont, Greg Tomlin, Adrienne Harrison, Rory McGovern, and Danny Sjursen. And, although not Americanists, I benefitted greatly from the friendship of Matt Cohen, Jon Heist, and, my officemate, Brett Lea.

Three individuals from my years at West Point deserve special recognition. Robert Goldstein invited me to help plan and execute the USMA Civil Rights Staff Ride, an integrated history and law program that took a small group of cadets throughout the American South to study the history and legacy of the Civil Rights Movement. To date, this effort is the most fulfilling project outside of my family. Greg Daddis, my last boss at West Point, showed me how a historian grapples with big issues and how to ask the right questions that lead to growth — both for students and yourself. Some of my proudest moments at West Point were when he would write down one of my ideas. And my first boss, Colonel Gail Yoshitani, had the hardest job of the three: taking a head strong and opinionated young Major and making him into a teacher and a field grade officer. I have no idea how many headaches I gave her, but the number must have
been sizable. She has never wavered in her support to me, my family, my career, and my scholarship.

After leaving West Point, I benefitted from the mentorship and guidance of several other officers and leaders. At the U.S. Army War College, Steve Kidder, Mike Matheny, and Lieutenant Colonel Mike Shekelton helped me work through how to frame my thoughts about strategy, policy, and the interplay between the two. My BSAP class probably heard more than they ever wanted to know about the politics of the 1790s; special thanks to John Eisberg, Jim Golby, Geoff Heiple, Mark Morrison, Adam Nestor, and Kevin Schiemann. Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster pulled me down to work for him at the U.S. Army’s Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC), and showed me how hard work and stubbornness can lead to success. Colonel Bill Chlebowski, Lieutenant Colonel Andy Sanchez, Major Tony Alvarez, Jim Eaton, and Howard Smith proved an extremely capable team at ARCIC and they supported my work with encouragement (and did not walk away when I talked about my dissertation).

The research for this trip was supported by grants and fellowships from the Omar Bradley Research Fellowship, the Filson Historical Society, the Kentucky Historical Society, and the TCU Graduate Studies Program. Thanks to the researchers and librarians at TCU, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the South Carolina State Archives, the South Carolina Historical Society, the Filson Historical Society, the Kentucky Historical Society, and the Jefferson Library at USMA. Special thanks to Robyn Reid for teaching me how to bring research into the digital age (I did ask her what an E-book was).

Almost two decades ago, Vera Jakoby and Grogan Ullah taught me how to ask questions, search for knowledge, and grow intellectually. Much of the readings and thoughts from my time
studying with them at McDaniel College (nee Western Maryland College) are readily apparent in this present work. My debt to them grows daily.

During my second semester at TCU, Gene Smith told me to study colonial Florida in the bathroom. At the time, I found myself floundering trying to decide upon a thesis topic (I cannot remember why we were talking about this in the bathroom). After ushering me through my thesis defense, he hardly batted an eye when I told him I wanted to write my dissertation on something else entirely. Gene not only managed to help me get to this point, but also to become one of my closest friends. He is a first rate scholar and an example of what professionalism in the field of history looks like.

My family bore the brunt of my dissertation. I have missed birthdays, Spring Breaks, hikes, basketball, reading stories, and video games to get this done. I read portions of my work to Reed and Wyatt and they kindly feigned interest. The plan for after my defense is to make up for lost time. Heather was the engine behind this work from the beginning. On several occasions I came to her to tell her I had no intention of going further — I was missing too much. My defense is testament to her strength more than mine.
Table of Contents

Introduction — “Internal Dissension…Tearing Our Vitals”: Federalists and Political Framing in the Early Republic………………………………………………………………………………………………………1

Chapter 1 — “No Jacobin”: The Fight for America’s Ports and the Public Political Space……31

Chapter 2 — “Come Guillotine, Muse Divine”: The Democratic Societies and Fearing for the Republic……………………………………………………………………………………….…84

Chapter 3 — Fresh Symptoms Every Moment Appear of a Dark Conspiracy”: The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Hardening of the Political Frame……………………………………………………….134

Chapter 4 — “To Delay Relief…Might Render the Blacks Impatient and Unbelieving”: The Search for Stability in the Caribbean…………………………………………………………………………………193

Chapter 5 — “Unprincipled Men and French Partisans”: The Federalists and the Limits of Political Framing………………………………………………………………………………………………………240

Conclusions — “French Spies Swarmed in our Cities and in the Country”: Political Framing and the Transfer of Power………………………………………………………………………………………………………295

Bibliography……………………………………………………………………………………308
Introduction

“Internal Dissension…Tearing our Vitals”: Federalists and Political Framing in the Early Republic

President George Washington took his second oath of office as President of the United States on March 4, 1793, before a gathering of Congressman, cabinet members, foreign representatives, and a few select Philadelphians. Whereas his first inaugural had been announced from the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City, the scene in Philadelphia proved far more dour, a formality rather than a celebration. Having never formally announced his candidacy, Washington had allowed his silence to speak as acquiescence to destiny. Rather than seeing his unanimous electoral victory as a positive mandate on his leadership, the now-second term president viewed the approaching four years as a duty. “I am again called upon by the voice of my country,” he stated, “to execute the functions of Chief Magistrate.” In the shortest inaugural address of any president, Washington closed on a sour note, charging those witnessing his oath-taking with monitoring and judging his performance in a position he had spent months debating whether he would or would not take.¹

The president could count more than enough personal reasons to forego a second term: his friend and neighbor George Mason had passed away during the fall of 1792 and the health of his nephew, George Augustine Washington, had taken a precipitous decline. At the same time, his Mt. Vernon estate seemingly needed a steady hand; his estate manager, Anthony Whiting, had recently contracted tuberculosis.² Politically, it appeared that his experiment with a cabinet


inched towards failure. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson had penned a letter to Washington the preceding summer that eviscerated Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Disapproving of Hamilton’s economic plans, Jefferson accused the treasury secretary of colluding to create a moneyed interest in the country that would ultimately usurp power in the republic and end the four year old political experiment in North America. For his part, Hamilton recounted the personal attacks that Jefferson had levied against him in the newly forming partisan press. These newspaperers had subverted the truth and left the public ill-informed, “render[ing] me and all measures connected with my department as odious as possible.”

The only thing the two secretaries agreed on was how imperative it was that Washington remained for another term. The partisan furor over the path that the still young nation would follow had simmered during the first years of Washington’s term, but rose towards the end to full boil. Establishing a cabinet, a national tour, overseeing the ratification of the Bill of Rights - these events presented few critical issues to an administration still basking in the afterglow of the Constitution's ratification. Hamilton’s economic plans, particularly his proposal to assume and then fund the remaining war debts of the individual states, proved a far different issue. Rancorous to Jefferson, James Madison (then a representative from Virginia), and their like-minded colleagues, Hamilton’s plan created the first significant ideological rupture in the republic. The parties had managed to compromise, though, passing the Assumption Bill after Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison met and agreed that the bill would go forward for vote

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contingent upon the government situating the new national capital in a southern state.\textsuperscript{4} By 1792, however, criticisms of Hamilton’s tariff and bounty proposals had inaugurated a fresh political crisis, one that included accusations of Hamilton’s involvement in an extramarital affair.\textsuperscript{5}

Concurrent to these domestic stresses, word slowly reached the United States about the radical turn of the French Revolution. The Marquis de Lafayette, the French officer that became like a son to Washington during the War of Independence, had fallen from a position of prominence during the autumn of 1792, marking a radical shift in the tumultuous politics of the Paris courts and streets. By the end of the year, thousands would be killed, including the King and Queen in a public regicide that made it appear anarchy reigned in the most liberal of European monarchies. The president voiced a near-visceral reaction to the news, claiming that his demeanor had grown “gloomy” after studying the “disagreeable” news.\textsuperscript{6}

Like it or not, Washington believed that his young nation had reached a critical inflection point. “How unfortunate,” the president wrote to Jefferson during that fateful autumn of 1792, “whilst we are encompassed on all sides with avowed enemies and insidious friends, that internal dissensions should be harrowing and tearing our vitals.”\textsuperscript{7} The United States, beset by cunning Old World nations struggling in a world turned mad, faced internal challenges that equaled, and possibly outstripped, the anarchy across the Atlantic. Partisanship, so intellectually

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} For a concise treatment of Hamiltonianism and the Washington Presidency, see Forrest McDonald, \textit{The Presidency of George Washington} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), 67 - 88.
\item \textsuperscript{7} George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, August 23, 1793, in \textit{PTJ}, vol. 24, 317.
\end{itemize}
anathema to the drafters of the Constitution, now gripped the nation. These ideological divisions increasingly spilled out into the streets, fanned by an eager political press that sought to build a public political space for the contest of ideas. The rising factionalism and matching public vitriol shocked many observers that had believed in the sanctity of “republican virtue” a few short years before. 

Thus, having opposed a second term during the summer and early autumn of 1792, Washington increasingly grew silent on the subject. By the election, it had become a foregone conclusion; even amidst an unanticipated, but ultimately unsuccessful, challenge to John Adams’ vice presidency, the electors unanimously declared their support for Washington. At less than one hundred and fifty words, the inaugural address recognized the election’s result as point of fact, offering no guiding principles or words of encouragement for the next four years. This was duty, Washington must have believed, a duty to something bigger than himself and his personal desires. The fate of the republic, harried from within and without, rested in his second term. Little time existed to mince words.

Others joined Washington in his fears. Hamilton, Adams, then-Secretary of War Henry Knox, soon-to-be-rank and file members of the still-forming Federalist Party, like-minded partisan newspaper editors - all soon shared the president’s views on the fragility of the republic in relation to external threats seeking to subvert the new nation’s own political and cultural values. In a series of printed opinion piece lambasting Jefferson’s support to an anti-administration newspaper, Hamilton drew clear linkages between the recent upsurge in public

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8 The Republicanism theory will be discussed further later; presently, see Elkins and McKitrick, 3-29 and 263 - 270; and Gordon S. Wood, Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789 - 1815 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 140 - 173.

unity to the Washington presidency and the partisan media’s effort to “disturb the public peace, and corrupt the morals of the people.” 10 This fear of subversion increasingly animated the Federalist’s view of ongoing events, serving as a frame in which to place the disparate and chaotic events then transpiring on both sides of the revolutionary Atlantic. Understanding the Federalists - their beliefs, fears, rationalizations, and causes — allow us to better examine their legacy and place the politics of the early republic within a continuity that links the Constitution's ratification to Jefferson’s “Revolution of 1800” and beyond.

This work argues that, from 1793 onward, the Federalist Party, an increasingly less-amorphous conglomeration of like-minded partisan thinkers, editors, and politicians, developed a political ideology that viewed partisan opposition and democratic tumult as threats to the legitimacy and the sanctity of the United States. This ideological frame allowed the party to rationalize new events and place them on a causality timeline. And this frame existed above the domestic partisan infighting - Hamilton vs. Jefferson, Federalist vs. Republican - that many historians use as their narrative foil. Instead, it saw an overarching intersectionality between the anarchy of the French Revolution and Europe’s conservative response and the development of an anti-administration opposition and its effort to politicize both the media and the streets — referred to here as the “public political space.” In accord with this ideology and the increasing evidence that they managed to conveniently place within this existing frame, Federalists responded to perceived tests of American legitimacy, foreign and domestic, in the same manner: an increased reliance on military action, a matching move to dominate the public political space, and a shift towards zero-sum policy battles. Unwittingly, these responses confirmed an ongoing

parallel political framing for the Republicans, one based on the notions of individual liberty and civic engagement. By 1800, the relationship between the two now-formed parties was not amenable to compromise nor coexistence; the “revolution of 1800” was a victory over a vanquished foe and a rhetorical redefinition of the relationship between the government and its citizenry.11

This view breaks with many of the significant historiographical threads that run through our conception of the early republic’s political battles. The 1960s witnessed the founding of the two dominant historiographical tropes used to define 1790s Federalists: Baiyln and Wood’s Republicanism Thesis and Fischer’s Pre-Modern thesis. While the work of these historians reached outside the chronological demarcation of the Federalist Era and specifically, the 1790s, their perceptions of the continuity of American history swallowed the early Federalist Party and left them as agents within a larger historical trend. In the process, these theses gave increased historical importance to Jefferson, Madison, and the “Revolution of 1800” that the electoral defeat of Adams, Hamilton, and the Federalists came to symbolize.

The 1967 publication of Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* signaled a clear paradigm shift in the historiographical interpretation of early American history. Breaking from the consensus historiography of the post-war era, Baiyln argued that the rhetoric of the American revolution exhibited a mix of Enlightenment thought and the literature and the ideas of the radical English opposition, or “country party,” of the Eighteenth century. This new ideology of “republicanism” focussed on disinterested civic virtue and republican government and formed to counter the corrupted “court party” of the English King and his ministers. The key was to hold virtuous men responsible for the workings of the

government through a system of power sharing so that corruption of the entire system could be avoided. Shortly thereafter, Bailyn’s protege Gordon S. Wood chronologically extended the notion of republicanism through the period of the Confederation and into the Ratification era. For him, the drafting of the U.S. Constitution reflected the pinnacle of republican thought. Wood emphasized the founders’ aversion to the notion of party and partisan infighting and how it appeared completely misaligned with republican thinking about disinterested civic virtue and the attempts to subvert corruption.¹²

Lance Banning was the first scholar to frame the partisan conflict of the 1790s as the continued legacy of the republican ideology that defined the revolution and the ratification debates. For him, the ideology of Jefferson’s Republican Party showed clear linkages to the above antecedents. As he argued,

Developed very early, the ideology required a strict construction of the Constitution and helped to keep party conflict within bounds. And yet it also taught that liberty and all fruits of Revolution were endangered by a scheme to undermine the Constitution and subvert the social structure on which liberty must rest. This conclusion led Republicans to view the Federalist administrations’ foreign-policy decisions as logical extensions of a plot.

Republican opposition represented a natural corrective to the supposed corruption of the Federalists in power. Banning assumes Bailyn and Wood’s “court” and “country” labels and uses them to identify the Federalists and the Republicans, respectively. In this light, Jefferson’s

victory in 1800 is a revolution; to defeat the ever-expanding power of a malign regime, the Republicans relied on their republican tenets to mobilize the people and ride to power on the first “wave” election in U.S. history.\textsuperscript{13}

In their magisterial work \textit{The Age of Federalism}, Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick advanced the notion of republicanism and a bipolar court/country divide even further. An admirable accounting of the partisanship and machinations of the 1790s, their work does not dive as deep into the ideological well as some of its predecessors. Yet, within the first twenty pages, the two historians propose Banning’s bifurcation as a means to understanding the era and the dynamic forces at play. While not outright stating it, the book intimates that the main purpose of the 1790s and the Federalists within that decade was to behave as a foil to shape Republican opposition in such a manner that their ascension to power in 1800 appeared inevitable. “A central question for this book,” they wrote, “will be that of exactly how the ‘court option’ — the Federalist version of a republican future — was smothered in the 1790s, and the degree to which it smothered itself.” For a book ostensibly about the more than a decade of Federalist administration, the narrative provided marks each step as inching closer to Jefferson’s presidency. Wood, writing several decades later, echoed many of these sentiments. He described the Federalists of the 1790s as seeking order and dubious about the full implementation of republicanism. In fact, he maintained that the Federalists sought the reintroduction of some monarchical qualities back into the republic; the large size of the nation and the wide array of interest would not allow for a general disinterestedness for the federal government. “Thus most

Federalists believed,” he writes, “that whatever aspects of monarchy they hoped to bring back into America would have to be placed within a republican framework.”

Wood would have made a first rate member of the Republican partisan press. His depiction of the Federalists as envious of monarchical prerogative exhibits the clear Jeffersonian bias of much of the purveyors of 1790s republicanism. As James Banner, Jr., noted towards the end of the twentieth century, “When we debate the relative strengths of civic humanism, Lockean Liberalism, Scottish moral philosophy, and Protestantism in early American politics, we debate their relative strengths within the Jeffersonian camp and in Jeffersonian categories. Federalism and the Federalists are missing from the story.” For Banner, this reflects a hindsight relativism that works from 1800 backwards: “since we know how the story turned out, we measure its elements against its conclusion rather than against its procession.” At the same time, the broad brush of republicanism would seem to forego the particulars for the general. Banner finds the court/country bifurcation troublesome for explaining the 1790s, particularly if you acknowledge the still-forming nature of the parties during the majority of the decade. The mere fact that each party faced electoral accountability for tacking too far away from perceived national values weakened the court/country dynamic, adding a third element — the people — into the political mix.

Several explanations exist for the Jeffersonian bias in republican scholarship. As Banner notes, the simple fact that Jefferson and his party won so convincingly in 1800 provided a historical mandate with which to view the period of Federalist governance; their inability to win

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14 Elkins and McKittrick, 18 - 29 (quote 21); and Wood, Empire of Liberty, 53 - 54 (quote 54).

another national election, coupled with their eventual demise, would seem to be another. Later historians have enjoyed assailing the Federalists as “not Jeffersonian,” of which more will we examine later. Henry Adams, the famed Progressive Era historian, described a post-1800 Federalist Party in full opposition to Jeffersonianism with deep aristocratic roots. David Hackett Fischer claimed that much of his description can be traced to a familial bias from the Adams clan that dated back to the “High Federalist” treason against John Adams during the election of 1800.16 Due to the near mythic status of George Washington and the near invisibility of John Adams, historians in the past directed most of this criticism at Alexander Hamilton, the most prolific and, debatably, the most intelligent of 1790s Federalists. Stephen T. Knott recently charted the malleable historic memory the United States has for its first Treasury Secretary. A whipping boy of Gilded Agers, Progressives, and New Dealers alike, Knott argues that, “[Hamilton] has never won the affection of many of his countrymen, in part because of his tendency to insult our democratic sensibilities with alleged impolitic comments about the character of the people.” Only recently has Broadway resuscitated the first Treasury Secretary’s image.17 Jefferson, in contrast, has generally fared well in the nation’s historical imagination; Franklin Roosevelt used his image to balance against Hamilton’s nefarious shadow. Only


recently has Jefferson’s remembrance been tarnished by his vexing sexual relationship with a slave and troublesome ideological relationship to slavery.\textsuperscript{18}

No matter the reason, the bias remains, and as Banner argues, “The consequences for American historiography have been severe.”\textsuperscript{19} The most damning of the Federalists indictments, of being inherently anti-democratic, built off of a branch of the republicanism family tree. Writing in the 1990s, Gordon Wood expanded his earlier vision of republicanism and created a historical dialectic that encompassed the breadth of the early American republic. Progressing from monarchy, through republicanism, to democracy, the political trends of the first American generation led to the broadening of the electorate and the loosening of the socio-political bonds that previously constrained the relationship of the American community to its government. In Wood’s model, much as he would argue later, the Federalist’s feared the turbulence of the transition to democracy and sought to contain its spread by reintroducing certain trappings of monarchy. While he does not go as far in linking the Federalists to certain monarchical proclivities as he would several decades later, he clearly sees the Federalists as a bulwark against the spreading of an egalitarian spirit.\textsuperscript{20}

Elkins and McKitrick, still attempting to appear at least even-handed, echoed Wood’s arguments. They labeled the United States of the early republican era as “The Yeoman’s Republic,” drawing a clear linkage between the state of the nation and Jefferson’s democratic-


\textsuperscript{19} Banner, “The Federalists - Still in Need of Reconsideration,” 248.

leaning ideology. The development of a ranging public opposition to the administration spoke to a “populist impulse, that while not a ‘functional democracy’…took on qualities and proportions…which had not been there before.” Sean Wilentz took these notions further; his epic, *The Rise of American Democracy*, advanced the idea of an inevitable democratic progression emanating from the Revolution and reaching its initial apogee at the Civil War’s conclusion. For Wilentz, “too many Federalists learned too little about what a growing number of citizens now believed were their essential democratic prerogatives.” All three historians frame Federalist ideology as reactionary, a first American response to the appearance of “hyperdemocracy,” the rapid entry and expansion of politics into the public space through media, public displays of partisanship, and protest in the streets. As David Waldstreicher and Jeffrey L. Pasley’s works both point out, the early republic can be defined by the formation of an American public political space that defined what the United States was, its values, and increasingly, the individual’s role within it. This transition created and/or cemented the partisan divide: Federalists feared the changing socio-political landscape and sought to contain or reverse it.²¹

And importantly, historians who shared this mindset quickly point out the concrete mechanisms of “oppression” the Federalists mobilized to combat the tide of democracy. Richard Kohn argued shortly after the formal introduction of the republican thesis that the Federalists

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sought to expand the military to curtail the political restiveness of the public political space. The Federalists, Kohn believed, saw the military establishment as a conservative bulwark against these forces, no better epitomized than in the proposed formation of the Provisional Army during the Quasi-War. Writing before Bailyn, James Morton Smith echoed these sentiments, stating that the political machinations surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts intended to subvert the surviving democratic voice of the people. While his work clearly exhibits the characteristics or a scholarly revolt against the McCarthy Era in which Smith wrote it, it has endured, remaining the only book-length treatment of the politics behind the passage of the laws for over half a century. Writing in 1970, Merrill D. Peterson claimed that the militarization of the republic and the intendant suppression of free speech represented an “American Thermidor, a revolution of the right, a ‘reign of terror,’ not by the Jacobins but against them.” Choosing words that mirrored the supposed aggression of the era, Peterson, having earlier labeled the Federalists of the time and “insane political cult,” writes of how “The Jeffersonian Republicans survived this ordeal but were maimed by it.”

This trope of political violence often conjoins with the other offshoot of the theory of republicanism: the early Federalists as inherently pre-modern. Ironically, much of the foundation for this line of thinking evolved from initial efforts to describe Federalist ideology in the Jeffersonian Era. David Hackett Fischer, James M. Banner, Jr., and Linda Kerber each published works during the late-1960s/early-1970s that sought to define Federalist ideology, favoring the

period where the party sat in opposition to the dominant Jeffersonian administration. In the process of outlining the key tenets of early nineteenth century Federalism - a centralization in New England, a belief in social hierarchy and order, and a stubbornly mercantilist streak — the historians, perhaps unwittingly, set the Federalists of the 1790s as a straw man lacking in ideology and party unity. Fischer, seeking to describe the dynamism of the Federalists of the 1800s, sees the earlier party adherents as “anachronistic” and consumed by the “postures of deference and subordination,” a notion “dealt a killing blow” by the expansion of the egalitarianism of the era. Banner argues a similar point in his To the Hartford Convention. For him, the Federalist’s ideological origins lay in Massachusetts’ socio-economic beginnings, the reaction to egalitarian challenges forming the basis of the party’s thought in the Jeffersonian Era. “[The] changing situation of Massachusetts in the union, the altered arrangement of social forces within the state, and the swiftly moving clash between native and foreign world views” energized a conservative response that became the defining characteristic of the Federalist Party. And while this conservatism grew a deep social and cultural element to it that matched its political arguments, it did not happen until after the election of 1800. Prior to that, the Federalists were an inchoate faction lacking thinkers, organization, and motivation.23

As the thinking goes, much of this intellectual vapidity stemmed from a pre-modern understanding of politics. Richard Hofstadter argued in The Idea of a Party System that, during the 1790s, neither party conceived of a “partisan system” that provided a workable solution to national problems. In fact, the crises of the 1790s reflected an intense polarization based on the

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assumption that party formation corrupted the political processes of the United States. Both partisan elements, however, found themselves in a political game of “chicken”: to claim that parties fouled the entire governmental system and that your bloc would not form one risked alienation and eventual electoral defeat. James Rogers Sharp agrees with Hofstadter’s characterization; he notes that the real issues of the 1790s was one of ideological shifts and not practical visions of governance. “The Americans in the 1790s may have shared a basic consensus [about the future of the republic],” he writes, “but they failed to realize that they shared a consensus.” The Republicans realized the dynamics of this new partisan contest first, though, and marshaled a nascent electoral organization that led to a successful bid for governmental control in 1800. In essence, they realized political modernity quicker.24

This pre-modern mindset extended beyond just the social and political, some historians claim. Joyce Appleby and, to a lesser extent Drew R. McCoy, state that the Federalists wed themselves to an antiquated economic system based on the central role of elites in maintaining social, political, and economic order. They did not account for the commercial dynamism of the early republic; changing socio-economic realities rapidly altered the class positions of individuals within American society. As Appleby notes,

The Jeffersonians coalesced around a set of ideas — radical notions about how society should be reorganized. These ideas were propagated less by a class of men — than by a kind of man — men attracted by certain beliefs. Their common vision about the reform of politics and the liberation of human spirit made a national democratic party in the 1790s because that vision alone had the power to hold together otherwise disparate individuals and groups.

The full incorporation of the United States into a burgeoning capitalist world system fostered a need for a new political framework that assessed the socio-economic fluidity of individuals. The Federalists, set upon flowing power upward to elites, provided no concept of such mobility to the American people.25

The historiographical image of Federalists as a pre-modern, anti-democratic faction dominates the current perception of actors during the republic’s first decade. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg pushed back against this idea, noting during the late 1990s that the Federalists proved adept at contesting the public political space of the 1790s. Federalist-leaning editors and publishers during the decade launched a steady stream of newspapers and pamphlets that harangued the factions lining up against Washington, Hamilton, and later, Adams. As Pasley notes, the newspaper wars of the 1790s presented a picture of parity more than of Republican preponderance. In fact, the Federalists enjoyed such a wide readership following the publication of the XYZ dispatches that Jefferson himself bemoaned the potential shuttering of several Republican-friendly newspapers. Waldstreicher, in his examination of public celebrations and pronouncements, ably charts the Federalists’ generally successful attempts to create a national image of unity by using the public political space as the means to reinforce a distinctly American consciousness. As he claimed in a later work, the Federalists mobilized a sophisticated media arm during the latter part of the decades; they later decried the Republican electoral victory as

one of style over substance.\textsuperscript{26} In effect, the Federalists adeptly portrayed the nuanced and multi-faceted anti-administration elements within the nation as one subversive element.

And the Federalist’s political expertise regarding the public political space moved beyond the print media. They used the media and public demonstrations to engineer electoral success during both the national elections of 1796 and the mid-term and gubernatorial elections during 1798 and 1799. Jefferson noted the prevalence of a “black cockade fever” following the publication of the XYZ dispatches — the black cockade being a distinctive badge worn in the hats of Adams supporters to contrast to the tricolor worn by those supporting the French Revolution. Writing during the mid-1960s, Alexander De Conde explained that not only did the tricolor disappear from the streets of Quasi-War Philadelphia, but that Federalists marshaled this popular public sentiment to usher in a wave of legislation that they had been seeking for several years — increased funding for the Navy and port defenses, several immigration bills, and eventually the Sedition Act. Not only did these bills prove initially popular, but they preceded Federalist mid-term victories in 1798 and 1799. And as Rogers M. Smith notes, amidst this bevy of electoral and legislative successes, several Federalist thinkers began to outline a criteria for individual American citizenship. While Smith does claim that this new nationalist identity spurred a recalcitrant nativism, the Federalists did take the fist step in identifying citizenship

\textsuperscript{26} Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, “The Paradoxical Legacy of the Federalists,” in Federalists Reconsidered, 8 - 10; Pasley, The Tyranny of the Printers, 79 - 131; and Waldstreicher, In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes, 108 - 173; and “Federalism, the Style of Politics, and the Politics of Style,” in Federalists Reconsidered, 99 - 117. For further discussion of the role of partisan editors and printers, see Keith Arbor, “Benjamin Franklin and Weird Sister: William Cobbett and Federalist Philadelphia’s Fear of Democracy,” in Federalists Reconsidered, 179 - 198.
qualifications, a necessity foisted upon the young nation by British and French impressment. The Jeffersonians grappled with this issue up through the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{27}

Gaining a full appreciation of the Federalist’s partisan machine, while important in rectifying the image of the party as it coped with and adapted to popular electoral politics, manages to swing the ideological pendulum in the opposite direction. Did the Federalists lack an ideological foundation and embrace partisan-style politics purely as a means to maintain power? Accepting this theory negates a wide and deep Federalist corpus that reflected on the conditions of the 1790s. Numerous Federalist politicians, thinkers, and editors saw fit to communicate a political vision of the current age throughout the decade. These writers shared a pseudo-apocalyptic vision, picturing a republic buffeted by the waves of crises across the Atlantic, a pawn of competing powers that sought to exploit the young nation’s republican principles to engender a fifth column intent on subverting the United States. They would most likely have rejected the currently accepted notion that, “politics stops at the water’s edge” or the existence of a natural bifurcation between foreign and domestic policies. For Federalists of the 1790s, the two existed as a whole: foreign powers sought U.S. support in their ongoing European wars and, as such, created political divisions within the country that either would pull the nation into

supporting one side or the other, or weaken the country so that it would not play a role in the conflict.

No more clear example of this exists than George Washington’s Farewell Address. As we will further explore in chapter four, Washington viewed his departure much as he had his deliberations on a second term in 1792. The United States, apparently fractured along hardening political fault lines, had experienced a series of cataclysms that tested the conceptual foundation of the decade-old constitution — a fight over neutrality, the rise of mass political demonstrations, military defeats, a militarized tax revolt, and seemingly perpetual perfidy within his own cabinet. As he and Hamilton collaborated on what he assumed would be his last public statement to the nation, he believed that the legitimacy of the United States was at risk, and as he worked to build a contextual frame to understand the trials of his last term, he very clearly linked them with the machinations of foreign powers, mostly the French, but also the English. His “entangling alliances” spoke not only to those at the formal national level, but also to ideological linkages that the parties, particularly the Jeffersonian Republicans, shared with foreign powers. At a time of national crisis, the nation must bind itself together, not allow portions of itself to turn towards others that saw its constitutional experiment as a means to gain or reinforce global power and prerogative.²⁸

Historians have treated this Federalist vision, here epitomized in Washington’s Farewell Address, as part of an extension of Hofstadter’s “paranoid style in American politics.” In this

view, the creation of “conspiracy theories” attempts to rationalize a conservative response to changing socio-economic and political conditions. In describing this idea, Hofstadter himself admitted that the term “paranoid style” was pejorative and that it had a “greater affinity for bad causes than good.” At the time when he wrote his assessment of conspiracy theories in American politics, Hofstadter compared the still gestating response to the Kennedy Assassination, along with McCarthyism and the advocacy against the fluoridation of public water, to the eighteenth and nineteenth century movements against the Illuminati, the Masonic Order, and Catholicism to illustrate a deep sense of irrationality in American political life. This suspiciousness came from a reaction to the increased class disparity and heterogenous nature of American society that, for Hofstadter, typified the American national experience. This political paranoia ultimately acts as a form of masochistic self-flagellation, he argued, and a political dead end. “We are all sufferers from history,” Hofstadter concluded, “but the paranoid is a double sufferer, since he is afflicted not only by the real world, with the rest of us, but by his fantasies as well.”

Should we consider the Federalist Party as little more than the earliest manifestation of Hofstadter’s “paranoid style?” Many prominent historians of the period have. Wood paints the Federalist response to the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion as an aberrant perception of the real issues at play. Banning notes that the Federalist use of the public political space lacked “a more rational debate and debased the quality of public rhetoric as a whole” while demonstrating the “Federalist contempt for the people.” Elkins and McKitrick see the Federalists as practicing an “ideology of suspicion and resistance, tough and serviceable for purposes of revolution, though less an asset when it came to nation-building.” And Hofstadter, writing after his first description of the

“paranoid style,” describes the Federalists of the late 1790s as little more than “Charges and Countercharges…heated by the European conflict and by mutual suspicions of treasonable foreign loyalties, were to grow and feed upon each other until they culminated in the Alien and Sedition Acts.” Accepting this as an intellectual starting point provides little room for a rational assessment of Federalist thought.30

A full consideration of the Federalist’s and the ideology that motivated their actions requires an initial first step outside the discipline of history and a reckoning with the party’s epistemological foundation. Events transpired throughout the 1790s that individuals perceived in a manner commensurate with their burgeoning party affiliation. And these perceptions transcended interest and geography; as we will see, the growing partisan divide increasingly framed the reaction of individuals to events. The rise of the Democratic Societies, the Whiskey Rebellion, Jay’s Treaty, the French Revolution — these events all came to mean something very different to Federalists and Republicans, and these new identities became the primary indicator to how one or the other would view them.

Much of this had to do with the world-view, or metaphor, that the Federalists used to structure the events that occurred during the 1790s. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson posited in 1979, humans use metaphors to contextualize their lives. This serves multiple functions: it allows one to rationalize seemingly random occurrences into a cogent and explainable framework while also allowing uniquely personal events to be communicated in such a way that allows for external understanding. Starting with several common metaphors (argument as war, life is a gambling game, ideas are food, etc.), Lakoff and Johnson go on to argue that large

“meta-metaphors” structure the actions of groups and allow for common understanding of abstract concepts (love, nationalism, democracy). These metaphors provide language and cultural touchstones with which to describe these concepts, but also constrain our understanding of seeming disparate events. “We live our lives,” the two thinkers wrote, “on the basis of the inferences we derive via metaphor.”

Such thinking aligns with Thomas Kuhn’s ideas about how humans “discover” knowledge and how they contextualize it within pre-existing paradigms, or epistemological frameworks. He argued in his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Resolutions* that individuals contextualize events within the paradigm that currently guides their thinking, no matter how the new knowledge may challenge the existing paradigm. Only when an accumulation of dissenting perception of events finally reaches a critical mass do we then see a “paradigm shift,” a reorientation of how we frame events — past, present, and future. While Kuhn focussed on scientific discoveries, his epistemological theory gained traction in multiple disciplines, notably in how historians viewed the impact of Bailyn’s “Republicanism” theory on the study of the American Revolutionary and Early Republic periods. Bailyn’s work provided a new language and epistemological foundation with which to view the events of the period. More recently, observers have labelled such epistemological framing as “cognitive bias,” the inability to view events outside of an existing paradigm. In his analysis of the intelligence failures leading to the Iraq War, Richards J. Heuer, Jr., explained how cognitive bias and over-powering mindsets prevented a fulsome analysis of the intelligence of Iraq’s supposed (and non-existent) Weapons of Mass Destruction program. Intelligence collection fit into and reinforced existing suppositions.

regarding Iraq’s intentions; no one, in power at least, viewed the data from outside the paradigm.  

In terms of a practical historical application, an interesting first perspective deals with conceptions of disease in American history. Starting in the early 1960s, Charles E. Rosenberg advanced the notion that society viewed disease and epidemics, inherently biological events, in a socio-cultural “frame.” According to Rosenberg, society rationalizes the sudden emergence of a disease by tying its morbidity and mortality to the values and morals that dominate the nation at the time. Early Americans attributed successive cholera outbreaks to sloth, immigrants, and civic decay at different moments in the Nineteenth Century. And developments within the fields of science and health care did little to impact this trend; in Rosenberg’s later years he clearly showed how the United States’ initial reaction to the AIDS epidemic reflected a fear of immigrants, an increased militancy in the “war on drugs,” and a sharp resurgence in political conservatism. Rosenberg clearly outlined the link between an epidemic’s explanatory frame and the actions that society and the government took to manage an outbreak. How an individual viewed the moral and cultural implications of a given pestilence oftentimes was reflected in the political choices they made regarding it. Later historians built on Rosenberg’s work, showing how the socio-cultural framing he described about the emergence of virulent diseases also

explained Americans perceptions towards vaccinations against and the policy responses to just such diseases.\textsuperscript{33}

How does such theoretical notions translate into concrete political realities beyond disease and medicine? Some recent interdisciplinary works analyzing the ideological and cultural foundation of modern conservatism may provide further clues. In his description of a Twenty-first Century “white lower class,” political scientist Charles Murray described four American \textit{founding virtues} — industriousness, honesty, marriage, and religion — and explained how many members of the stratum of American society he described viewed the changes ushered in by rising globalization and deindustrialization as anathema to them. Murray’s new lower class frames all events transpiring within the nation as either aligned or askew with these same founding virtues. Sociologist Arlie Hoschild reached a generally similar conclusion in her immersive study of ultra-conservative Tea Party activists in rural Louisiana. Echoing similar language as Lakoff and Johnson, Hoschild describes how members of the community in which she embedded herself within had created a metaphor of the post-9/11 United States in which select members of the country (minorities, the poor, the educated) figuratively “cut in line” to get ahead of them to the American Dream. Much as with Murray’s founding virtues, this metaphor of undeserved entitlement framed the political feelings, actions, and activism of this group.

Theda Skopol and Vanessa Williamson charted the role these beliefs played in grassroots

political activism in their book, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. In their work, the two political scientists described a similar metaphor of “undeservedeness,” then outlined how such thinking bounded together dissimilar individuals, many of them not politically active before, and motivated them to act.\(^{34}\)

Many political historians have advanced this notion of political “framing,” particularly in reference to the rise of American political conservatism in the last half of the twentieth century. The massive realignment of the citizen-government dynamic brought on by the New Deal and World War II, the anxiety generated by the Cold War, and the social turbulence of the 1960s, led many Americans to affirm a picture (or metaphor) of American life based on individuality and industriousness, capitalism and meritocracy, and values and families. Increasingly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, those events or policies that did not situate well within this socio-cultural frame became politically noxious. Conservative politicians appealed to this frame, placed their opponents without it, and remade the dynamics of American politics for a generation.\(^{35}\)

The current focus on modern political conservatism should not lead one to believe that the present work seeks to characterize the Federalists of the 1790s as proto-conservatives. Far from it; the Federalists existed within period distinct from the present and recent history.


Mentioning the studies do, however, provide an example of ideological framing in American politics, of which most of the current scholarship focuses on modern conservatism. And yet, the Federalists still present a unique case, for as Hofstadter points out, the notion of partisan coexistence remained a foreign concept to the majority of the party throughout the decade. This by no means reinforces the “pre-modern” interpretation of the party, a position described as wanting earlier and that we will revisit later. In fact, the Federalists found themselves doubly cursed: not only did they have to contend with the growth of a partisan style of politics that they viewed as inimical to the health of the republic, they also faced a jarring realignment of the global order and the concomitant international anarchy that it appeared to usher in.

The Federalists viewed these two trends — the growth of partisan opposition within the republic and the growing impact of the unrest created by revolutionary France — and, not having experienced them before in the context of a new nation, began to conceive of them as not only related, but part of a greater whole. The line between domestic and foreign issues blurred and Federalists saw the rise of a political opposition as foreign subversion and a test of American legitimacy. Historians for too long have hand-waved this notion, instead viewing the party’s repeated claims as evidence of partisan politics or delusion. The merits of truth or reality still standing, it is important to understand the cognitive metaphor that the Federalists used to rationalize the disruptions going on about them. For this metaphor formed the foundation of the Federalist Party’s ideology during the 1790s and energized their policy planning during the time period.

Fresh off of his burdensome second inauguration, Washington immediately had to contend with the more violent turn of the French Revolution. In chapter two, we will see how the
arrival of the French Emissary, Citizen Edmond Genêt, galvanized an American public still wrestling with their interpretation of the Constitution and the government-citizen dynamic. Feted throughout the United States, Genêt also actively recruited privateers and filibusters for France, testing American neutrality, and ultimately, the nation’s legitimacy. Washington, Hamilton, Knox, and other Federalists conflated Genêt’s machinations with the growing popular political sentiment, and charged the French emissary publicly with attempting to subvert the republic’s very own principles to draw it into conflict with England.

In chapter three we will plumb the distinctions between the various Democratic Societies that formed in the wake of Genêt’s arrival in America. As expected, each of the Societies proved distinct, but a deeper investigation just shows how deeply their differences ran. Pushing back against the pre-modern label, evidence clearly shows how Federalists and their supporters optimized the print media to dominate the public political space with a message of foreign subversion that they explicitly linked with the formation of the Jeffersonian Republicans. And as more events transpired within and to the United States, they continued to place these events within their metaphorical frame, reinforcing their existing notions. The Whiskey Rebellion, frontier restlessness, the debate’s over Jay’s Treaty — each of these events, to the Federalists, signaled some form of foreign meddling in American affairs. And, as we will outline in chapter four, the Federalists began to view the solution to their myriad problems as inherently of a military nature; the mingling, in their minds, of domestic and foreign affairs seemed to necessitate such actions.

The full animation of Federalist thought and action with their metaphor of foreign subversion came during the Adam’s presidency. Here, clear French provocations led not just to
the need to protect American shipping, but a desire to gain legitimacy and ensure stability outside
the borders of the United States. As we will demonstrate in chapter five, the Federalists sought to
expand American prerogative to the restive Caribbean, concerned that revolutionary Jacobins
would use the islands as a spring board for an attack against the republic. Interestingly enough,
this fear led the Adams administration to make a series of pragmatic choices, most significant of
these the support of an avowed revolutionary ex-slave general in Saint Domingue.

This quest for stability and legitimacy further influenced the domestic environment of the
late 1790s. Reaching a point of acute paranoia, the Federalists sought to ferret out the foreign
scoundrels from within their midst and protect the population from their false anti-administration
pronouncements, all the while attempting to build a national defense apparatus to defend the
nation from an expected Jacobin invasion. Chapter six will chart the development of the Alien
and Sedition Acts and the Provisional Army, showing how each of the associated policies
reflected a desire to protect the nation from a radical foreign menace set to exploit the freedoms
so recently guaranteed in the Bill of Rights to turn the people against the government. They
failed, however, in building a coherent logic for suppressing the freedom of the press, and once
Adams negotiated for peace with France and Hamilton very publicly broke with the executive,
the party’s electoral chances lay in tatters. We will conclude by briefly analyzing the election of
1800, judge its “revolutionary” moniker, and determine just how sharp a policy transition
Jefferson’s victory signaled.

The research that forms the core of this work uncovered no smoking gun, no
communique detailing how the French planned to use the press to agitate the American
population first against Washington, then against Adams. Instead, by looking at the private letters
of prominent Federalists, the public pronouncements of named and pseudonymous Federalists intellectuals, the editorials of pro-administration newspaperers, and the floor debates in Congress for legislation that the Federalists believed would protect the nation, we will see the accelerated generation, from 1793 onward, of an animating idea, a metaphor that Federalists used to define the current state of the world and rationalized the chaos about them. Buffeted at the borders, riven from within, the United States needed unity against a common foe: foreign powers intent on subverting the United States for their cause, be it either radicalism or conservatism. Partisan politics not only threatened this unity, it was a symptom of foreign influence and designs.

The following pages seek neither to pardon the Federalists nor to justify their actions. They clearly infringed upon the stated Constitutional rights of the American people while attempting to build a national security state on a foundation of paranoia. Understanding their thinking, however, provides an interesting case study in how belief, as opposed to truth, can shape ideology and drive political action. Belief, the metaphor used by a group to frame their sociopolitical values and cultural touchstones, exists separate from truth; it interprets truth and finds the means to rationalize it within it's existing cognitive framework. The Federalists believed that the republic was under foreign assault, that French spies worked to turn the American populace out into the streets. When tax resistance in Western Pennsylvania turned violent, Washington and Hamilton did not see it as an episode in democratic expression, but rather as part of a French (or English) plot to cleave the frontier from the nation. When French colonial privateers raided American shipping in the Caribbean, Knox and Stoddert did not see it as isolated French colonies attempting to feed themselves, but rather as the generation of an anti-American radicalism set to invade the United States. And when Republican editors voiced a
stinging critique of the Adams administration, Adams and Harper did not see it as a willful right of the people, but instead as libel propagated by foreigners intent on destroying the United States. To paraphrase comments from a similarly undeclared war in American history, the Federalists believed that to save America’s republican values, the republican values had to be curtailed.
Chapter 1

“No Jacobin”: The Fight for America’s Ports and the Public Political Space

*Le Petit Decmocrate* raised her anchor one humid day during mid-July, 1793, exiting Philadelphia and heading south on the Delaware River, tacking slowly through the river’s widening at Horseshoe Bend. Gaining speed, the French vessel glided past Mud Island, a semi-permanent island that hosted the defunct Fort Mifflin; no American cannons watched over the ship’s movement. By day’s end, the ship most likely had neared the mouth of the Delaware, prepared to enter the bay and sail into the Atlantic Ocean. No ordinary French merchant ship or day-cruiser, *Le Petit Democrat* hunted the New Jersey shoals for game – British ships attempting to escape France’s privateering dragnet.¹ Most consider privateers unique, existing in a foggy realm of legitimacy: half pirate, half business venture. *La Petit Democrat* exemplified this duality, but also much more, for only two months prior, she had been named *Little Sarah*, a British merchantman attempting to leave Philadelphia and return to an England in the throes of a war with revolutionary France. Captured by a French frigate shortly after leaving harbor, *Little Sarah* returned to Philadelphia to embrace upon a marked conversion.

In this regard, the episode with *Little Sarah*, and later *Le Petit Democrat*, came to represent different things to many interested parties. An increasingly vocal political group of supporters, evincing their support for the ideology of republican France, not only saw this as a victory for the beleaguered French navy, but also as a means for the United States to support their former ally. Arming, manning, and provisioning *Le Petit Democrat* in Philadelphia would

allow France to fight back against British ships and, figuratively, aristocracy. American sailors would make up most of the crew of the French privateer, and American arms would help the ship attack unsuspecting vessels.²

The presidential administration of George Washington viewed the ship’s capture, refitting, and departure in a significantly different light. Washington had declared the United States neutral in the European war earlier that spring, but only after an exhausting debate within his cabinet. The discord belied structural issues not only within the cabinet, but also within the American political process. At the same time, the sailing of Le Petit Democrat served to question the legitimacy of the fledgling American republic, both at home and abroad. The French privateer had been armed and manned in Philadelphia in direct contrivance to Washington’s stated policy on neutrality. Not only could the fledgling republic not enforce its own policies within its own port cities, it also appeared vulnerable to foreign subterfuge and chicanery. The nation appeared unable to prevent its own slide into the morass of a European war.³

What many historians often overlook during the Le Petit Democrat episode is the almost complete lack of enforcement options at Washington’s disposal. A combination of funding issues, republican ideology, and political discord had left the United States with a small standing army, charged mainly with securing the frontier against Native Americans. The navy lacked ships; funding disputes had left the navy’s allocated frigates unbuilt. No ready mechanism existed to enforce American prerogative in its own ports, and Congress created no department to

² Elkins and McKitrick, 350 - 352; and Wood, Empire of Liberty, 187.
formally accomplish such a feat throughout most of the decade. The United States could neither project power nor manage the home front. *Le Petit Démocrate*’s departure from Philadelphia inaugurated a pseudo-conflict over American legitimacy, and the battleground was the ports of the United States.4

This conflict dominated 1793, Washington’s first year of his second term. Inaugurated that March, by May, Washington’s political world turned upside down with the arrival of the new French emissary, Citizen Edmund Charles Genêt. Sent to represent the latest manifestation of the French Revolution, Genêt used his position to recruit future filibusters and enlist would-be privateers for France’s new war with the crowns of Europe. The more radical turn in the Revolution that preceded his arrival shocked Washington and his administration. Genêt’s manifestation widened significant cleavages within the cabinet and helped foster the still-being-born two party system within the early republic. Genêt’s mission marks a clear dividing line between what came before — a vague bickering over constitutional limitations — to what followed — full on partisanship and political warfare.5

Genêt and his role in the politics of the United States do not often receive its just due; some may say that Washington’s second term does not either. Granted, both receive attention in histories of the era, but at times seem unconnected. Historian Alexander DeConde best explores “the interaction of foreign policy and domestic politics centering on the French alliance,” devoting a significant amount of pages to Genêt’s mission and internal political debates. He goes

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so far as to argue that, “Genêt terrified the Federalists.” That said, personal conflicts and narrative discussion dominate his coverage. Although he admirably explores the interrelationship between the mission and the creation of the political parties, he does not describe how Genêt’s arrival helped create a strong ideological foundation for the Federalist brain trust. The emissary’s example became a standard to weigh all French and radical machinations and became a boogeyman with which to understand the weakness of the republic.6

Other dominant works focus on the neutrality aspects of Genêt’s mission, perhaps viewing the cabinet deliberations inaugurated by his arrival within the republic as a case study in foreign diplomacy. In this context, Genêt represented a threat to Washington and his administration, not in relation to domestic politics, but on the international stage. Political chasms widened along Anglo and Francophilic lines, Genêt’s maneuvering only exasperating already existing divisions. Washington sought peace (historians John Alexander Carroll and Mary Ashworth Wells call him First in Peace) and Genêt threatened that. Seeking neutrality, Washington’s administration might have erred on the side of Federalism, but had a noble goal in mind. In this light, partisan politics came before Genêt; his presence worsened existing conditions. Historian Richard Hofstadter rightly discusses the primacy of the French Revolution in party creation, but within a holistic narrative of party rejection that he later calls “the quest for unanimity.” While not one for heroes, he does elevate Washington as a somewhat-champion of

the revolutionary “republican” ideal of disinterested government, a notion disallowed by the French Revolution’s perception in the United States.\(^7\)

Such an image of Washington descends from the “indispensable man” narrative that still dominates much of the writing about the first president. Those that ascribe to this view often portray Washington as more symbol than substance, veering towards viewing him as a figurehead rather than an executive agent. His presidency affirmed the ratification of the Constitution and bound the nation together in the crucial period following the professed failure of the Articles of Confederation, while at the same time grounding the nation in the heady memory of the Revolution.\(^8\) Thus, the focus often falls more on Washington’s first term and his tour of the nation and creation of the cabinet, and not as much on his second term and the dissension within it.

Some scholars further extend this narrative, claiming that Washington was truly a figurehead with little impact on the events around him. The true story of his presidency, and the 1790s writ large, entailed the conflict and debate between Hamilton and Jefferson, first in the cabinet and, later, in the larger arena of partisan politics. Washington clearly agreed to his second term under duress and as duty of service to the young republic. His attempts to hold the nation


\(^8\) Chernow’s *Washington* is the best, and most thorough, current biography of Washington. While strides have been made to “mortalize” Washington since the Freeman and Flexner biographies, the recent (and ongoing) publication of his papers has added to the portrait of the “First of Men”…but has little changed the appraisal of him nor his presidency. Freeman made him the integral part of the nation’s founding (Douglass Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 6 vols. (New York: Scribner’s,1948 - 1954); and Carroll and Wells); Ferling paints him as a “dreamer” (*The First of Men*), while Flexner’s condensed one volume history provided us with the term “The Indispensable Man” (*Washington: The Indispensable Man*).
together by “being above party” failed, his inaction in this regard established the two-party system. Some may argue that his hands-off approach allowed the genius of his two dominant cabinet-members to flourish, but again, those that espouse this notion paint Washington as one acted upon, not an actor in his own right. Historian Forrest McDonald voiced this opinion strongly in his work on Washington’s presidency, stating:

George Washington was indispensable, but only for what he was, not for what he did… No one who followed Washington in the presidency could escape the legends that surrounded his tenure in office, but the more perceptive among them shared a secret: Washington had done little in his own right, had often opposed the best measures of his subordinates, and had taken credit for achievements that he had no share in bringing about.9

This chapter will challenge each of these ideas. The Genêt mission proved integral to the formation of a Federalist ideology based on the perceived menace of Jacobin subterfuge that threatened the basis of the fledgling republic. Federalists argued that the presence and actions of the French emissary proved these fears to be no chimeras, but very real possibilities that necessitated defense against. Thus we see the first inklings of future actions: a growing tendency to view military preparedness as the adequate response to heightened insecurity at home and abroad; and a generalized paranoia over “faction,” the amorphous coupling of interested parties that formed in opposition to the administration and their policies. Genêt invigorated and helped give voice to a wave of populist and radical dissent in the United States that challenged the policies and prerogative of the Administration. For Washington, Hamilton, Knox, and several

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like-minded Federalists, little to no divide existed between the then-gestating Republican Party and the designs of a radical Jacobin menace.

In this light, the year 1793 proves crucial to understanding the creation of this new ideology and charting its growth. While the next chapter will examine the rise of radical populism and the Federalist response “in the street” during the decade, this chapter will instead focus on the actions of Washington and the members of his cabinet. This should provide a two-pronged assessment of the creation of Federalist ideology during the early-to mid-1790s: an “official” representation, explored in the present and third chapter, that places executive and cabinet actions within a context of defending against Jacobin-inspired rebellion; and a socio-political aspect that focuses on the creation of common rhetorical tools with which to counter opposition elements politically.

Presently, this chapter will chart the twelve months of this critical year through three general phases. First, early portions of the year belied the divisions simmering within the cabinet. Washington sought to steer the nation, and the cabinet, through a neutral course that would prevent further, and future, divisions. The April 1793 Proclamation of Neutrality exhibits much about Washington’s mindset as he considered the arrival of Genêt and the spreading war in Europe. Genêt’s measures to make the United States a pseudo-base camp for the French only became known over the course of the long hot summer. Washington, increasingly frustrated by the ambassador, political demonstrations, and a critical press, began to turn his administration and his cabinet against Genêt and, by extension, those dissenters within the young nation. In fact, he drew clear connections between the two, creating a foundation for Federalists ideologues that interpreted the events of that summer. Finally, the year closed with Washington outside the
capital, first at Mt. Vernon and then in Germantown, taking a more authoritative approach towards executive power. By year’s end, Jefferson and his perspective had left the cabinet, and Washington embraced a negative view of radicalism within the United States.

“It is the sincere wish of the United States to have nothing to do with political intrigues.” – Spring 1793

On January 21, 1793, the new French government beheaded King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, before more than twenty thousand spectators. Incited by the freshly ensconced Jacobin-leaning government, the crowd roared in heady exaltations as the executioner placed the former king’s head between his legs. Following this spectacle of desecration through innuendo, he then flung the royals’ bodies onto a cart already piled high with corpses, while the crowd rushed forward to dip clothes and scraps of fabric in the king’s blood as it slowly congealed below the guillotine. Vendors would hawk supposed relics from the event on the streets of Paris for weeks to come.

Letters from Paris related these scenes to a shocked and confused United States during the late winter of 1793. This seemingly anarchic turn within the ongoing epic of the French Revolution stymied many on the other side of the Atlantic. The following word that the young French Republic had declared war on the monarchical states of Great Britain and Holland on February 1 created even more concern, for many wondered what the expectation was for the United States in the upcoming conflict. Barley a decade after cementing its own independence,
the young American republic would have to decide what its role would become in the gradually dividing globe.\textsuperscript{10}

Washington’s administration struggled to define American neutrality since learning of Great Britain’s February assumption of war against the French Republic. The cabinet believed firmly in American neutrality but argued over the issue’s finer points. On April 18, 1793, Washington forwarded a series of questions to his cabinet, entitled “Questions on Neutrality and the Alliance with France.” The President worried that the French Republic would look to the United States to abide by the earlier alliance enacted during the American Revolution. Under this treaty, France could request American assistance in the defense of its West Indian interests. Washington knew that the United States was in no position to make war on Great Britain; U.S. mercantile interests had strong ties to British markets. Full acceptance of the French alliance, in Washington’s eyes, could spell the end of the Republic.\textsuperscript{11}

Fortunately for Washington, his cabinet agreed — in principle. The Cabinet met on April 19, and Jefferson decried any formal proclamation of neutrality. He maintained to Madison that, owing to the fact that only Congress possessed the power to declare war, it was also its prerogative to \textit{not} declare war.\textsuperscript{12} The executive could describe a policy of non-interference among the population, but it could not enact a policy of non-aggression. Hamilton and the Secretary of War, Henry Knox, both believed it to be within the purview of the President to declare neutrality since foreign affairs, as per the Constitution, were within his realm of decision-

\textsuperscript{10} Elkins and McKitrick, 303 - 336; DeConde, \textit{Entangling Alliances}, 164 - 203.

\textsuperscript{11} Elkins and McKitrick, 336-341; Flexner, 283-290.

\textsuperscript{12} Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, June 23, 1793, \textit{PTJ} 26, 346; see also Dumas Malone, \textit{Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty} (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1962), 68 - 70.
making. Both also argued that the United States should abandon its old alliance with France, arguing that the royal government with which the United States had negotiated no longer ruled. The Attorney General, the Virginian Edmund Randolph, clung to a middle-of-the-road position, siding with Jefferson on most debate topics, but being swayed by the arguments of Hamilton and Knox and admitting that he needed to “take further time for consideration.” Jefferson abhorred Randolph’s apparent vacillation, not understanding his fellow Virginian’s lack of regional cohesion. Not seeing Randolph’s deliberate and studious consideration of events as a symptom of open-mindedness, Jefferson derided him as a “chameleon” and grew angry when he could not count on him for unequivocal support in the cabinet.13

In the end, Washington formulated his policy along Jeffersonian lines, issuing a Proclamation on April 22 that outlined the American position. The United States would adopt a “conduct friendly and impartial to the belligerent powers.” Washington warned all citizens of the United States that any acts that favored either warring side would result in punishment under the laws of the Republic, and citizens captured abroad in support of either side could not assume protection under the laws of the United States. Even though posterity would record this executive order as the “Neutrality Proclamation,” nowhere within the text is the term “neutrality” used, a key compromise to satisfy Jefferson. The Secretary of State still apparently held significant political clout within both the cabinet and in the mind of the President.14

13 Anas, 118-121; and Elkins and McKitrick, 337-340.

Jefferson succeeded on another issue relating to France’s radicalism and America’s neutrality. On the ancillary issue of meeting with and recognizing the new French government’s representative to the United States, Citizen Edmond Genêt (something favored by Jefferson), Washington agreed. At this point Genêt was already five to six weeks late; a storm had blown his ship off course, forcing it to land in Charleston during the late winter of 1793. Instead of remaining aboard and sailing post-haste to Philadelphia, Genêt dallied in the Southern city, only later making a leisurely overland trip to the nation’s capital. Crowds of well-wishers met him along his route, and many of the nation’s well-connected citizens dined or met with the French emissary as he wound his way north.\(^{15}\)

A series of Hamilton’s like-minded associates updated him on the emissary’s progress throughout the southern United States. South Carolinian William Loughton Smith recollected Genêt’s arrival in Charleston and his pending movement upcountry to Camden. He further commented that, “A gentleman arrived from that place [Camden] this morning [and] tells me they mean to compliment him with a public dinner;” Smith believed this be a “foolish thing.”\(^{16}\)

John Steele updated Hamilton from North Carolina on April 30, barely a week after Smith penned his letter from outside Camden. Referring to Genêt as “the man we are all afraid of,” Steele opined that the minister intended to “laugh us into the war if he can.” Steele’s colleagues in North Carolina feared that Genêt’s arrival, coupled with his abilities to compliment and cajole crowds in the same breath, would pull the nation fully into the war, thus jeopardizing commercial intercourse with England. Only Hamilton, in his role as the Secretary of the Treasury, remained

\(^{15}\) Chernow, 692 - 693; DeConde, *Entangling Alliances*, 200 - 203; Elkins and McKitrick, 335 - 336.

\(^{16}\) William Loughton Smith to Alexander Hamilton, April 24, 1793, *PAH* 15, 341.
as a solid bulwark of neutrality, Steele stated, and he and his fellows owed much to him and his ongoing role within the cabinet.\footnote{John Steele to Alexander Hamilton, April 30, 1793, \textit{PAH} 15, 358-360.}

The arrival of Genêt in the United States energized a small, but growing and definitely boisterous, segment of the population. Starting in Charleston, grassroots political committees welcomed, fed, and toasted Genêt on his route to Philadelphia.\footnote{Philip S. Foner provides several examples of the toasts given Genêt; see Philip S. Foner, ed., \textit{The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790 - 1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions and Toasts} (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 253, 347, and 380. Correspondence to Genêt also litters the accounts of the lumped together Democratic-Republican Societies.} Modern scholars wrestle with how best to categorize these societies, reaching a partial consensus in calling them a “pressure group.”\footnote{Elkins and McKitrick, 451-461. For best overview of the Democratic Societies, see Foner, 3 - 52; and Eugene P. Link, \textit{Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800} (New York: Columbia University, 1942). As we will explore in the next chapter, these works do have their flaws, as does most of the historiography relating to the Democratic Societies.} Generally speaking, they identified with the anti-monarchical principles of the French Revolution, seeing the French struggle as a logical extension of the ferment engendered by the American Revolution. Concurrent to this forward-looking tendency, the societies also looked to the past. The Democratic-Republican Societies, as the disparate groups came to be labeled, perceived authoritarian impositions being made by the rich and the monarchical-minded within the shifting society of the Early Republic. As stated in the “Principles, Articles, and Regulations” of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the “Republican Constitution…being framed and established by the People, it is our duty as good citizens, to support [it].”\footnote{“Principles, Articles, and Regulations, Agreed upon, Drawn, and Adopted, May 30, 1793,” (for the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania), in Foner, 64.}

The Democratic Society of Pennsylvania turned to Philip Freneau and his \textit{National Gazette} for assistance. Turning the pages of the \textit{National Gazette}, one realizes that...
advertisements and international stories composed only a fraction of the paper’s content. As the unofficial journal of the burgeoning anti-administration faction within Philadelphia, the newspaper served as an editorial bulwark from which to launch partisan salvos against the proto-Federalists and Washington’s administration. Freneau officially worked for Jefferson in the State Department as a translator, and unofficially as a mouthpiece for Jeffersonian ideology and criticism. Authors with classical pseudonyms lobbed contentious editorials at the Federalist façade, becoming increasingly personal as the year 1793 progressed. Freneau viewed his job as editor in a manner that modern observers might call “Speaking Truth to Power.” A self-styled representative of democracy and the common-man, he decried monarchical leanings within the government, particularly within Washington’s cabinet. Joining with the interests of the Democratic Society, Freneau published the constitution of the group, agreed upon at the end of May, on the front page of his July 17 issue. At this point, the Democratic Society had forwarded a circular letter that outlined the group’s ideology to the remainder of the state, evinced by the incremental expansion of like-minded societies during 1794, to include groups outside Pennsylvania’s borders.

In his correspondence from 1793, Washington often mentioned these newly engendered groups tangentially, and never positively. He believed it ridiculous that anyone could suppose that the Republic was sliding back towards monarchy. If it ever did, the President “would set his face against it.” He worried about the opposite trend, the blossoming of the Democratic Societies (yet to be formalized), through which “there was more danger of anarchy being

21 National Gazette, July 17, 1793.

22 Link, 3-19.
introduced.” Washington continued this theme in later correspondence, informing fellow Virginian Henry Lee that a body existed within the nation whose “conduct and views… [aim] at nothing short of the subversion of the central government; and that they would do it at the expense of plunging the country into a disastrous war.”

Arriving at the nation’s temporary capital during mid-May, 1793, Genêt had been feted by throngs of the city’s denizens, seeing in him a ready representative of the war for liberty that France currently waged. The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, a precursor of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, published correspondence between the group and Genêt during May, 1793. The Society welcomed Genêt, “the representative of the people of France, on your arrival in this city,” part of a grateful republic “which your generous and gallant Nation contributed to make happy.” Throughout the welcome, later printed in a local Philadelphia paper, the Society explicitly linked the causes of American and French liberty, here embodied in their Society and the minister. “With our best wishes for the perpetual union and freedom of our respective republics,” the welcome closed with “every blessing which can serve the glorious cause on which you are embarked.”

Genêt had received word of the Washington administration’s Proclamation of Neutrality when he reached Richmond, and he decided to change the nature of his trip. Although a representative of the French Republic, Genêt apparently believed that his role included much more flexibility in its pursuance than just a simple focus on the affairs of state. Starting with his

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23 Anas, 124-125.


25 “To Citizen Genêt and his Reply, May, 17, 1793,” in Foner, 55-56.
stay in Charleston, Genêt attempted to raise a force to invade Spanish Louisiana, arm captured British ships, and recruit Americans to man these now-French vessels as privateers for the new republic. Although proclaiming his avowed recognition of American neutrality, Genêt repeatedly disregarded U.S. interests and continued with his militant policies throughout the remainder of the year. The Washington administration had yet to learn of these transgressions by the spring of 1793, though Washington and Jefferson later that May preparing for the minister’s forthcoming presentation to the President.

Genêt, escorted by Jefferson, presented himself to President Washington at his residence in Philadelphia on May 18, 1793. Washington met him, but “not with too much warmth or cordiality,” a decision he made and communicated to Jefferson some weeks before. Genêt, having factored in the administration’s declaration of neutrality, took a markedly different cant than he originally intended. The French government maintained that 1778 mutual defense treaty between the two republics remained in place, making the United States bound to protect France’s Atlantic colonies. But, as Genêt stated, “[W]e do not desire it.” In fact, Genêt stated much the opposite; “We wish you to do nothing but what is for your own good,” he intoned, “and we will do all in our powers to promote it.” He mentioned a new commercial treaty that both parties had indicated they wanted some months prior, then bowed graciously and exited the executive’s manor.


27 Anas, 347.

28 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 19, 1793, PTJ, 26, 61-62.
Jefferson crowed to Madison about what he assumed was a diplomatic coup. “In short,” the secretary wrote, “he offers every thing and asks nothing.” The letter, which opened with a description of the Philadelphia crowds heralding Genêt’s arrival, closed in a similar vein, although acknowledging that agreeing upon a new commercial treaty would prove hard in the currently simmering political environment. Still, he regarded Genêt’s entrance into the capital and meeting with Washington as clear successes. Those that opposed Genêt’s mission sought “to make a part in the confederacy of princes against human liberty” and the growing public outcry against neutrality would surely help steer the administration towards a pro-French policy.29

It is unclear if Genêt’s charisma blinded Jefferson to the symbolism of the meeting, or if he willfully disregarded some of the obvious steps taken by Washington to mold the meeting to express his intent. As stated, he acted professionally cold to Genêt, evincing neither hostility nor hospitality. “I believe it is the sincere wish of the United States to have nothing to do with the Political Intrigues, or the squabbles of European Nations,” he wrote to an English friend a month prior to meeting with Genêt; one imagines that the President struck a similar note with the French emissary.30 More important than words, Washington symbolically decorated the room in which he met Genêt. Paintings of the former French monarchs hung on the wall behind the President, alongside a key from the Bastille forwarded to Washington by Lafayette during the French Revolution’s earliest days. The new regime in Paris had placed the former American general in prison outside of the capital.31 Without saying a word, the President clearly showed his

29 Ibid.

30 George Washington to Earl of Buchan, April 22, 1793, *PGW* 12, 469.

31 Washington never provided a written description of the events of the Genêt meeting, leaving Jefferson’s biased account as the only contemporary rendering. Ferling does the best job relating the incident, see Ferling, *The First of Men*, 432.
allegiance to the former regime in Paris while warning Genêt to not test the nation’s stated neutrality.

This response may have also stemmed from news out of South Carolina that Genêt had raised ships and recruited sailors in Charleston harbor, issuing letters of marque for captains wishing to seize British war ships. This news reached Philadelphia when the English minister to the United States, George Hammond, sought restitution for English ships seized by the privateers outfitted in Charleston. Starting in mid-April, the cabinet dithered over a policy recommendation for several weeks. Unable to formalize a response, Washington called the cabinet together on May 14, exhorting them to craft a unanimous response to these reports that recognized and outlined American neutrality. After meeting on the next two days, the cabinet adjourned unable to reach the consensus the president desired. Each cabinet member agreed to draft a written recommendation for the president to peruse.

The forthcoming memorandums fell along clearly defined ideological lines. Hamilton, in the lengthiest of statements, called the actions “an injury and affront of a very serious kind and that the injury and insult to our government cannot be doubted.” Later, he also charged Genêt’s actions as “a violation of our rights — for which we have a claim to restitution and a right to make war, if it be refused.” Knox thought the actions “improper,” but focused more on punishing those American citizens that enlisted, while Randolph’s response seemed to confound itself with legalistic terms and provided no clear answer. Jefferson replied in complete


33 “Memorandum from Henry Knox,” May 16, 1793, 595; and “Memorandum from Edmund Randolph,” May 17, 1793, 604-605; both in PGW 12.
contempt to British arguments for restitution, claiming that what occurred between British and French ships in international waters mattered not at all to the United States. Falling back on a defense he would increasingly use over the next several months, he argued that seizure of any French privateers “would be an act of force or reprisal which the powers of the Executive are not competent by the constitution.”34 Washington did not immediately betray his own thoughts reference the memorandums, but, in accord with Jefferson’s earlier recommendation, he did keep his meeting with Genêt.

Washington finally acted upon the cabinet’s recommendations on May 24, authorizing Knox to forward a circular to the “several Atlantic states” that explicitly charged them as the heads of their state militias to use force, if needed, to stop the practice of arming privateers in America’s harbors. Jefferson appears to have agreed with this action; he drafted one of the initial letters that Knox forwarded to the governors.35 But Jefferson demurred on another matter: the fortifying of U.S. harbors. In a letter to Virginia governor Henry Lee, he claimed that the President felt that he could not act on this measure. The funding for the fortifications relied on Congress appropriating the funds.36 As May closed, the Washington administration had better defined the intent of its position on neutrality, but had forced its adjudication onto the states and provided little federal assistance. Treasury circulars from that period, while having shifted from the mundane treatments of accounts, only outlined the methods to issue sea letters to ships

34 “Memorandum from Thomas Jefferson,” May 16, 1793, PGW 12, 594.

35 “To Henry Knox, with Proposed Circular to the Governors of the States,” May 21, 1793, PTJ 26, 75.

36 Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 21, 1793, PTJ 26, 76.
explicitly owned by U.S. citizens. As the nation entered June, the ideological battle for American ports, at least in the near term, fell upon the states.

On the same day that the French consul met with president in May, Jefferson noted an impromptu gathering of a multitude of Philadelphians who marched to where Genêt was staying. The crowd presented him with a formal welcome address from the citizens of the city. Although the intention was only to have “a select body of 30” take the address to the French minister, “a vast concourse attended them.” This “populist impulse,” the proclivity for politics “out of doors,” and the advent of Democratic Societies that appeared in structure to resemble either the Jacobins of the French Revolution or the Committees of Correspondence active at the forefront of the American Revolution, all served as symptoms of a change in American politics, centered in Philadelphia. Jefferson offers future readers a window into Washington’s own private view of this changing environment. In an account of a meeting held May 22, the President commented on the changing political landscape. Recent newspaper assaults had cut him to the quick. Providing as an example an editorial from Freneau’s paper, Washington stated that “he despised all their attacks on him personally, but that there had never been an act of government…which that paper had not abused.” As the month closed, an apparently frustrated Washington sought to manage two parallel sequences of events that he, and the Federalist-minded members of his cabinet, believed to be connected: the further machinations of Genêt; and a growing, and vocal, populist dissent that seemed to reach into the president’s own cabinet.

37 “Treasury Department Circular,” May 13, May 14, and May 30, 1793, Circular Letters of the Secretary of the Treasury (hereafter CLT), T Series, RG M735, Reel 2, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

38 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 19, 1793, TJ 26, 61-62.

39 Anas, 124-125.
“The President is not Well” – Summer 1793

“The President is not well,” Jefferson observed during early June. “Little lingering fevers have been hanging about him for a week or ten days, and affected his looks most miserably.” Most striking, Washington was “also affected by the attacks made and kept up on him in the public papers,” Jefferson continued, noting that “I think he feels them more than any person I ever yet met with.” The politics, in- and out-of-doors, was wearing on the President.

Reminiscing about Mt. Vernon provided little solace. The preceding April, the news of the expansion of the European war had brought Washington from Virginia in the middle of the night, and later, during July, Washington hurried home. His overseer had fallen ill to tuberculosis prior to the June harvest, and Washington hoped to organize the remaining work around the plantation. With pressure all about him, Washington increasingly relied on the advice of his cabinet, particularly Jefferson. The President asked for his thoughts on a variety of measures, to include finance, legal matters, and at times, new crops and machines. Any disturbance in this relationship would have far-reaching consequences on the management and course of the American Republic.

This appeared evident in the president’s mounting silence on the privateering issue. Jefferson convened an abridged cabinet meeting on June 1 in response to word that a French warship had brought a British prize into Baltimore. The cabinet decided to tack towards a moderate course, compromising with both Hamilton and Jefferson. In a response written by the

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41 Flexner, 291.

latter, the cabinet stated that all current French privateers were to leave U.S. ports and no further outfitting was to take place. That said, Jefferson claimed that only Congress held the authority to stop the selling of seized British goods in U.S. ports. In a few brief lines, he affirmed the positions of the ideological bookends on his cabinet; he had forbade further privateering in accordance with the Neutrality Proclamation, but foreswore the power to adjudicate the seizures of British ships in American harbors. This statement affirmed the April 22 Neutrality Proclamation, but left some room for interpretation in terms of the selling of prizes. Washington appears to have quietly acceded to this point of view, providing no further policy guidance in the near term. Over the next several months, this exacerbated the ideological battle in America’s port cities.

Genêt spent the summer of 1793 traveling along the eastern seaboard, along the way feted by the ever-growing Democratic Societies. Although Genêt proclaimed his understanding of April’s Neutrality Proclamation, customs officials and state governors along Genêt’s route reported the arming of captured British ships and the avid recruitment of American sailors. By the middle of June, the Cabinet found itself again forced into debating the privateering question. In this instance, Genêt had actually complained to Jefferson, arguing against the seizure of ex-British ships being armed in New York City’s harbor by the state’s governor. A broadside posted in New York actively encouraged American sailors to sign on as French privateers. The cabinet

43 “Cabinet Opinion on French Privateers,” June 1, 1793, PGW 13, 1.
44 DeConde, Entangling Alliances, 275 - 283 for the arrival of the French ships and recounting of the tension they created.
45 Special Manuscripts Collection, New York Public Library; for a photo of the broadside, see Joanne B. Freeman, Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2001), 94.
could only muster a mild reply, again stating that all current French privateers had to immediately leave American ports.46

These discussions did not satisfy Hamilton. In a June 22 letter to Henry Lee, Hamilton voiced his developing fears over the current state of American politics; “I am not without anxiety on the score of what is passing among the people.” He recounted how “open and ardent demonstrations” among the population in favor of Genêt and the French cause continued to force the issue of American neutrality in the international realm. Interestingly enough, Hamilton labeled the French “Anarchists whom it is the interest of all governments to suppress.”47 This represented one of his first overt statements linking France with anarchical radicalism from the secretary. Whereas prior he had disagreed with the radical turn of the French Revolution and clearly identified with the British cause in the ongoing war in Europe, here he took the first steps towards linking concrete policy formulation with the construction of ideological reactionism.

A week later, Hamilton went a step further, publishing the first of a series of essays under the pseudonym “Pacificus” in the administration-friendly Gazette of the United States. While he had assumed a pseudonymic style in the past, most notably during the ratification debates, he had not done so in a while. The first essay, published on June 29, 1793, claimed that the current demonstrations against the President’s neutrality policy were “not very friendly to the constitution.” The public voicing of grievances against the administration represented more than just the normal grumblings of a republican electorate. In fact, Hamilton claimed, these “discussions [demonstrations] cover a design to weakening the confidence of the People in the

46 “Cabinet Opinion on French Privateers,” June 17, 1793, PGW 13, 90-91.

author of the measure.” Later in the month, as he closed his Pacificus series, Hamilton inveighed against the fickle populace that cheered on hearing of the execution of the French king, pointing out that barely a year before they were some of the same ones that graciously thanked the monarch for his support during the American Revolution. As he closed, Hamilton warned the republic to be “upon our guard against foreign attachments…Foreign influence is truly the GRECIAN HORSE to a republic.” Hamilton continued to outline the new ideological position that he began in his letter to Henry Lee. Foreign subterfuge would endanger the republic, subverting the principles and strength of the nation.

The drama surrounding Little Sarah, now renamed Le Petit Democrat, broke during Pacificus’ print run. Genêt oversaw and encouraged the refitting and transformation of Little Sarah in Philadelphia’s harbor. The Cabinet, minus the President, met on July 8 to discuss the issue. The French emissary, when confronted by the facts of Little Sarah conversion, would provide no guarantee that the ship would sail prior to Washington’s return from Mount Vernon, expected within the week. The governor of Pennsylvania, Thomas Mifflin, sought to detain the vessel as it clearly had been outfitted following the President’s June 1 statement. Made aware of the questions surrounding its conversions, Le Petite Democrat sailed just south of the city, weighing anchor at the mouth of the Schuylkill River just north of Mud Island. Mifflin, and later Knox and Hamilton in the July 8 cabinet meeting, advocated for the creation of a small fortification at Mud Island and it's manning by a company of militia. As Jefferson recounted in his the notes from the cabinet meeting, Knox and Hamilton believed that, should the ship sail

48 The Pacificus essays were published from June 29 to July 27, 1793, in seven parts, all in the Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia). The quotes referenced here are “Pacificus No.1,” June 29, 1793, PAH 15, 33-34; and “Pacificus No. 6,” July 17, 1793, PAH 15, 101 and 106.
south on the Delaware River, “military coercion [sic] be employed to arrest and prevent her progress.”  

The vagueness of the June 1 statement allowed Genêt to fight a battle in America’s harbors. Nothing in the Proclamation explicitly denied the French the right to issue letters of marque in American harbors but the cabinet argued, from different ideological perspectives, that the Proclamation’s wording made clear that such actions were not to occur. Now that evidence mounted that Genêt had put such machinations in place in several American ports, the cabinet could not formulate a satisfactory response. In fact, the issue widened the growing ideological gap between Hamilton and Jefferson. At the July 8 cabinet meeting, Jefferson met Hamilton and Knox’s proposal to fortify Mud Island and fire upon *Le Petit Democrat* with dissension, stating that such actions threatened war with France. Jefferson felt confident in Genêt’s promise to hold *Le Petit Democrat* until the President had time to weigh in on the situation. Never mind that Mifflin had attempted to act in accordance with Knox’s May 24 circular; firing upon the ship if it attempted to leave would only lead to a war that the U.S. could not win and behoove the monarchies of Europe.  

Washington returned to Philadelphia on July 11, having fired off a strongly worded letter to Jefferson about *Le Petit Democrat* while en route. After reviewing his correspondence, the President then demanded the cabinet immediately determine if the legal questions relating to neutrality and privateering should be forwarded to the Supreme Court for consultation, to which they agreed. Jefferson again stated that he trusted Genêt and believed him when he said that the


50 *Anas*, 365-371.
ship anchored off Mud Island would remain in place pending the President’s decision. These assurances came to naught; in a surprisingly inarticulate memorandum dated July 26, Jefferson recounted how, at some point in mid-July, he and the French minister met and discussed the issue of arming privateers in American ports. At the close of this meeting, which Jefferson thought was July 16, Genêt indicated that he either ordered or planned to order *Le Petit Democrat* to sea, ostensibly to reconnoiter the route of a small fleet carrying refugees from the fighting in San Domingue. The vagueness of the memorandum is striking, particularly given the eloquence of Jefferson’s past correspondence. The slipping away of *Le Petit Democrat*, directly in contrivance of America’s stated neutrality, appeared in no way vague to President Washington.

The privateer’s departure fresh in mind, and with word coming from Mifflin that he had detained what appeared to be a British ship going through a privateer conversion, Washington issued a series of directives at the end of July. He called the cabinet together on July 29, asking them to consider using customs house officers as a surveillance network to monitor the equipping of privateers in American ports. He conceived of them as reporting to state governors, but left it open-ended, allowing them to notify “other proper Officers,” as well. This step proved necessary to “check this evil in the first stage of its growth.” Washington had not before spoken so stridently against the privateering issue in his correspondence, an indication of his growing frustration. The cabinet agreed; Hamilton began penning exhaustive instructions for his customs officials. The circular, stamped “official” on August 4, empowered the customs officials as never

51 See the series of correspondence on July 11 and 12: George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 211; Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 212 -213; and “Cabinet Opinion on Foreign Vessels and Consulting the Supreme Court,” 214 – 215; all in *PGW* 13.


53 “To the Cabinet,” July 29, 1793, *PGW* 13, 299.
before, making them the primary reporters of any neutrality infractions within U.S. ports, even allowing them to refuse entry of any ships they deemed as infringing upon the Neutrality Proclamation. Hamilton closed the circular, stating that “the president desires me to signify to you his most particular expectation that the instructions contained in this letter will be executed with the greatest vigilance, activity, care, and impartiality.”

Such a move proved genius for the administration. Whereas Jefferson and his like-minded associates could demur against building non-appropriated fortifications in America’s ports, this policy required no extra money. Better yet, enforcement of neutrality still rested with the governors of the states, with the federal customs officials acting as bureaucratic bloodhounds hot on the trail of reported infractions. The administration now had a “weapon” to use in the ongoing battle for control of the republic’s port cities. Although some clarification of issues concerning the policy dogged the treasury department throughout the year, no more significant privateer conversions took place.

Washington took action in another, more personal, way. Two days after giving his instructions to the cabinet, Washington wrote Jefferson and instructed him to bring all the correspondence between the secretary and the French minister for review by the cabinet. While the tone of the letter reflected no enmity — the President invited him over to a “family dinner with the other cabinet ministers – Jefferson decided to tender his resignation that same day, effective in September. In his resignation he never mentioned anything to do with Genêt or the request to bring the letters forward for review. But the timing is striking; Washington had


mentioned to Jefferson several days earlier that this might happen, but the synchronicities of the letters are suspicious. Historians have often downplayed this letter. True, Jefferson had indicated during the first term of Washington’s presidency that he only intended to serve one term. But Washington had cultivated the secretary’s opinions and good will throughout most of the year. And Jefferson had mentioned before his desire to leave, but had never acted upon it. Now, for some reason, he felt the time most opportune to leave public service.

Jefferson, most likely, felt ensnared by his earlier associations with Genêt. The French minister’s luster had worn away by July 7, as was readily evident in a letter from Jefferson to Madison. Genêt was “hotheaded, all imagination, no judgment, passionate, disrespectful and even indecent to the P. [President],” Jefferson raged. Most startling, Genêt threatened “appeals from him to Congress, from them to the people.” Such a move would inevitably force Jefferson into an uncomfortable position. Having supported the minister so far, Jefferson had little room to save face in what appeared to be an upcoming calamity. “If ever it be necessary to lay his [Genêt’s] communications before Congress or the public,” he opined, “they will excite universal indignation.” Resting at home, possibly looking out over the Schuylkill River from his veranda, Jefferson concluded, “He renders my position immensely difficult.”

Washington thought Jefferson’s resignation grave enough to ride out to the house upon the Schuylkill on August 6. The President revealed for the first time “that Colonel Hamilton had three or four weeks ago written to him that, private as well as public reasons had brought him to the determination to retire.” Hamilton looked to leave “at the close of the next session” — roughly the same time that Jefferson planned to tender his resignation. If this news surprised

Jefferson, he gave no evidence of it in his retelling of events. Instead, the two discussed possible replacements and the intentions of Jefferson’s political colleagues. Washington assured Jefferson that he understood the “views of the Republicans were perfectly pure.” But he cautioned Jefferson about the progress of his “machine,” claiming that men may find it impossible “to stop it exactly where they would chuse [sic] or to say where it will stop.” The crowds of Democratic-Republicans massing in the streets and the caustic accounts published within the *National Gazette* rested heavily on Washington’s mind, and he must have doubted anyone else’s ability to guide the new populist impulse within Philadelphia.  

The image of Washington in Jefferson’s account of their August 6 meeting is older and afraid that he is facing abandonment at the most crucial moment in his presidency. Washington begins the conversation with his own “repentance of not having resigned himself, and how much it was increased by seeing that he was to be deserted by those on whose aid he had counted.” The bickering over potential replacements resolved nothing, and Washington appeared to become more truculent as the discussion wore on. Jefferson put his foot down, arguing that to not leave that fall “would be the loss of another year and prejudicial beyond measure.” Washington rose to leave, requesting that Jefferson “would take two or three days to consider whether [Jefferson] could not stay in till the end of another quarter [end of December], for that like a man going to the gallows, he [Washington] was willing to put it off as long as he could.”

Historians often grapple with the issues surrounding Jefferson’s resignation. Some conjecture that it was a power play. The threat of Jefferson’s resignation forced Washington into

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57 *Anas*, 163.

58 Ibid, 161, 165-166.
withholding Genêt’s correspondence from Congress and leaning towards the Secretary’s cautious proposal of diplomatic recall.\textsuperscript{59} Others indicate that Jefferson’s aversion to public life, when combined with the contentious debates of that summer, finally proved enough.\textsuperscript{60} Either way, Jefferson reached a decision on August 10. He decided to stay in the cabinet until the end of the year, but only on the condition that he could “journey home in the autumn” to manage his affairs. On August 11, Jefferson penned a letter to Washington in which he recounted the face-to-face discussion from the day before, hoping “to express in writing what he meant to have said yesterday.”\textsuperscript{61} The President had not misunderstood anything. “I clearly understood you on Saturday,” Washington taciturnly opened his reply, showing that the gruff general still resided within the aging gentleman. “Of what I conceive to be two evils,” Washington “preferred the least — that is — to dispense with your temporary absence in autumn (in order to retain you in office ‘till January) rather than part with you altogether at the close of September.”\textsuperscript{62}

Modern observers can only conjecture whether Washington conceded to any further evils that day. Whereas Jefferson could tell Madison that the President was “inclined” to expose Genêt’s transgressions to the public on August 3 and wanted to call the Congress into session early (against the cabinet’s recommendation), by August 11 the Secretary had swayed Washington to his position. The cabinet would not expose Genêt’s correspondence (or the full scope of his perfidy) to the American people yet, Jefferson would compose an account of events

\textsuperscript{59}Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., \textit{In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1987), 190; and Elkins and McKitrick, 363.

\textsuperscript{60}Carroll and Ashworth, 146-147; Chernow, 711-712.

\textsuperscript{61}Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, August 11, 1793, \textit{PTJ} 26, 659-660.

\textsuperscript{62}George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, August 12, 1793, \textit{PTJ} 26, 660.
for forwarding to the French government (where they would decide on recall, the cabinet hoped), and customs officers would continue enforcing neutrality in the ports. Washington’s hard-line stance softened as the second week of August closed, and noticeably so following Jefferson’s concession to remain in the State Department until the New Year.  

But frustration lurked within the President. In a late-July letter to Henry Lee, Washington admitted “there are in this, as in all other Countries, discontented characters.” While some dissent proved good, he also pointed out the existence of “some bad, and…diabolical.” The end result of this current chicanery focused on “destroy[ing] the confidence which it is necessary for the People to place…in their public Servants.” Washington went on, calling the editorial page broadsides against him “arrows of malevolence.” The President repeated such thoughts often over the next few weeks. By mid-August frustration building, he prepared for the sitting of Congress and the hopeful resolution of the issues with Genêt.

Hamilton chose not to sit idly during the first weeks of August. Taking up his pen, the treasury secretary used the administration-friendly Daily Advertiser to voice his opinions on the ongoing crisis with Genêt. Foregoing one of his traditional classical pseudonyms, Hamilton instead chose a nom de guerre that more aptly reflected the ongoing ideological confrontations within the United States, and particularly within America’s ports: “No Jacobin.” Initially composed and deliberate, the essays took on a much more acerbic and ideological bent as they were printed. Modern historians often overlook the “No Jacobin” series as reactionary and below

63 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 3, 1793, PTJ 26, 606-607; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 11, 1793 PTJ 26, 649-650.

the typically high-minded verbosity of Hamilton. But to do so overlooks a key component in understanding the Federalist Party during the 1790s: the creation of a paranoid partisan ideology that fixated on the threat from foreign subversion. It is between the lines of the “No Jacobin” essays that Hamilton first begins to outline a new security-minded platform for the Federalists. The enemy has not even presented itself before the gates, he claimed, they were already inside.

The first three “No Jacobin” essays present as fairly straightforward and policy-minded. Hamilton’s sought to address two direct challenges to the Washington administration. First, Genêt had recently announced his intent to appeal the French cause directly to the American people, bypassing Washington and the traditional relations between state and ambassador.65 Secondly, the anti-administration General Advertiser had recently printed a series of letters attacking Washington’s neutrality policy as “A Jacobin.”66 Hamilton relied on legalistic rebuttals to both of these claims, closing his first essay by noting “the result is that a pretension to fit out privateers in our ports against our will is an insult to our understanding and a glaring infraction to our rights.”67 This phrase marked the high water mark of indignation for Hamilton through the first ten days of August.

By “No Jacobin’s” fourth appearance, however, Hamilton’s rhetoric began to shift. He believed that the claims made by Genêt and “A Jacobin” had been outright refuted by the first three essays. Now, though, “No Jacobin” discussed the general legality of neutrality in the context of the laws of nations. No scenario within these laws allowed for the arming of

65 DeConde, Entangling Alliances, 302 - 303; and Elkins and McKitrick, 348 - 354.
67 “No Jacobin 1,” July 31, 1793, PAH 15, 151.
belligerents within a neutral's borders, making any attempt to do so, and then later to claim its legitimacy, asinine. The only clear explanation would seem to involve wide-ranging subversion perpetrated by “agents of France.” Unable to pull the United States directly into their war against England, France counted on the passions of the population to push the nation into a foreign debacle. In his next missive, Hamilton went a step further:

Here at once the system of *electrifying* the people, (to use a favourite phrase of the Agents of France) began to be put into execution. Discerning men saw from the first opening of the scene, what was to be the progress of the drama. They perceived, that negotiations with the constitutional organs of the nation, was not the only mean to be relied upon, for carrying the points, with which the Representative of France was charged; that popular intrigue was at least a second, if not to enforce the efforts of negotiation.

Genêt, and all of France, planned to attain their goals by subverting the power of the republic: its republican electorate. And to do this, Genêt captured the prevailing trend, becoming (at least according to Hamilton) “the head of a political club.” This linking of Genêt and his subversion to the rising grass-roots Democratic Societies – “No Jacobin” called them “Society of Friends to Liberty and Equality,” terms loaded with a perniciously radical context — represented a unique ideological linkage for the Federalists. Shaken by the rise of vocal populist dissent, those within and friendly to the administration grasped at reasons to conceptualize their detractors’ political fervor. The response that proved easiest to frame within the Federalist’s worldview proved to be the most divisive. Dissent in 1793, as well as later, did not represent the actual will of America’s citizenry. Outside agents worked to subvert this republican strength and

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68 “No Jacobin 4,” August 10, 1793, *PAH* 15, 228.
69 “No Jacobin 5,” August 13, 1793, *PAH* 15, 244.
70 “No Jacobin 7,” August 23, 1793, *PAH* 15, 268.
turn it into a weakness, flaming passions and stripping away reason. The only bulwark that remained against this wave of foreign-induced mass hysteria would prove to be steely eyed leaders who could see through the mists of treason and determine the right trajectory for the nation.

“No Jacobin IX,” appearing on August 28, 1793, feels rushed. A direct response to letters leaked by Genêt to the anti-administration press, Hamilton chastised the French emissary for taking an imperious tone with the president and trying to “lesson” him on the American people. The essay almost serves as a paean to Washington, complimenting him on his patient and steady hand dealing with a clear interlocutor. And yet, “No Jacobin IX” lacks some of the rhetorical gravity and verve that earlier essays possessed. While he does argue that “The people of the United States can now be at no loss to determine, that they have been insulted by this forgoing agent,” Hamilton does not drive the blade home as he had done in earlier essays. The ties between Genêt, foreign subversion, and the Democratic Clubs, nurtured before, do not appear now. It could be that events forced Hamilton to shift the context of his essays; the appearance of the letters leaked by Genêt forced him into an immediate response. A draft for a future essay seems to support this notion. In it, Hamilton states, “The time has come, when they [the American people] are to decide whether they will consent to be governed by a foreign Agent and to submit their rights and interests to his disposal — or whether they will effectually support the constitutional authorities they have created in opposition to that Agent and to those who may prefer his service to the dignity honor and welfare of the country.” Genêt had worked to create a

71 “No Jacobin 9,” August 28, 1793, PAH 15, 304-306.
“scism[sic] between it [the administration] and the People” and sought to subvert the republic against itself.\textsuperscript{72}

Other, more natural events may have stopped Hamilton from seeking publication of this last anti-Genêt screed. By early September, Hamilton had begun to show symptoms of the yellow fever that was then building to a ghastly crescendo within the capital. Washington first mentioned the yellow fever epidemic then-occurring in Philadelphia on August 25, almost a week before Jefferson recorded it in his personal correspondence. In a letter to his nephew, the President noted that the family was well, “but the City is very sickly and numbers dying daily.”\textsuperscript{73} Several of his letters from late August and early September attest to the rising macabre tide within Philadelphia. But, for the most part, Washington, much as in the manner of Jefferson, seems to rise above the epidemic’s scourge. This situation changed drastically on September 6. “With extreme concern I receive the expression of your apprehensions, that you are in the first stages of the prevailing fever,” Washington wrote to Hamilton. If they were well, Washington hoped that Hamilton and his wife would dine at his house that day.\textsuperscript{74} They did not keep that invitation. Eliza Hamilton cared for Alexander until she herself fell ill with the disease. The Hamiltons’ illness and post-sick bed sojourn to reunite with his evacuated children is a wrenching account of quarantine and suspicion. Several times during his journey to New York, city and state officials forced Hamilton and his wife to stay in taverns and post-houses outside settled areas in order to guarantee their recovery. At one point, only the Hudson River separated

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.; see also \textit{PAH} 15, n306.

\textsuperscript{73} George Washington to Howell Lewis, August 25, 1793, \textit{PGW} 13, 545.

\textsuperscript{74} George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, September 6, 1793, \textit{PGW} 14, 36-37.
them from their children while they waited for physicians from Albany to inspect Alexander and Elize for any symptoms of the disease.75

Three days after his letter to Hamilton, Washington took a more paternal and cautious tone in a letter to Henry Knox. “I think it would not be prudent either for you or the clerks in your office…to be too much exposed to the malignant fever,” he stated, closing with “I sincerely wish, and pray, that you and yours may escape untouched and when we meet again that it may be under circumstances more pleasing than the present.”76 Wanting to stay in Philadelphia during the crisis, Washington could not convince Martha to leave without him. Thus, at his wife’s bidding, the President left for Mt. Vernon on September 11, the previously scheduled date of his leaving, both escaping the pestilential city and hoping to find an adequate overseer for his plantation.77

“There is a Rank Due to the United States among Nations” – Fall and Winter, 1793

Jefferson remained adamant about staying at his home outside of Philadelphia up through the middle of September, refusing to evacuate the capital. The nucleus of the epidemic centered in the eastern, dockside portion of the city, and it may be that Jefferson felt himself at a safe distance from the danger. To further buttress himself against the rising tide of death, Jefferson introduced the idea of conducting all State Department business from his home once Washington


77 Flexner makes sure to show that Washington wanted to stay, but Martha would not leave without him, and that they left on the scheduled day of their departure; see Flexner, 301. Ferling calls Washington’s leaving “fleeing” and does not tie it with his planned trip to Mt. Vernon; see Ferling, The First of Men, 446-447.
left for Mt. Vernon. He repeatedly mentions in his letters from the first two weeks of September his concern that the complete abandonment of Philadelphia by the cabinet would further incite the growing panic and halt all federal government actions. Possibly realizing the growing scope of the malady, he mentions on September 10, for the first time, that he is contemplating leaving for Virginia “within a week or ten days.” Jefferson clung to the hope that he would remain at Monticello through the fall as he had agreed upon with Washington during their August 10 negotiation. The fear of contracting yellow fever, by forcing him to leave earlier than planned, changed his political schedule. The modern scholar only observes the full reason for the extended vacation within a letter, dated September 15, to Madison. Jefferson had hoped that his and Washington’s independent sojourns in Virginia would limit the amount of time the two would be in Philadelphia at the same time. The Secretary of State apparently wanted to distance himself from the upcoming actions of the cabinet, particularly the ones that could taint him as a Federalist. “My view in this,” Jefferson recounted to Madison, “was precisely to avoid being at any more councils as much as possible, that I might not be committed to in any thing further.” By forcing Jefferson to flee earlier than he had hoped for, the yellow fever changed the political dynamic that he had envisioned. Rather than being absent from the upcoming debates on Genêt and Congress, Jefferson instead found himself in the midst of the arguments, and increasingly marginalized to boot.

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78 Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, September 8, 1793, *PTJ* 27, 64.

79 Thomas Jefferson to Adam Lindsey, September 10, 1793, *PTJ*, 27, 84-85.

80 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 15, 1793, *PTJ* 27, 121.
The same day that Jefferson expressed his frustration with his changed timeline to Madison, he indicated to the President that he was preparing to leave. “Having found in my going to town…that I had one clerk left, and that business could not be carried on, I determined to set out for Virginia as soon as I could,” Jefferson explained. At some point, Jefferson agreed to stop at Mt. Vernon on his way back home, planning to meet briefly with the president and discuss a few remaining issues still left undone due to the epidemic.

Washington’s gruffness lessened little while he waited out the yellow fever at Mt. Vernon. Apologizing to Madison for the scrawl of his October 14 letter, he admitted that he had had “no time to copy it.” “Although I came here to look into my own private concerns, the President grumbled, “no time [is] allowed me for this purpose being followed by other matters.” When Washington initially planned his trip to Mt. Vernon, his intent had been to stay only briefly, most likely two weeks. As such, he did not bring any of his official papers with him, particularly the “rules” concerning the precise application of neutrality practices in the nation’s ports. Responding to queries from Thomas Sim Lee, the governor of Maryland, Washington admitted that he was “not prepared at this place to decide points which may require a reference to papers not within my reach.”

After one month away from the capital, Washington grew frustrated. He had placed his nephew, Thomas Howell, in charge of the plantation. Howell lacked the experience to manage Mt. Vernon and supervise the plantation’s overseers. Daily rides about Washington’s property

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81 Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, September 15 (16), 1793, *PTJ* 27, 122-123.
only reinforced the image of mismanagement that seemed to choke the productiveness out of Mt. Vernon’s wheat fields. Washington finally reached an agreement with William Pearce during the latter part of September to assume the superintendent’s position, but not until the beginning of the New Year. Mt. Vernon, in Washington’s eyes, would founder until Pearce’s arrival.  

Further exacerbating Washington’s frustration was the regular arrival of executive business in the daily post. The collapse of the federal bureaucracy in Philadelphia prevented the President from delegating his normal work load of correspondence and from seeking the opinions of his cabinet. As shown above, letters from governors and other officials regularly arrived at Mt. Vernon seeking more guidance on the minutiae of neutrality enforcement. Evidence of Genêt’s perfidy also continued to arrive from various sources, to include state governors, friends of the administration, and Jefferson.

What did not arrive in Northern Virginia was the partisan press of Philadelphia, so long the bane of Washington’s existence. All of the papers in Philadelphia, save for Freneau’s *National Gazette*, shuttered their windows during the epidemic. The *Gazette* did not print anything about the epidemic until September 11, and further reporting on the calamitous events within the city seemed disjointed during September and early October. The general quarantine of Philadelphia prevented the ready regurgitation of overseas news, and the lack of federal and civic governmental actions forced the *Gazette* to fill its columns with sundry items. Reports of

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85 Several state governors and Congressmen forwarded mail to Washington concerning Genêt and neutrality during September and October, in particular George Clinton, Thomas Sim Lee, Oliver Wolcott, Jr., and Gouverneur Morris, among others. For a concise account, see Carroll and Ashworth, 126-131.
quarantine and state and civic legislation to control the spread of the disease often appeared as front page news. By October, Freneau, seeking solid news of the disease, began to publish editorials concerning its cause. The most striking to appear blamed the contagion on the moral laxity and love of luxury that had pervaded the city during the heady days of summer. Published October 16, during some of the darkest and most fatal days of the epidemic, the front page article quoted scripture, proclaiming that, “Fools make a mock of sin.” “Sabbath breaking” appeared as the primary sin of Philadelphians prior to the epidemic, and the author filled the paper’s first column with admonitions about not observing the Lord’s Day. By the second column, though, a new vein of thought becomes apparent. The polemicist attacks the landlords, asking “how many of the poor and unbefriended have groaned beneath the burden of a heavy rent?” Yellow fever had engendered a social schism within Philadelphia, one that left observers guessing at the future consequences.

Freneau had little opportunity to comment. Ten days after the front page religious polemic, the Republican editor claimed that the paper was going to take a short hiatus to install a new printing press in the hope of having new copy ready by the seating of Congress in December. This new edition never appeared. Depopulation and quarantine within Philadelphia brought commerce to a halt, and Freneau lacked capital with which to begin printing the National Gazette again. Jefferson mentioned the paper’s closure several times in early

86 See National Gazette newspapers from September 11, 21, 25, and 28, 1793.

87 National Gazette, October, 16, 1793.
November, hoping that Freneau would collect his “arrearages” and begin publishing. By early December, however, Jefferson knew that the paper had been “put down forever.”

Frustrated and beyond the reach of the partisan press, Washington began to get restive by mid-October and started to branch out into making his own policy decisions. During late September, the President wrote both Knox and Hamilton, entreating them to meet him in Germantown by November 1. In his correspondence to his two secretaries, Washington indicated that he had broached this topic to Jefferson when the Secretary of State had stopped at Mt. Vernon on his way to Monticello. Perhaps believing that Jefferson needed further inducement to meet the assembled cabinet, Washington penned a letter to him on October 7, stating that, “public business will require the Executive Officers to be together some time before the meeting of Congress.” Unlike in the earlier letters to Knox and Hamilton, this letter to Jefferson lists an explicit reason for the executive’s meeting: Genêt’s continued conniving.

Relating news from Knox concerning the French navy and of Genêt’s latest actions in New York, Washington clearly grew anxious now that Genêt had gained a step on the administration, stymied by yellow fever and the evacuation of the capital. The President believed that the next bout with Genêt would be in the “public mind,” and that a “lack of information” due to the inability of the executive branch to meet would create “unfavorable impressions.” Washington might have grown to despise the newspapers that had harried him while he was in Philadelphia,

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88 Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, December 1, 1793, PTJ 27, 468.
90 George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, October 7, 1793, PGW 14, 179-180.
but he had begun to gauge the power of the public will. The evacuation of the executive branch had forced the administration into silence, and Washington intended for this to change.

The President had broached another subject with Jefferson during his brief stay at Mt. Vernon that September: the calling of Congress to meet outside of Philadelphia. The details of this discussion are lost, but what is clear is Jefferson’s complete dismissal of the idea. In a later discussion of his views, he claimed that the Constitution provided no power to the President to move the location of Congress’s meeting. While Washington could call the legislature into session, it had to meet in the agreed upon location. And, according to the Residence Act of 1790, that location was to be Philadelphia until 1800, at which point it would transfer to the still-being-built Federal City. Any delay in Congress’s meeting would benefit Jefferson, allowing him to divorce himself from the policy in-fighting that he had hoped to avoid when he first agreed to stay on until the end of the year. Modern readers should not perceive this claim as a disparagement of Jefferson’s Constitutional views. Nowhere amidst his correspondence does he indicate that his views were anything but Constitutionally based. But, one should gauge the assertiveness of his constitutional predilections within the context of his earlier stated plans to separate himself from executive and legislative actions up to his resignation.

Jefferson most likely pointed to these same reasons during his September meeting with Washington. The President’s reaction belies his inclination to call the Congress to meet elsewhere, Constitutional or not. A letter written to Randolph on the last day of September asked if he had “ever examined with attention” the laws regarding the movement of Congress’s meeting place. Washington admitted that Jefferson had thought it unconstitutional in their

91Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, October 17, 1793, PGW 14, 226-227.; and Carroll and Ashworth, 132.
meeting, but Washington noted that they did not have the regulations in front of them and, in his opinion, the Constitution was “silent respecting it.”\textsuperscript{92} When Randolph did not reply in a timely manner, Washington canvassed the remainder of the cabinet, along with the heads of the respective branches of Congress, to ascertain their opinions concerning the matter. Their responses followed party lines. Hamilton and Knox both argued that the President possessed the power to call Congress into session outside of Philadelphia, although Hamilton did not currently believe that this measure would be necessary. Jonathan Trumbull, the Speaker of the Senate, lost the initial correspondence, but also agreed that the danger inherent to meeting inside Philadelphia created the “emergency situation” for which Washington could convene the Congress outside the city proper.\textsuperscript{93} Madison firmly agreed with Jefferson, however, as did a “Citizen of Virginia” who brazenly wrote Washington during the last week of August beseeching him to recognize the unconstitutional track that he was pursuing.\textsuperscript{94} The tardy Randolph finally helped to break the Constitutional loggerhead. Writing on October 24, the Attorney General deemed that the calling into session of Congress outside of Philadelphia was unconstitutional. Randolph opined, however, that this situation need never arrive. If the Congress arrived at Philadelphia, and the infection within the city prevented them from meeting within the city’s boundaries, “then the President will stand justified to convene them; inasmuch as a failure to meet in the present

\textsuperscript{92} George Washington to Edmund Randolph, September 30, 1793, \textit{PGW} 14, 152-153.

\textsuperscript{93} Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, October 24, 1793, \textit{PGW} 14, 279; and Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., October 30, 1793, \textit{GW} 14, 301-303.

\textsuperscript{94} James Madison to George Washington, October 24, 1793, \textit{PGW} 14, 278-281; and “A Citizen of Virginia” to George Washington, October 28, 1793, \textit{PGW} 14, 294-295.
posture of public affairs on the appointed day…of itself create[s] an ‘extraordinary occasion.’”95 Simply by biding his time, Washington could call Congress into session at an alternate location.

At first glance, Washington’s decision to solicit the opinions of his cabinet is not striking. Much as he had done during the debate over the Neutrality Proclamation, the President sought the advice of his entire cabinet prior to making a decision. Unlike the discussion from the previous April, though, Washington during the autumn of 1793 has already made up his mind on what to do and was looking for the best explanation of why he could do it. After talking with Jefferson at Mt. Vernon and writing to Randolph, Washington wrote to Timothy Pickering, the Postmaster General, and entreated him to begin searching for an alternate location for Congress to meet. Washington preferred Germantown, but only “if it should be free from infection,” and ended with a postscript asking “What sort of place is Reading?”96 Throughout the remainder of October, he continued to request news of the epidemic, in particular asking “whether the malady with which Philadelphia is afflicted has extended to Germantown.”97 Pickering assayed the danger around Philadelphia daily for the President, and relayed that Germantown would be too small for both houses of Congress, but Lancaster would most likely suffice.98 Immediately upon receiving Randolph’s enjoinder for executive patience, Washington reviewed a Proclamation that recognized “the power, in me vested by the said constitution, to convene Congress on extraordinary occasions.” The fact that, “Philadelphia…laboured under a contagious fever” created such an occasion, and the President declared that both houses of Congress would meet

96 George Washington to Timothy Pickering, October 14, 1793, *PGW* 14, 211.
outside of the city. Preparing for any eventuality, Washington left blank spaces to place the date of the proclamation and the site for the designating meeting.99

Cooler weather and frosts during late October prevented the issue of where to convene Congress from coming to a head. An account of burials within the city showed that the daily number for November 8 dropped below double digits for the first time since mid-August.100 By mid-November, Jefferson recounted that “the inhabitants [of Philadelphia], refugees, are now flocking back generally.”101 As some in the cabinet had believed would happen, “there does not exist a single subject in the disorder … [and]there is no doubt you [and the Congress] will set in Philadelphia.”102 Against the wishes of Randolph, Washington rode into Philadelphia on November 11 to inspect the city. Cheering crowds met him all along his route, and his appearance seemed to symbolize the end of the tragedy.103 Although the cabinet remained in Germantown through the end of the month, daily business consumed the group, particularly the context of the upcoming Presidential address to the Third Congress. As Carroll and Ashworth point out, “never before had an Annual Address been so complex, so tedious in preparation.”104

99Enclosure “Draft for ‘A Proclamation By the President of the United States” (October 24, 1793), in Edmund Randolph to George Washington, October 24, 1793, PGW 14, 284.
101 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, November 9, 1793, PTJ 27, 334.
102 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, November 17, 1793, PTJ 27, 395-396.
103 Edmund Randolph to George Washington, November 10, 1793, PGW 14, 355-356; Carroll and Ashworth, 141; and Flexner, 301.
104 Carroll and Ashworth, 141.
This complexity reflected a sea change taking place in the cabinet. For starters, Hamilton’s recovery from yellow fever seemed to be less than complete. Ill health kept Hamilton from the cabinet’s first meeting on November 2, and from it's meeting to discuss the Annual Address on November 23.\textsuperscript{105} In an unprecedented step, Hamilton wrote to Jefferson on December 8 and admitted to having a “confused recollection” about a discussion the day before concerning foreign ships brought as prizes into American ports.\textsuperscript{106} Even though weakened by his bout with the fever, Hamilton still remained within the cabinet and was a vocal defender of the Federalist, pro-administration position. Knox continued to align himself with Hamilton and favored a hard-line position against Genêt and any further French intransigence.

In the November 23 cabinet meeting that Hamilton missed, Knox, in his position as Secretary of War, proposed the fortification of major harbors and the establishment of a military academy, arguing that both points should be included in the upcoming annual address.\textsuperscript{107} Although the Constitution did not specifically delegate this power to the President or the federal government, Knox believed both steps to be expedient. Jefferson vehemently opposed both steps on purely constitutional grounds. Washington, although doubting the “expediency” of the fortifications, did think the proposal of a military academy to be a good idea. That said, at least on the 23\textsuperscript{rd}, he did not want to bring forward any notions that, “might generate heat and ill

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{105} Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, November 3, 1793, 312 and November 23, 1793, 418, both in PGW 14.; Flexner, 302.

\textsuperscript{106} Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Jefferson, December 11, 1793, \textit{PTJ} 27, 504.

\textsuperscript{107} Anas, 180.
\end{footnotesize}
humor.” Leaving little resolved, the cabinet adjourned, assigning Randolph the task of drafting
the speech.108

Five days later, Washington’s mood appears to have changed. Randolph presented his
draft of the annual address, and after a review, the cabinet accepted it in near totality; Jefferson
later indicated that, “no material alterations were proposed or made in any part of the draught.”
Any mention of harbor fortifications had been stricken from the record, and yet, a commentary
about the needs of a military academy remained. Randolph argued that, “the words of the
Constitution authorize[ed] Congress to lay taxes, etc., for the common defence.” Washington,
apparently feeling empowered to propose further actions to approach preparedness, declared that
he would refer the measure to Congress and allow them to determine its constitutionality.
Jefferson, maybe feeling snubbed by the decision, noted that Randolph had “accidentally” called
the nation “our republic” in several places. Perhaps this thought placated him as he reflected
upon his resounding failures in the cabinet debates as November closed.109

The cabinet meeting on November 23 also closed one last brief bit of business. The
cabinet struck four separate letters from the packet of correspondence that Jefferson provided to
them of his correspondence with Genêt. Washington decided that the packet of correspondence
would be presented to Congress post haste. Jefferson composed the draft of the message that
would introduce the letters, going out of his way to portray Genêt as a rogue agent untethered
from the mother country. France had acted benevolently with the United States in the past and
one poor decision in appointing a minister should not ruin their relationship. Washington,

108 Ibid., 410.
109 Ibid, 182.
although agreeing to the gist of the draft, made significant revisions prior to sending it forward to congress. He toughened up the language, making Genêt’s perfidy starker, and stridently arguing that this rupture represented a significant issue within the nation. Once the message and its attached papers reached Congress, the administration released them to the newspapers, where they were forthwith printed out in special editions of the slowly reviving Philadelphia press.\footnote{To the United States Senate and House of Representatives, December 5, 1793, 474-477; print copy at manuscript collections, Library Congress of Philadelphia (hereafter LCP).}

Interestingly enough, Jefferson did not assume the position of primary opposition throughout the November debates. Edmund Randolph came to the fore during these discussions. Several times during the heated conversations concerning the Annual Address, Jefferson noted that Randolph holds his position with “firmness” and “lengthily.”\footnote{Anas, 175.} Jefferson’s assessment of Randolph is a far cry from the earlier rendering of him as a “chameleon.” Later, Jefferson would again attack Randolph as “the most unpopular one [choice] the President could have made.”\footnote{Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, March 22, 1794, Reel 1, James Monroe MSS, LOC.}

For the time being, though, Randolph appeared ascendant. From early in the process of evacuating the capital and discussing the constitutionality of calling the Congress to meet in Germantown, the attorney general navigated a moderate path that, surprisingly, tacked closer to the positions of Hamilton and Knox. While he never fully conceded to every position, he found enough areas to accede to the President’s wishes to draw Washington’s attention. A month after the drafting of the annual address, Washington invited Randolph to take over Jefferson’s portfolio as the Secretary of State, and the move was cemented on Christmas afternoon. In his letter to Randolph, the President indicated his desire to have retained Jefferson, but the former
secretary was “so decidedly opposed to it” he found himself in need of a replacement. Laying out the timeline for the assumption of the position, Washington wrote that Jefferson had “quit it [the secretaryship],” using those words in place of “resign his commission.” These words seem to belie a keen frustration in Washington, one far different than his often glowing words for his fellow Virginian.\textsuperscript{113}

At noon on December 5, the President and the cabinet assembled at Washington’s residence and duly left for the Senate chambers where both houses of Congress sat to receive the President’s Annual Address. Few have ever accused Washington of being a powerful orator, and his fifth annual address has some very mechanical paragraphs within in. He opened with a legalistic recounting of the summer’s events relating to Neutrality and Genêt, indicating that Genêt’s correspondence would be shared with the body in a matter of days. He then closed with a discussion of the ongoing negotiations with the native tribes along the frontier and some debt and financial transactions. These portions seemed a continuation of the mundanity of the annual addresses that had preceded the one currently being read.

The middle, and most contentious portions of the speech, rose to near-Jeffersonian levels of virtuosity:

\begin{quote}
I cannot recommend to your notice measures for the fulfillment of our duties to the rest of the world, without again pressing upon you the necessity of placing ourselves in a position of compleat [sic] defence, and of exacting from them the fulfillment of their duties towards us…There is a rank due to the United States among Nations, which will be withheld, if not absolutely lost, by the reputation of weakness. If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} George Washington to Edmund Randolph, and Edmund Randolph to George Washington, December 24, 1793, \textit{GW 14}, 619.
instruments in our rising prosperity, it must be known, that we are at all times ready for war.

Washington then immediately referenced documents distributed among the legislators that cataloged the “Arms and Military stores” possessed by the federal government. These paltry amounts would not suffice in times of war, the President stated, and “supplies cannot with prudence be neglected.” He continued, claiming that this resupply could not be delayed due to the “censure of jealousy of the warmest friends of Republican Government.” Whether or not he intended this to be a tongue-in-cheek critique of the partisan opposition remains unclear. Washington clearly did not want to see politics undermine the defense of the nation.

Then, in the following paragraph, Washington coyly unveiled his initial steps to founding a military academy. Starting with paean of praise to the state militias, he quickly transitioned into reflection, wondering if the 1792 Militia Act organized the militia “to produce their fullest effect.” He appeared to doubt that relegating complete control of training and manning to the states provided the best means to organize the nation’s immediate defense and whether there were “some imperfections in the scheme.” As he closed the paragraph, he wondered aloud if “a material feature in an improvement of it [the militia system], ought not to be, an opportunity for the study of those branches of the military art, which can scarcely ever be attained by practice alone?”

In these brief sentences, Washington not only proposed some form of training formalization, most likely leading to a military academy, but he also attacked the fairly new militia law. Discussion of such a step had not appeared anywhere in the various notes from the

cabinet’s meeting regarding the annual address. Knox had increasingly championed military preparedness throughout the latter portion of 1793, but no immediate evidence exists proving that the President sought a revision to the nation’s policies regarding the state militias. His words in the address seem to indicate that Washington sought greater federal control over the militia system as a means to better prepare for national defense. Within the context of the speech, his paragraph arguing for improvements in military preparedness appeared amidst his ongoing discussions of the war in Europe and attempted subversion at home. Washington linked the two in his speech, going a step further by proposing these alterations of the national defense as the appropriate response to the impact of these events within the United States.

Two interrelated, yet distinct, trends brought Washington and his cabinet to the policy proposals outlined in the Annual Address. First, the president’s advisers had sought to conceptualize Genêt’s arrival and machinations into a greater Revolutionary Atlantic. Even though the cabinet divided along still forming ideological lines, they all identified the French emissary’s actions as part of a larger whole. The subterfuge in America had clear linkages with the war in Europe and the president and his cabinet had moved beyond the point of counting this as a misunderstanding. Even Jefferson in his pro-Genêt, Francophilic letters to anti-administration politicians thought that Genêt embodied the verve of the French Revolution and placed supporting him as analogous to supporting their sister republic. Supporters of the administration held a similar position, but saw such support as tantamount to becoming participants in a European war. Genêt’s disregard for Washington’s painfully crafted neutrality proposals, and the populist response this engendered within the nation, left supporters of the
administration feeling that Genêt connived to subvert the president for the gain of the French nation.

The Washington administration sought to craft a response to these developments beyond the legalistic wording of the Neutrality Proclamation. Simply put, they lacked any ready enforcement mechanisms. Herein lay the other, interrelated trend: throughout 1793, the administration struggled to find federal-level responses, beyond the reach of the legislature, to address the weakness within the nation exposed by Genêt. First with the proposals to garrison Mud Island against the departure of *Le Petit Democrate*, to expanding the role of the customs collectors, along with the argument to create coastal defenses to protect the nation’s harbors, all belied Washington and his pro-administration allies’ attempts to stop Genêt and his maneuvering.

The annual address represents the pinnacle and full interrelationship of these two trends. Washington, in the space of a few paragraphs, argues for the causal linkages between Genêt and subversion that he viewed as self-evident. In response, he advocates for further steps, here reforming the training and organization of the militia and creating a military academy, to ensure that the nation has situated itself in a position of strength in relation to the rest of the Revolutionary Atlantic. The president, so tentative to take potentially contentious or unconstitutional actions earlier in the years, felt confident and pressed to propose what he deemed necessary action by the close of the year.

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Jefferson slowly prepared to exit Philadelphia during the entire month of December. In a letter to his daughter, Martha, written on December 22, he reminded her about staging horse on
his route home. His “books and the remains of furniture embark tomorrow for Richmond.”

Jefferson also hoped to include a freshly printed copy of the collected correspondence between himself and Genêt, already creating a “turbid appearance” in some areas of the Republic’s foreign affairs. Embedded within the lines of preparation and movement, Jefferson briefly mentions that, “the President, made yesterday, what I hope will be the last set at me to continue.”115 Nowhere else in either man’s correspondence does this meeting appear. This general silence on the topic lends itself to two conclusions: either Washington did not make as much of a case as he did during their August negotiations, or Jefferson had firmly decided that it was time to leave. Either way, Randolph accepted the position of Secretary of State three days after Jefferson’s letter to Martha. On the last day of the year, Jefferson formalized his resignation in a short, but eloquent letter to Washington, claiming that “I carry into my retirement a lively sense of your goodness, and shall continue gratefully to remember it.”116

The fact that the two did not pursue the option of Jefferson’s retention in the same manner that they had done the summer prior indicated how far things had changed over the course of several months. Whereas Washington had relied on Jefferson almost explicitly in policy formulation and typically deferred to his judgment on most accounts, by November, Jefferson appeared to be the odd-man-out in the cabinet. Hamilton’s weakness and muddled demeanor prevented him from being a truly powerful force in debate, and Randolph had exhibited a more forceful demeanor than Jefferson had come to expect from his fellow Virginian. But the crucial change appears to have come from the President. Beginning with the discussion


concerning the ability of the President to call Congress to meet at a separate location, Washington showed a proclivity towards more direct actions. While he did consult his cabinet, he also made up his mind early that Congress would meet somewhere besides Philadelphia (and do it on time).

The Washington of December 1793 appears more forceful, more apt to take risks and meet crises head-on. So conscious earlier on of appeasing Jefferson’s republican proclivities, the president’s lack of a concerted appeal for him to stay speaks volumes in its silence. The Secretary of State’s resignation removed the most strident opponent of gestating Federalist ideology from within the Cabinet. While Randolph appeared cut from a cloth more akin to Jefferson’s, we shall see that he lacked the verve and ideological stubbornness of the man he replaced. Washington would not stray from the path he established in late 1793; no voice amongst his advisors would deign him to do so.

Washington replied to Jefferson’s resignation with “sincere regret.” The President wrote, “Since it has been impossible to prevail upon you, to forego any longer the indulgence of your desire for private life, the event…must be submitted to.” The farewell letter concluded in three quick paragraphs. The two men never wrote to each other again during Washington’s Presidency.

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117 George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, January 1, 1794, PGW 15, 7.
Chapter 2

“Come Guillotine, Muse Divine:” The Democratic Societies and Fearing for the Republic

Writing to James Monroe on May 5, 1793, Thomas Jefferson recounted the arrival of Little Sarah, not yet aware how this one ship would impact his future, as well as the nation’s.

“Thousands and thousands of the *yeomanry* [italics by Jefferson] of the city crowded and covered the wharfs,” craning their necks in an attempt to ascertain the status of the British vessel; “never before was such a crowd seen there,” Jefferson claimed. As the ship hove towards it’s mooring, the British flag unfurled in the breeze and everyone could plainly see that it was reversed, with the French flag flying above it. The yeoman burst into “peals of exultation,” so vigorous that Jefferson worried about “repress[ing] the spirit of the people within the limits of a fair neutrality.”

Alexander Hamilton also saw fit to comment upon the arrival of Little Sarah and the reaction of the crowd to its appearance. He clearly saw a linkage between the ship’s docking at Philadelphia’s dock, the raucous reception afforded Genêt, and a new restiveness among the population. Clearly at the opposite end of the still-forming political spectrum, Hamilton penned a missive for publication in a local newspaper, noting that the arrival of “M. Janet [sic]” had been met with much pomp and celebration in other cities and hoping that, “the good sense and prudence of the Citizens of Philadelphia…will guard them against being led into so unadvised a step.” Any overt demonstration of fealty to the French in general, and Genêt in particular, made the administration’s claim of neutrality in the expanding wars of the French Revolution harder

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and harder to maintain. And if such events occurred “at the seat of the general government,” such
a claim would take on the quality of a lie. Hamilton appears to almost plead with Jefferson’s
yeomanry: “any extraordinary honors…would be as little consonant with decorum and humanity,
as with true policy.”

As noted last chapter, the Anglo-French phase of the French Revolutionary Wars, begun
several months earlier, helped inaugurate nascent party divisions within the early republic.
Beyond the ideological heads of the party, the divide created by the foreign war forced many
individuals, the *yeoman* that Jefferson chose to italicize in his letter to Monroe, to choose sides.
As the two writings indicate, the ideological heads of the still-forming parties both viewed this
new mass politicization as troubling. The people, both politicians believed, could forestall any
concerted efforts by the Washington administration to maintain its neutrality in the face of a
potential global conflict. The democratic impulse, what Jefferson referred to as the “spirit of
1776…rekindling,” held the perceived potential for disaster within the republic.

Nobody better represented this “rekindling” than the various groups that congealed under
the banner of “Democratic Societies” during the spring, summer, and fall of 1793. Forming
predominantly in the urban areas along the Atlantic seaboard, the groups did branch out into
Vermont, western Massachusetts, and most notably, Kentucky. The Democratic Societies voiced
common cause with the French Revolution, going so far as to hijack the rhetoric of the *sans
culottes*, espousing fraternity while decrying the rise of monocratic forces within the young

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2 “On the Reception of Edmond Charles Genêt in Philadelphia,” *PAH*, 14, 449-450. While this piece is clearly
intended for public perusal, it is unclear where, and if, it appeared in print.

American Republic. These societies uniformly advocated for support of the French Republic and viewed neutrality as treachery in light of France’s republican background and the assistance that France (even though then a monarchy) provided the United States during its war for independence.

The following chapter will discuss three distinct Democratic Societies: the Republican Society of South Carolina (Charleston); the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia); and the Democratic Society of Kentucky (Lexington). Each of these groups espoused a similar rhetoric, particularly in their formative stages. A closer examination reveals that each used this rhetoric to conceptualize their own unique political issues. Rather than a solid ideological movement, the birth of the Democratic Societies represents a grassroots fumbling with political processes during a period of party formation and governmental regularization. The divergent trajectories and outcomes of the three above groups reveals much about the mechanics of constitutional governance during the 1790s.

Although the Democratic Societies may have been diverse in their political make-ups, the Federalist responded in an increasingly uniform manner, focusing on the radical democratic nature of the groups and their recitation of Jacobin-inspired rhetoric. The fiasco of the Genêt experience, now coupled with grassroots radicalization that bluntly criticized the Washington administration, further gave credence to the Federalist’s perceived accounts of foreign subterfuge. This ideological juncture cemented the Federalist’s response to crises through the remainder of the decade: a reliance on the military and an increasing paranoia against radicalism.
The clearest articulation of the Democratic Societies’ views may lie in a broadside account entitled “At a Meeting of the Democratic Society of the City of New York.” Published after a May 1794 meeting, the broadside provides a cogent synthesis of thoughts and ideas, rather than the hyperbole of the prior year’s initial flourishes. Responding to critics, the New York Democratic Society claimed that they had unjustly been labeled “dangerous” and “contemptible.” The group freely admitted that they had chosen the term “DEMOCRATIC” over “REPUBLICAN,” not to reject the notion of a representative government, but to instead re-enshrine the power of the citizen in national politics. They saw a clear thread running from 1775 to 1787, and “sincerely hoped for a union of sentiments throughout the nation on the real principles of the constitution and the original intentions of the revolution.” Ratification had capped off a radical and democratic movement inaugurated by the Revolution that owed its success to the mass of the people. Somewhere in the years following the writing of the Constitution, this had been lost.

At this point, the New York Democratic Society reached full vitriol. Whereas earlier in the broadside the group sought to tack to a more centrist position while still proclaiming connections with the revolutionary and constitutional past, the last third stridently speaks against the Washington administration’s policy of neutrality. “Yes, fellow citizens,” they veritably shouted, “we take pleasure in avowing thus publicly to you, that we are lovers of the French nation, that we esteem their cause as our own, and that we are the enemies, the avowed enemies, of him or those who dare to infringe upon the holy law of liberty, the sacred Rights of Man, that we ought to be strictly neutral.” No perceived ideological gap existed between the American and French Revolutions; to claim one did was nonsense. And while the Society made no claim that
their ideological opponents were “an enemy to the country, or an aristocrat at heart,” they did believe that those who advocated for neutrality “ought not to be entrusted with the guidance of any part of the machine of government.”

For the most part, all of the various Democratic Societies voiced these common rhetorical devices: ties to a democratic past most readily present in the Revolutionary era; advocacy of the citizen over the elite, or “monocrats;” clear linkages between the United States and the French cause; and questioning of the current federal government, either implicitly or explicitly. This common rhetoric has flavored the historiography of the movement and its diverse elements. Eugene P. Link’s Democratic-Republican Societies 1790-1800, published during 1942, viewed the Democratic Societies holistically and as part of larger social movements that traced their heritage back to the Sons of Liberty. He downplayed the role of the French Revolution in affecting the formation of these groups, instead seeing their development as a natural out-growth of a democratic spirit. “In actions, no less than words,” he wrote as he concluded, “the democratic societies reveal a social force driving towards man’s right to self-determination and the fulfillment of his creative possibilities.” That said, Link juxtaposes the political construct of the first party system into the earliest portions of the work, making it appear as if the “popular societies” existed right alongside already formed Federalist and Republican parties, a situation we have seen to still be in flux during 1793 and 1794. Also, he claimed that “sectionalism was another factor” in the formation of the groups, charging that, “distant rumblings of the Civil War

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4 “At a Meeting of the Democratic Society of the City of New York,” May 28, 1794, Rare Book Collection, LCP.

5 Link, 210.
could be heard in the economic and social clashes that arose between North and South.”6 Clearly such extrapolation ignores electoral and social connections between North and South during this time and, instead, force feeds causality when it really does not exist.

Philip Foner, in the introduction to his edited work Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800, attempted to correct some of these issues. While he notes that Hamilton’s fiscal policies and the development of parties and “interests” did create turmoil in the republic, “it was the French Revolution and the crisis over foreign policy in 1793 and 1794 that integrated all issues…enabl[ing] the popular societies to build a following to challenge the Federalists.”7 Although giving due credence to the impact of the French Revolution, Foner yet again assumes the primacy of party in the political thinking of the democratic agitators. And he also makes common cause with the Societies and the Republican Party, be it either as a “pressure group” or as a grassroots organizer.8 No overt genealogy exists, however, and Foner’s attempt towards creating one runs aground on a sandbar of attempted synthesis.

What a close examination of individual Societies shows is the opposite of earlier treatments. The various societies all espoused a common rhetoric, but viewed the individual pieces of that rhetoric contextually. The phrases “Natural Rights” and “Rights Man” are uttered by Democratic Societies in Charleston, Philadelphia, and Lexington, but can be construed to explain geographic expansion, oppose aristocratic malfeasance, or agitate for free navigation of the Mississippi River. The actions and writings of the members of the various Democratic

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6 Ibid., 62.
7 Foner, ed., 17.
8 Ibid., 40; for the “pressure groups” thesis, see Cunningham, The Jeffersonian Republicans, 63-65.
Societies show an inspired populace attempting to verbalize popular dissent, at both the national and local level. The French Revolution provided ready-made rhetoric for these groups to use, while the issue of neutrality galvanized them against a common enemy — the nascent Federalist Party, in general, and Washington’s administration, in particular.

“The Interests and Preservation of France is that of America” – Charleston

One dark and damp night in December, 1793, the South Carolina legislature deputized Wade Hampton, the sheriff of Camden District, to travel to Charleston and arrest one Colonel Stephen Drayton and Major James Hamilton, both officers in the state militia. Hampton arrived at Colonel Drayton’s home first, entering the residence as Drayton threw some papers on the fire. A cursory search provided nothing of ill intent, but Hampton did find his desk drawer locked, Drayton refusing to give up the keys. “We were obliged to force his drawer,” Hampton reported; “this painful task was performed under the impression of mind which naturally rises from a sense [of] official duty on one part, and from violating the rights of a citizen.” Prying the lock open still did not provide any evidence. The dragnet failed to find Major Hamilton that night (he would be found the next day), but Hampton and his deputies scoured the city until two in the morning looking for him and other accessories to Drayton’s crime.9

And what could be so nefarious to roust an upcountry South Carolina sheriff and send him to Charleston to arrest a veteran of the revolution and former justice of the peace? “Armed force levying within the state by persons under foreign authority, for invading the Spanish

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9 “Wade Hampton, Sheriff of Camden District, Report [illegible] describing his arrest of Col. Stephen Drayton and seizure of his papers in Charleston concerning his participation in the Genêt Affair,” December 13, 1793, Miscellaneous Communications to the General Assembly, South Carolina State Archives (hereafter SCSA), Columbia, SC.
dominions,” or so the committee that deputized Hampton proclaimed it a week before Drayton’s arrest. Drayton, and several other prominent members of the Charleston and low country elite had, the committee found, “received and accepted military commissions from Monsieur Genet…authorising [sic] them and instructions requiring them to raise, organize, [and] train troops in the United States.” The final goal of this group entailed “conquest and plunder,” more specifically, the seizure of land from the Spanish and the granting of titles by French authorities. Such a move could only serve to “disturb the internal stability of the United States,” and the committee not only recommended the arrest of those implicated, but also the immediate notification of the federal government.10 Dr. James A. Brown, also implicated by the late-1793 committee, held a seat in the South Carolina legislature. He appealed to maintain his seat, claiming that he had in fact reviewed a paper that outlined the “pay, rations…numbers of men to be raised, and battalions, divisions of land, and other particulars.” Brown stated that he had declined a commission and, at his wife’s behest, refused to have anything to do with the group of which he did admit, “he had been engaged.”11

Oddly enough, the list of those arrested during the anti-Genêt round-up includes several members of another list that came out earlier that same year: the membership and governance committee of the Republican Society of South Carolina. Drayton (president), William Tate

10 “Committee report respecting an armed force levying within the state by persons under foreign authority, for invading the Spanish Dominions,” December 6, 1793, in Michael E. Stevens, ed., The State Records of South Carolina: Journals of the House of Representatives, 1792-1794, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 298-299.

11 “Committee of Privileges and Elections, Report on the Case of Dr. J. Robert Brown who allegedly accepted the commission of a foreign government to raise an army in this state, and is thereby ineligible to hold his house seat,” December 11, 1793, Reports of the South Carolina Legislature, SCSA.
(secretary), and his brother, Robert Tate, all appear in roll calls for the Society.\textsuperscript{12} “Armed force levying for a foreign power,” or filibustering, seems far removed from the initial statements released by the Society. In a statement of purpose written for and given to Edmund Genêt following his arrival in Charleston, Drayton and the other members of the then-named “Friends of Liberty and National Justice,” pledged “ourselves to each other and to the world, that we, and each of us, will contribute to the utmost of our ability, towards the support of equal liberty and national justice, as well in respect to the French Republic, as of the United States, against tyranny and iniquitous rule, in whatever form they may be presented…in these United States.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Republican Society (formally taking that name in August), spent the remainder of the summer and early autumn toasting the French cause, requesting a copy of the new French Constitution from the French government, and attempting to formalize the structure of their new group.\textsuperscript{14}

The Society’s address that August served as the organizing document for the both the group and its ideology. From the first sentence, readers become aware of a markedly different tenor in this document than those of the other Societies forming that summer. Drayton and his followers focus almost exclusively on events in Europe, seeing the coalition arrayed against France as a threat to liberty both there and in America. “Those very powers who are now combined against France, will not suffer a vestige of liberty to remain,” the address declared;

\textsuperscript{12} “Address by the Republican Society of South Carolina,” August, 1793, Papers Relating to the Republican Society, South Carolina Historical Society (hereafter SCHS), Charleston, SC. Names of officers within the Society appear at the close of the message, with an undated roll call list included in the same packet.

\textsuperscript{13} “Declaration of the Friends of Liberty and National Justice,” July 13, 1793, Edmund Genêt Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC), Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{14} Foner, ed., 380-381.
“wherever they can reach out to destroy it they will; and America will next become their objective.” Nowhere within the address do they discuss domestic issues relating to monocratic subversion, nor even speak out against the current trend in the Washington administration towards neutrality.15 By August, the Society clearly viewed its primary concern as French military success in Europe. It would appear that, by December, some elements of the group had found a way to impact the war in Europe, particularly as they viewed the ill-defended Spanish frontier.

The exact nature of the overtures and planning between Genêt and the Society remains unclear. A letter from Samuel Hammond to the French consul in Charleston, one Citizen Marigourt, may present an interesting view of the proposed operation. Hammond resided near Camden in Kershaw County, upcountry from the nucleus of the Society in Charleston. A Revolutionary War veteran, he settled in South Carolina during the 1780s, quickly situating himself with his brothers whom oversaw a sprawling trade with the Native American along the frontier. Writing during March 1794, Hammond stated that the “engagement [sic] of the Creek Indians to form our intended operations to the Southland is in my conjecture very practicable, and at the same time necessary for the safety of our adventures.” While he does not detail these adventures, he does point out that they necessitated peace with the Creek, as the end result entailed “immigration” into the new lands. He explicitly identified the Spanish trading houses in Florida that would need to be seized to fully affect their claim to the borderland. He concluded by stating that he had “but little time for the execution of such business as we have to transact.”16

15 “Address of the Republican Society of South Carolina,” August 1793, Papers Relating to the Republican Society, SCHS.

16 Sam Hammond To Citizen Marigourt, March 30, 1794, Papers Relating the Republican Society, SCHS.
The haste that Hammond alluded to as stemming from his own personal business, while possibly true, may also have something to do with the formal message that Governor Moultrie forwarded to Washington in which he announce both Drayton’s arrest and the accusations of conspiracy lined up against him and his colleagues. Washington received the governor’s report sometime around the Christmas holiday, and he packaged it with several other reports of Genêt’s misdeeds, and forwarded them to the cabinet and the vice president for review. These documents added to the other damning papers that outlined Jefferson’s possible complicity with the whole affair; they were forwarded to Congress on January 15, 1794.17

Although Moultrie’s message to Washington ultimately made the Drayton arrest a national issue, the conduct of the investigation, and particularly the rhetoric of the Society following the arrest, exhibited more of a local character. The Society took again to the printed word the March following Drayton’s seizure. Much as before, the rhetoric drove home the image of European monarchies attempting to pervert the cause of liberty. Now, however, the Society clearly blamed the “British court” and “her agents” for “undermin[ing] and destroy[ing] the liberty and happiness of America.” The piece, published in Charleston’s City Gazette, concluded with a series of resolves that placed the Society firmly on the side of liberty. The Constitution protected the right to assemble and guaranteed the freedom of the press; the actions of the Society fell clearly within the parameters of these allowed actions. They took it upon themselves to remind the people of their elected officials’ civic duties and where their responsibilities lay.

17 William Moultrie to George Washington, December 7, 1793, PGW, 14, 482 - 483; George Washington to John Adams, January 8, 1794, PGW, 15, 50 (see particularly n50), and “Message to United States Senate and House of Representatives,” January 15, 1794, PGW, 15, 79.
Strikingly, the Society claimed that “War is inevitable,” and demanded that steps should be taken to prepare for a British assault.\textsuperscript{18}

The March article displayed a marked increase in vitriol from the Society’s initial statement and resolves from barely a year prior. Without clearly stating it, the Society drew an evidential line from the British “daring outrages and diabolical machinations” in the United States to the arrest of Drayton and Hamilton the preceding winter. If anyone did not see this linkage, they only had to wait until June for the Society to take to the \textit{City Gazette} again and explicitly lambast the proceedings of the legislature for the handling of the Drayton case. “The House of Representatives,” the Society claimed, “[had] entirely departed from their duty, and [were] in direct violation of the constitution.” Drayton’s capture had devolved into a rump circus with little to no concrete evidence. Forces had arrayed themselves against the republican ideal, subverting the constitution and due process.\textsuperscript{19}

Not until more than a year after its founding, and after the arrest of its president, did the Society’s rhetoric grow to include elements relating to overt internal subversion. As stated, the initial rhetoric of the Society entailed a close identification with the military destiny of France, not with contesting monarchical forces in South Carolina. This departs from our traditional conception of the Societies and their commonalities. To understand this difference, one must consider two elements that make the Republican Society of South Carolina unique: its membership composition, and the nature of South Carolina internal politics. Both factors help

\textsuperscript{18} “Resolutions Adopted Condemning the Conduct of Great Britain,” March 14, 1794, in Foner, ed., 387-388.

explain why in South Carolina, neutrality and relation with France meant more than the subversion of liberty, at least initially.

The average member of the Society was a low-country slave holder situated on a plantation. Drayton himself provides a ready example. A founding member of the Georgia Council of Safety, he formally joined the Continental Army during 1778 as the deputy-quarter master of the Southern Department. Following the Revolution, the citizens of Charleston elected him Justice of the Peace, and at times he served as secretary to Governor Moultrie himself.20 Prior to the Revolution, he bonded two colleagues with his personal holding in slaves, numbering fifty-eight in total.21 Whether he maintained them throughout the war remains unclear. His retention of the title “Colonel” in most of the correspondence involving him would seem to indicate a place among the higher echelons of Charleston society, if not in South Carolina. Sam Hammond, of the attempt to woo the Creek into an attack on Spanish Florida, retained the title of “Captain” for his service during the Revolution, as well. His lineage extends to prominent members of the South Carolina militia and a future United States Senator from Georgia. Upon his death in 1806, he bequeathed a total of 9 slaves to this wife and children, along with a stately mansion in Stoneboro, Kershaw County.22 A steady recurrence of military titles appears in the Society’s membership rolls, informing readers of either Revolutionary War commissions as

20 “Notes to Chapter 12,” in Foner, ed., 435-436.


officers or current militia service. Such a composition rests in stark contrast to other groups we shall explore.

In terms of politics, an analysis of the congressional electoral returns from the 1790s may help explain the dissonance between ideology and planned actions. Starting with the November 1790 mid-term election, South Carolina’s first district (which include Charleston and its environs) spent an entire decade sending pro-administration politicians to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. The second and third districts, both of which bordered the first and the Atlantic Ocean, each sent pro-administration or Federalist representatives to the national government three times during the 1790s, a rate of fifty percent for the decade. These returns contrast markedly with the up-country districts of the state; not until 1800 do any of these districts vote Federalist. A clear divide existed when one considers South Carolina’s electoral results for the decade of the 1790s. Although agitation existed in Charleston, as the Republican Society reveals, the majority of Charleston’s representative districts apparently viewed the Federalist’s idea of expanded national security as akin to its own. Thus, one can surmise that the problem low-country Southerners had with the Washington administration reflected their prerogatives about foreign policy and domestic expansion; not until the up-country legislature began passing judgment on the members of the Republican Society did it take a on a more populist tone.

Telling examples of up-country/low-country political divisions appear throughout the records of the state legislature during the 1790s. Throughout the decade, citizens from Charleston

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and its environs forwarded several petitions to the legislature, relating to a diverse set of topics that shared a common thread of increased local security. Even following a portentous opening message to the legislature from Governor Moultrie in 1793 that described a slave revolt in Virginia discovered in its planning stages, the up-country house decided to take no action on a petition to strengthen the state’s “Negro Codes.” The house also reviewed petitions from Charleston requesting revisions to the slave patrol legislation that would enforce either service or payment of a fine. Both in 1794 and 1795, the house eventually demurred, finding the 1784 militia law as adequate to cover both drill and slave patrols. And only an executive order from Governor Moultrie allowed for the speedy defense of the State Island Magazine and Fort Johnston, increasing the compliment at the latter from six to a paltry ten.24

Increasingly frustrated by the lack of legislative action in response to Charleston’s demands, the city’s citizens worked to take the matter into their own hands. On October 8, 1793, Charlestonians convened an emergency meeting and called the Intendant forward to enact resolutions passed by the assembled body. Attempts to stop the spread of the yellow fever then epidemic in the Delaware River rested foremost among their concerns, but the citizenry quickly transitioned to other matters. After outlining an in-depth plan that would provide for both defense and quarantine, the citizen’s council passed a resolution that forbade the entry of any free Negroes or people of color into the state. Furthermore, the council declared that all refugees from St. Domingue that had settled in Charleston, along with any free Negro who had emigrated to the state within the last twelve months, would be escorted to state lines and prohibited from re-

24 For reports on slave patrols, see “Committee Report on the Bill Regulating Patrols,” July 8, 1794, SCSA; for update to Negro Codes and Moultrie’s actions to defend Charleston, see “Opening Message to the House, 1793,” SCSA; and “State of South Carolina,” Columbian Herald, October 10, 1793.
admittance. As for an explanation for these drastic measures, the council stated, “We trust that when our fellow citizens of the country, by whose welfare as well as our own we are prompted reflect, that confidently with a due regard to it, the measures which we have taken could not have been delayed until the sense of the inhabitants of the state at large could be collected, they will attribute our conduct to its true motive, and approve and support the resolutions.” Interestingly enough, the council named one John Blake to assist with the enforcement of their resolutions. One can surmise that, given Charleston’s relatively small size during the 1790s, that this John Blake is the same one that appears on the rolls of the Republican Society as that group’s vice-president. Eight days following the publication of the Charleston city council’s resolves, Governor Moultrie signed a bill that, in essence, codified the resolves into executive action. “[I]t hath been further represented to me,” Moultrie stated, “that there are many characters amongst them [free blacks and refugees], which are dangerous to the welfare and peace of the state.” All free blacks from St. Domingue or who had recently settled in South Carolina had ten days to leave the state.

Moultrie’s description of potential perfidy went much farther than the city council. But they do help illustrate a point about the nature of politics and rhetoric amidst the tumult of 1790s South Carolina politics. Radicalism, in any way one might define it, did not readily appear in South Carolina political culture, not even from the Republican Society. Their use of Jacobin-inspired rhetoric, initially served two purposes: first, it created a unifying principle against

25 “State of South Carolina,” Columbian Herald, October 10, 1793; and “Address by the Society,” August 1793, SCHS. I am estimating the size of Charleston based on the 1820 census. At that time, there were approximately 24,780 individuals (slave, white, and free black) in the city. The USGenWeb Archives carries a by district list of reports from the 1790s census, but does not include a report just from Charleston; see http://www.usgwarchives.net/census/cen_sc.htm.

26 “A Proclamation,” Columbian Herald, October 19, 1793.
possible English attack; and second, it set a local foundation for future filibustering campaigns. Not until later did their rhetorical flourishes take aim at any American group or institution, and here, their sights fell on the legislature, of which they deemed as subverted by English spies. The group at no point advocated for a readjustment of South Carolina society or politics. Far from it; the specter of a slave revolt or radical rebellion could hastily unite both ends of the political spectrum. This stands the Republican Society of South Carolina in sharp contrast from a similar themed group in Philadelphia, one that more epitomized the radicalism of the French Revolution.

“Erecting temples of LIBERTY on the ruins of Palaces and Thrones” – Philadelphia

On September 11, 1793, Alexander Hamilton posted a letter to Philadelphia’s College of Physicians in the evening copies of The Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser. Hamilton, having himself nearly succumbed to the yellow fever epidemic that raged at that time within the city, recommended the services of one Dr. Edward Stevens. Stevens, lately of St. Croix and a good friend to Hamilton, had cared for both the Treasury Secretary and his wife, nursing them back to health. The treatment regimen that Stevens followed differed from the common practices, Hamilton declared, and he firmly believed that if the College adopted his views, “many lives will be saved, and much ill prevented.” Hamilton advised the College to speak with him right away.

27 Ira Berlin does not focus as much on the politics, but I think that this may represent an extension of his theme found in Slaves Without Masters. See Ira Berlin, Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: The New Press, 2004 [1974]).

28 The Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Advertiser, September 11, 1793
Dr. Benjamin Rush, the one-time surgeon general of the Continental Army and one of the most respected members of the College of Physicians, roundly disavowed Steven’s methods. Rush, a democratic-minded Philadelphian that often disagreed with the administration’s policies, chose to voice this opposition not by attacking Steven’s medical background, but to instead politicize the issue. Several weeks after the president of the College wrote to Stevens to inquire into his methods, Rush, in a letter to a friend, stated that, “Colonel Hamilton’s letter cost our city several hundred inhabitants.” Further, the doctor believed that Hamilton had only recommended Stevens due to the political nature of their friendship, opining that, “if the new remedies [Steven’s own] had been introduced by any other person than a decided Democrat…they would have been met with less opposition from Colonel Hamilton.” After the epidemic had begun to subside, Rush veritably crowed to his friend, “Colonel Hamilton’s remedies are now as unpopular in our city as his funding system is in Virginia or North Carolina.”

As the above anecdote, as well as Jefferson’s story of the masses at the docks, illustrates, Philadelphia had become highly politicized by the late summer of 1793. Many historians have commented on this, but have often disregarded the national implications of this politicization.

Only in such an environment could an esteemed physician draw linkages between


epidemiological theories and federal economic policies, satirical or otherwise. The Pennsylvania Democratic Society, the most vocal and radical of the societies formed during the 1790s, arose from amidst this heated political discourse. As alluded to prior, this group is often portrayed as the most representative of the entire body. The following section should show that it is in fact an outgrowth of events within Philadelphia itself, unique in its structure and composition, but still using common rhetorical devices. This would prove beneficial to Federalists later as they tried to fashion a response to their populist criticism.

If one object could represent Philadelphia during the summer of 1793, it might be Matthew Carey’s new atlas. “No. 1 of a new system of modern geography,” Carey’s advertisement in the National Gazette heralded, “a geographical, historical, and commercial grammar, and present state of the several kingdoms of the world.” Only a literate society, with extra money to spend, could bestow value upon a new world atlas, particularly one that bragged of including embellishments and a full “geographic index.”

Reflecting on Philadelphia after the 1793 yellow fever epidemic that decimated the city, Carey remembered that, “the manufactures, trade, and commerce of this city had, for a considerable time, been improving.” He also observed “numbers of new houses, in almost every street…adorned, at the same time that they greatly enlarged, the city.” Carey continued, proclaiming that, “confidence, formerly banished, was universally restored.” At the same time, Philadelphia’s population was “extending fast,” increasing rent in the city center to three times its proposed value. Philadelphia led the nation into a new era of commercial prosperity, reviving the “almost-extinguished hopes of four

31 Advertisement, National Gazette, May 22, 1793, 236.
millions of people.” 32 The city had blossomed during the early years of the decade. Beyond its historical legacy, the recent movement of the federal government within its environs served as an economic and political catalyst. The expansion of the merchant and artisan classes and the clerks, secretaries, and legislators of the national government all added to the growing population. In this burgeoning capitalist metropolis, Carey hoped that each of these new houses would need his primer on geography.

Philip Freneau’s *National Gazette* placed this new material prosperity on the back page. Lists of European imported goods typically appeared towards the end of an issue, advertising chocolate, linen, and cutlery. Philadelphians also took out advertisements, peddling the latest books, offering package deals on stationery, inquiring about apprentices, and offering rewards for runaway slaves and servants. Merchants and artisans discovered a new economic mobility within the urban milieu of commerce and manufacturing. This mobility expressed itself through outward emblems of social prosperity. As Carey noted, “The number of coaches, coachees, chairs, &c. lately set up by men in the middle rank of life, is hardly credible.” Urbanization and sky-rocketing prices, combined with this inclination towards luxury, was changing the dynamic of wealth and labor in the city. “Affairs were in such a situation,” Carey contended, “that many people, though they had a tolerable run of business, could hardly do more than clear their rents, toiling for their landlords.” Such a condition seemed odious to Carey. The republican foundation of the country “depended on its temperance and sober manners.” 33 Neither trait appeared in regular practice during the summer of 1793.

32 Carey, 8-10.

33 Ibid., 10.
Amongst this tumult, and on the wings of Genêt’s arrival to the city, Democratic Societies began to slowly form around an ideology of populist political involvement. The first of these groups blatantly identified itself as ethnically German. Using the *National Gazette* to answer criticisms of its conduct in the city, the German Republican Society of Philadelphia explained its role and its explicitly German heritage. Citing that, “large portions of the state” remained “wholly ignorant of the English language,” the Society agreed to conduct all business and formal toasts in the German tongue. This served two purposes: one, to unite the German minority present within the city; and two, to educate them on the machinations of government. This stricture had obviously created some consternation within the capital, for the last paragraph and a half of their letter repeatedly argue that such steps served only unite the differing ethnicities within the city, not to bring them apart.34

For a Republican Society, this German manifestation sounded much more like an ethnic protection group than a political affiliation. While later communications from the society did take on the verbiage and ideals of the later, and more radical, groups, the German Republican society chose to maintain its German ethnicity as foundational element of its group identification. Rather than serving notice of German restiveness within the United States, the appearance of a German-specific group may better indicate the changing demographic dynamic within Philadelphia. Clearly the German community perceived the need for political education, advocacy, and empowerment, and the Republican Society filled that need.

The more vocal, and radical, of the societies formed about six weeks after the *National Gazette* article from the German Society. Formally founded on May 30, 1793, the Democratic

34 *National Gazette*, April 13, 1793.
Society of Pennsylvania immediately sounded a strident anti-aristocratic tone, one far different from that of its Charleston brothers. The Society’s constitution began with an all-capital letter “THE RIGHTS OF MAN,” and carried on by describing how the successive American and French Revolutions had torn away the veil of “adventitious splendor” and “antiquated usurpations.” The Democratic Society sought to “erect the Temple of LIBERTY on the ruins of Palaces and Thrones.” And the Society did not limit this project to Europe alone, for “the vigilance of the people have been too easily absorbed in victory.” Interestingly enough, the party claimed to be “unfettered by religious and national distinctions,” a potentially underhanded criticism of its avowedly German predecessor.35

But instead of agitating for increased U.S.-French partnering in military matters and the abandonment of neutrality, the Society looked to build a more introspective political movement. The “fundamental principles of our association” all dealt with the power of people in republican government and their inherent right to discuss and question policies enacted by their elected officials.36 A circular letter meant to spread the news of the Society to the remainder of the state declared that “the seeds of luxury appear to have taken root in our domestic soil” and that “a constant circulation of useful information…were thought to be the best antidotes to any political poison.”37 The Society took a somewhat less hard line in terms of indicting the Washington Administration’s neutrality policy (although it was against it), and instead placed more emphasis on fostering a more radicalized discourse among the republic’s citizenry.


36 Ibid.

The outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia several months later further added to the discourses on radicalism. The National Gazette, the primary editorial voice of the Society, continued to print throughout the early days of the epidemic, announcing a hiatus in October 1793 ostensibly to install a new printing press. Prior to this journalistic pause, all of the papers in Philadelphia, save for Freneau’s National Gazette, shuttered their windows. The Gazette did not print anything about the epidemic until September 11, and further reporting on the calamitous events within the city seemed disjointed during September and early October. The general quarantine of Philadelphia prevented the ready regurgitation of overseas news, and the lack of federal and civic governmental actions forced the Gazette to fill its columns with sundry items. Reports of quarantine and state and civic legislation to control the spread of the disease often appeared as front page news.38 By October, Freneau, seeking solid news of the disease, began to publish editorials concerning its cause. The most striking to appear blamed the contagion on the moral laxity and love of luxury that had pervaded the city during the heady days of summer. Published October 16, during some of the darkest and most fatal days of the epidemic, the front page article quoted scripture, proclaiming that, “Fools make a mock of sin.” “Sabbath breaking” appeared as the primary sin of Philadelphians prior to the epidemic, and the author filled the paper’s first column with admonitions about not observing the Lord’s Day. By the second column, though, a new vein of thought becomes apparent. The polemicist attacked the landlords, asking “how many of the poor and unbefriended have groaned beneath the burden of a heavy rent?”39

38 See National Gazette newspapers from September 11, 21, 25, and 28, 1793.

39 National Gazette, October 16, 1793.
This populist apocalyptic vision also boomed from the pulpit. Thomas Dunn, commemorating the day of thanksgiving in December 1793 that formally marked the end of the epidemic, began his oration by reminding everyone that, “the poor and the rich man meet together [in death], the lord is the maker of them all.” Riches corrupted the “poor man,” so “honest, industrious, and [a] useful member of society.” The latest epidemic proved the impotence the rich before the power of God. “All most fall alike before the stroke of death,” Dunn proclaimed, “all must obey that voice which faith, return ye, children of men.”

Death, money, and politics melded together towards the end of 1793. And to further stir the pot of radicalism, Dunn gave his sermon in Philadelphia’s prison.

Ecological catastrophe evidently exacerbated a roiling socio-economic conflict already present in 1790s Philadelphia. When the Society did formally meet again the January after the epidemic had run its course, it began its minutes with a number of resolves that outlined its clear favor for France during the ongoing conflict and its general disdain for the administration’s handling of the neutrality issue. But, to answer these resolves, the Society still looked inward, placing the onus for righting the nation’s foreign policy on its democratic principles and republican guarantees of liberty. The resolutions held that, “tryal [sic] by jury ought to be held sacred and inviolate” while decrying the apparent “mimicry” of European aristocratic society by the heads of the republic. In contrast to the Charleston Society, the Society in Philadelphia maintained a deep streak of populist radicalism from its very inception. Whereas the Society in

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40 Thomas Dunn, *Equality of Rich and Poor; A Sermon Preached in the Prison of Philadelphia on Thursday, December 12th, 1793, being the Appointed Day for Humiliation and Thanksgiving, on the Ceasing of the Late Epidemical Fever*, Manuscript Collection, LCP.

41 Foner, ed., 70-71.
South Carolina only agitated against coercive government power after a series of arrests and trials for its members, the Philadelphia Society launched a biting critique of institutions at both the local and national level from its first missive.

The basis for this marked difference between the societies most likely lay in the dissimilar compositions of the group. A survey of the membership of the Pennsylvania Democratic Society reveals a striking occupational dissimilarity between it and the Republican Society of South Carolina. Of the close to 220 registered members of the society, only five (approximately 2%) identified themselves as “gentleman,” and no military ranks or titles appear, either. “Merchant,” “printer,” and “shopkeeper” appear far more regularly in the Society’s rolls, alongside “lawyer,” “doctor,” and “teacher.” Such a bourgeois composition feels out of place when considered alongside the espoused racialism of the group. The South Carolina’s Society, manned for the most part by well-to-do low country planters/slave-owners, never ventured as far out in the political spectrum as the Philadelphia group.

The collapse of the Atlantic commercial market following the British declaration of war and its imposition of a blockade more than likely played a role in the Society’s radicalization. Capital retraction in Great Britain at the inauguration of its war with Republican France early in 1793 created cascading bankruptcies that extended across the Atlantic. Lack of ready capital among Philadelphia’s merchants slowed general commerce throughout the city and with it the mid-Atlantic hinterlands that gravitated towards the city as a commercial entrepôt. “The stocks are very low here,” Jefferson wrote on May 5. He fully expected the return of shipments of paper to England to drive them down further.\textsuperscript{42} Concluding his scathing criticism of the avarice

\textsuperscript{42} Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793, \textit{PTJ} 25, 661.
among the Philadelphia mercantile elite, Carey claimed that “during this period, many men experienced as great difficulties as ever known in this city.” And the denizens of Market and Water Streets, the nexus of commerce and trade in the city, would most deeply feel the squeeze of fiscal tightening. Here began the political agitation that preceded the formation of the Society: the dockside celebration of *Embuscade*’s victory, the street demonstrations for Genêt’s arrival, and the printing of several anti-administration broadsides and newspapers.

At the same time, the Society’s stance on African-Americans, if not overtly radical, did assume a different tack than that of the Charleston group. While some may point to the long tradition of Quaker opposition to slavery in Philadelphia as its foundation, the 1790s radicalization of politics apparently played a strong role, as well. By the middle of the decade, Philadelphia, for a number of reasons, experienced an explosion in its free black population. While some resentment of this demographic change did build among Philadelphians and the group’s increased political restiveness, the city, for the most part, allowed the black community to build a place for itself within its environs. And several members of the Society advocated for them, particularly Dr. Benjamin Rush. As Rush recounted, blacks and whites supped together and served each other at the roof-raising celebration for the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia during August, 1793.

Some years later, at the formal association of the church, the leaders made sure to “pray for the long life of Dr. Benjamin Rush, who was the first gentleman that assisted us with advice.”

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43 Carey, 11.

44 Ira Berlin first tackled this demographic shift; see Berlin, 79-107. Berlin’s study focuses on the South, however. Gary Nash takes the Berlin model and traces its development in Philadelphia; see Nash, 100 – 133.

45 Benjamin Rush to Julia Rush, August 2, 1793, LBR, vol. 2.
At this same meeting, the members of the church proclaimed “that none but coloured persons shall be chosen as trustees of the said African Episcopal Bethell Church.” One of the members named Richard Allen, an advocate for abolition, also wished to thank those supporters “who devote their time and service freely to work out a deliverance for the poor African race.” The articles of association concluded with a strident anti-slavery poem, condemning a slave owner for trading a black child for a pocket watch. At a period when the Constitution forbade the formal legislative debate of slavery, Rush-supported African-Americans felt empowered to publish clearly incendiary tracts against the practice.

And this publication was not the first one to speak out against elements of the white community. Absalom Jones, a leader in the Philadelphia black community, published a pamphlet in 1794 that addressed the role played by free blacks during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic. During the contagion, Rush had appealed to black leaders to assist him in caring for the sick, transporting the dead, and maintaining civic functions. African-Americans readily stepped up to help, only to see the de facto official account of the epidemic, Carey’s A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, either disregard their role or lampoon them for ineptness and thievery. Jones, present in Philadelphia throughout the epidemic, fought back, stating that the black community oftentimes lost money due to the charitable nature of their work. “We have buried several hundreds of poor persons and strangers,” he wrote, “for which service we have never received, nor never asked, for any compensation.” Jones went a step further, accusing poor whites of the

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46 Articles of Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1799, Manuscript Collection, LCP.
thefts that Carey described. “We can with certainty assure the public,” he stated, “that we have seen more humanity, more sensibility, from the poor blacks than the poor whites.”

In goals, composition, and racial viewpoints, the Democratic Societies in Charleston and Philadelphia differed markedly. At the same time, they did share some strong similarities. Both drew a clear connection between the French and American Revolutions in their intent and the reciprocal nature of support. The Washington administration’s claims that the nature of the French government had changed and that this annulled the treaties of the 1770s and 1780s found little traction among both groups. The Charleston society did not deign to formulate an ideological response to this argument, instead painting the French Revolution as an embodiment of liberty that needed U.S. protection. Charlestonians could draw a clear line from the monarchical designs in Europe to future conflicts in America. The Philadelphia Society, already claiming the corruption of the republic, took a much harsher stance, seeing the president’s neutrality position as backtracking against an ally. Such a perception fueled the notion that neutrality equated to treason. “All persons who, directly or indirectly, promote this unnatural succession [neutrality],” the Society claimed, “ought to be considered by every free american as enemies to republicanism and their country.” The French Revolution, for both groups, portended future struggle, be it at home or abroad. The difference for the groups entailed who they would struggle against: European or American monarchists.

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48 Foner, ed., 69.
Both groups also voiced a critique against a corrupt government. Granted, the charges of corruption in South Carolina came later in the agitation process, and proved much more personal and less critical of the entire system, but it did employ a rhetorical device similar to that of the Philadelphia group — subversion of the democratic system. The society in Charleston could only fathom the undemocratic actions of the South Carolina legislature if they constructed a conspiracy of British secret agents. Philadelphia’s conspiracy proved less cloak-and-dagger and more money-and-power. Those leading the country through the neutrality crisis represented a monarchical influence within the republic, and the machinations of the federal government served their interests, a far cry from the disinterested republicanism of days gone by. Only full citizen involvement could provide the antidote to this subversion. Again, South Carolina never went this far, but this may be that they viewed energizing this populace as little help against British spies.

These broad commonalities show the pervasiveness and flexibility of Jacobin rhetoric in the United States of the 1790s. The groups in Charleston and Philadelphia, almost wholly diverse in the practical sense, could use similar phrases and words to convey disparate notions, and thus claim geographical connections. Both societies, almost from their inceptions, saw fit to create Corresponding Committees as a means to engender a dialogue composed of the common phrases mentioned above. Such a program allowed the groups to use the same words when they actually meant different things, sharing common ideological visions that grew in variance when one considered the details.

“Patriotism…has its bounds” – Lexington

At some point during late 1793 or early 1794, President Washington and several members of the United States Congress received a letter from “Citizens West of the Allegheny Mountains.” No normal “remonstrance,” the correspondence took a strident tone, one similar to the rhetorical flourishes of the preceding Democratic Societies. “We still experience,” the letter proclaimed, “that the strong nerved government of America, extends its arm of protection to all the branches of the union, but to your Remonstrants.” The denizens of Kentucky had suffered too long outside the pale of the national republic. An unresponsive federal government had done little to meet the needs of the people of the frontier, those that represented the farthest reach of the American experiment in North America. No one should question the patriotism of the letter writers. They did concede that “patriotism, like every other thing, has its bounds.”

As they closed, the writers took an insurrectionist tone: “We declare it a right which must be obtained; and also declare, that if the General Government will not procure it for us, we shall hold ourselves not answerable for any consequences that may result from our procurement of it.”

Discussion of natural rights and the responsibility of government dominate the missive throughout, the citizens of Kentucky employing the vocabulary of radical governance to seek the expansion of concrete federal power across the western mountains. But for what purpose might these democrats speak out against a perceived federal injustice? “That Your Remonstrants are entitled by Nature and by stipulation,” they stated, “to the undisturbed Navigation of the

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50 “Remonstrances of the Citizens West of the Allegheny Mountains to the President and Congress of the United States.” N.d., Harry Innes Papers, 335N, Box 1, LOC. This remonstrance is located with a letter from James G. Hunter dated January 5, 1793, in which Innes declares his approval of its writing. See also, Foner, ed., 366-368.
Mississippi, and consider it a right inseparable from their posterity." We know from a later letter posted by one August Lachaise, a consul within the French government, that the letter, or at least its content, had been forwarded to the French Executive Council, and both had been written by Kentucky’s permutation of the Democratic Society.

Kentucky’s Democratic Society may represent the most unique manifestation of the Democratic Societies in the United States. Almost from its inception, the Society shared the rhetoric of the other groups still forming along the Atlantic seaboard. In fact, from its very creation, the Kentucky Democratic Society espoused “the laudable objects of the Philadelphia Democratic Society.” Much as in Philadelphia and Charleston, the Society quickly determined that they would need an official printed platform for their pronouncements. At the same meeting that formed the Society, the body charged with drawing up the rules of the body recruited John Bradford, the editor of the *Kentucky Gazette* and one of the members of the Society, to print the minutes and announcements from all forthcoming meetings.

A week following the announcement of the Society’s formation, the *Kentucky Gazette* printed the Society’s statement of purpose. The group fervently recognized the power of the citizenry within the republic, placing “Democracy by representation” above any other form of governance. But democracy required diligence. “That in order to preserve the inestimable blessings of liberty, from the open attacks of avowed tyrants, or the more insidious, tho much

51 Ibid.
52 “August Lachaise to the Democratic Society of Lexington,” May 9, 1793, Harry Innes Letters, 335N, Box 1, LOC; also Foner, ed., 368-369.
more destructive machinations of ambitious and intriguing men,” the Society warned, “it behooves the people to watch over the conduct of their officers in every department of government.” The dire warning against “ambitious and intriguing men,” while not as bombastic as the Philadelphia Society’s broadside against aristocrats and monarchists, did reflect the tone of the earlier Society’s rhetoric. The remainder of the statement mirrored it, as well. The missive intoned the “Rights of Man” and the “blessings of Freedom and Equality,” while France had recently “caught the glorious flame” of beneficent revolution. By the statement’s close, the society appeared to have taken on the mantle of its Philadelphia brethren, planning to curtail undemocratic abuses at both the state and local level while safeguarding the political institutions that they viewed as potentially under attack. The statement drew little common cause with the French Revolution and did not directly condemn the Washington administration. Nonetheless, the statement served notice that the radical democratic urge bubbling over along the Atlantic coast had permeated into the interior.55

The arrival appears to have occurred in a time of political turbulence within the state. During the preceding March, Bradford reprinted a letter from London that heralded the ongoing wars in Europe as the end of monarchical rule. He later added his own comments, drawing parallels between British paranoia of French radicalism and the tragedy of Macbeth. Strikingly, the following paragraph within the same story directly criticized President Washington, stating that he “affects a greater state than any crowned head in Europe” and that, “when he travels, it is in the style of affected magnificence.” The future vice-president of the Kentucky Democratic

Society closed his pseudo-editorial ominously, stating “So much for the modesty of Republicanism.”

Fermenting discord at the state level appeared ready to rise that spring. A “NOTICE” printed in the Kentucky Gazette sought it necessary to remind the reading public that the national constitution recognized several individual rights. The anonymous editorialist believed that the new state constitution somehow brought these under attack. “There are a number of persons who conceive it necessary for the peace, safety and happiness of the state,” they wrote, “that the present constitution should be altered, reformed, or abolished.” The missive provides no clear evidence that the circular letters forwarded by the Philadelphia Society had reached Lexington yet, but clearly a coterie of citizens had begun to express a populist democratic prerogative that voiced concern over civil liberties and political representation. The forming of the Democratic Society, and its initial stated goals and purposes, seemed to have flowed out of this notion.

More concrete political matters began to appear in the pages of the Gazette as the spring slipped into summer. An article from August 10 recounted a July meeting among frustrated individuals in Lexington concerning the recent excise tax passed by the federal government. The law required payment of taxes in “specie only,” a difficult feat considering that free traffic of American goods on the Mississippi River had yet to be negotiated between the United States and Spain. In the second paragraph, the citizens gave voice to the first hinting of the radical rhetoric later used by the society. Passage on the Mississippi, currently “stopt by the Spanish,” represented a “natural and constitutional right” and, given the reciprocal nature of “allegiance

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56 Kentucky Gazette, March 23, 1793.

57 “NOTICE,” Kentucky Gazette, April 20, 1793.
and protection,” the group decided not to pay the excise tax until they benefitted from “equal protection in our trade.” The concerned citizens from the meeting included John Breckinridge, John Bradford, Thomas Bodley, and William Murray, all soon-to-be founding members of the Kentucky Democratic Society. The *Gazette* ran the minutes and proceedings from the meeting, in full, for three consecutive weeks, coinciding with the formal announcement of the forming of the Society.\(^{58}\)

The ideological statements communicated by the Society lessened by the ensuing autumn, replaced by a concrete and direct political action campaign. By mid-October, the Society clearly saw agitation for free transit on the Mississippi River as their primary mission. Co-opting the rhetoric of the other societies in the United States, the Kentucky group agreed that “the free and undisturbed use and navigation of the River Mississippi is the NATURAL RIGHT of the Citizens of the Commonwealth; and is unalienable with the SOIL; and that neither time, tyranny, nor prescription on the one side, nor acquiescence, weakness, or non use on the other, can even sanctify the abuse of this right.”\(^{59}\) Two months later, the Society’s Committee of Correspondence penned a circular letter to the “Inhabitants West of the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains” that continued to label the free navigation of the Mississippi as a natural right and, in a twist, declared it fuller a “Right of Man.” The Society went a step further, perhaps previewing their upcoming letter to the heads of the federal government. God himself had designed Kentucky and the frontier regions to enjoy the beneficence of navigable rivers and streams and bountiful lands. Those that foreswore the use of it “must be criminal” and taking

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\(^{58}\) *Kentucky Gazette*, August 10, 1793.

\(^{59}\) “Proceedings of a Meeting,” *Kentucky Gazette*, October 12, 1793.
away this right necessitated “the most arduous struggle.” The circular letter rose to a crescendo, blaming an Eastern seaboard-dominated national government that disdained actions that might benefit the citizens of the frontier. The Committee sought unity among all the counties in Kentucky, particularly as the prepared to compose their official remonstrance to the federal government.  

Clearly the formation of the Kentucky Democratic Society occurred at, or perhaps was precipitated by, the confluence of two ideological currents: radical democratic ideals transferred from the coastal societies, and a renewed furore directed at the inability of the federal government to negotiate passage of the Mississippi. While the former represented a new strain of thought, the latter tapped into a political concern that arose from a time preceding the state’s, and nation’s, inception. In a letter dated July 2, 1788, Robert Breckinridge, a relatively new Kentuckian, wrote to his brother, James, about issues concerning the current political questions of the day. Despite the ongoing debates within the numerous state legislatures around the issue of ratification of the federal constitution, Robert placed emphasis on the “satisfactory information” that the current Congress appeared favorably disposed to “open the navigation of the Mississippi for the exportation of produce from the western country.” Uncertainty over this issue most have created some consternation among residents of the frontier, for Robert made clear to point out the “apprehension” of many of his neighbors. Rectifying the issues concerning freedom of passage would bind the frontier to the national government while “reconciling them [Kentuckians] to the new system of Government.”  

60 “Address and Remonstrance to the Inhabitants of the United States West of the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains,” N.d., Harry Innes Papers, 335N, Box 1, LOC.  

61 Robert Breckinridge to James Breckinridge, July 2, 1788, Breckinridge Papers, FHS.
The inability of the new federal government to resolve the issue of free passage strained the bounds of national control on the frontier. From 1787 to at least 1792, James Wilkinson, a former general in the Continental and United States Armies, coordinated with Francisco Miro, a colonial official in Spanish Louisiana, to create a Spanish vassalage of Kentucky. Wilkinson prepared to renounce his citizenship while working out the machinations for a transfer of control, and ultimately, secession from the United States. The primary causes of discontent that Wilkinson outlined dealt primarily with what he believed to be an ineffectual system of government. Ratification of the federal constitution had left unaddressed key issues for Kentucky — lack of infrastructure improvement, protection from Indian attacks, and, most importantly, free passage on the Mississippi River. Wilkinson argued that the government in New York, and later Philadelphia, willfully underdeveloped Kentucky and the whole frontier region in order to benefit eastern merchants.62

While some have brought into question the validity of Wilkinson’s claims, arguing that his intent remained primarily monetary, the aptly named “Spanish Conspiracy” brought concern at the national and state level. By the time the Conspiracy ran its course during the early 1790s, Wilkinson, along with Harry Innes and Benjamin Sebastian, two judges (Innes a federal one) with intricate social and economic ties with Wilkinson, would be implicated as traitors by many.

in national politics. All would rebound socially and politically; Innes maintained his role as a significant figure in Kentucky politics, acting as a link between the federal and local governments, and Wilkinson would later command the Western Army during and after the Quasi-War. The stain of the conspiracy lingered on; typical among those who never forgot Wilkinson’s actions was one Edward Clark, an early-nineteenth century Kentucky politician. Recollecting on the Spanish Conspiracy to a friend in 1807, Clark regretted the chance to have killed Wilkinson years before, going so far to claim that “[if] I had one guinea I would freely give it for rope to hang Wilkinson.”

Of note from this period, Innes outlined his reasons for free navigation of the Mississippi River alongside his disappointment in the new federal government’s inability to defend the frontier and promote commerce within the region. In a late 1780s letter to John Brown, a friend an associate from his earlier days in Virginia, Innes enumerated his issues with the sitting Congress. He listed first among his many issues “free navigation,” something bestowed upon the frontiersmen by “the god of nature.” While he never went so far as to deem transit on the Mississippi a “natural right” or among the “Rights of Man,” Innes did claim that the inability of Congress to resolve the issue prevented “equality of liberty.” Whereas eastern states could enjoy the “blessings of their land,” western states could not. The remainder of the letter outlined an argument that seems to have come more from an anti-federalist position on ratification, discussing Congress’ backing out of international negotiations, recounting the federal

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63 Ibid.; also see correspondence between Wilkinson and Innes from 1789-1794, in Harry Innes Papers, 335N, Box 1, LOC.

64 Edward Clark to George Hopkins, July 17, 1807, in the Clark-Hite-Shell Papers within the Bodley Collection, FHS.
government’s inability to pay its debts, and closing by wondering if Congress even had the power to enforce a prohibition of travel on the river.\textsuperscript{65} Although the rhetoric may come from a period of different political discourse, Innes’ comments clearly helped establish an ideological framework for those Kentuckians who agitated in the following years for free navigation.

The potential implications of taking the matter of American shipping on the Mississippi River into their own hands appears to have crossed the minds of the members of the Society. Beyond the normal outreach conducted by the Committee of Correspondence, the Society apparently sought the guidance of the more senior denizens of Kentucky. Letters arrived to prominent Kentuckians throughout late 1793 and early 1794, each enclosing a specific copy of the Circular letter and a brief letter explaining the causes and eventual goal. Harry Innes received a copy, but historians have yet to locate his response.\textsuperscript{66} The other respondents, located throughout the state, voiced strong support for the Society’s move to agitate for free navigation against the federal government. Notably, the respondents accepted the argument that free navigation represented a natural right, almost immediately agreeing upon and echoing the rhetorical devices used by the Democratic Society.\textsuperscript{67} In only a few months, the Democratic Society of Kentucky successfully changed the narrative of free navigation from one of conspiracies to one of natural rights.

\textsuperscript{65} Harry Innes to John Brown, N.D. (believed to be late 1780s), Isaac Shelby Papers, SC727, The Kentucky Historical Society (hereafter KHS), Frankfort, KY.

\textsuperscript{66} Within the Innes papers at the LOC is an envelope, dated January 7, 1794, with a return address from “Citizen John Breckinridge, President, Democratic Society of Kentucky.” The circular is not enclosed, but bound with the envelope is a letter from James G. Hunter, apparently a lawyer in Danville, Kentucky. This letter deals directly with the Circular Letter, and may have been forwarded along with the Circular Letter forward to Innes.

\textsuperscript{67} James G. Hunter to Committee of Correspondence of the Democratic Society of Kentucky, January 5, 1794, Harry Innes Papers, 335N, Box 1, LOC; and John Crittenden, Sr., Willam Murray, January 6, 1794, John Breckinridge Papers, FHS.
The reaching out to grounded members of Kentucky society might reflect a generational gap. Much as in the other Societies, an analysis of the group’s composition can help explain its motivations and causes. The majority of the members of the Democratic Society in Kentucky were young men who had arrived in the state within five years of the Society’s founding, oftentimes after the furor over the Spanish Conspiracy had abated. Most had chosen the law as their profession, but also owned small farms or plantations. As such, this unique group represented a hybrid of what typified the Societies in Philadelphia and Charleston. Seeking upward mobility, they agitated for free navigation of the Mississippi River as a means to engender commercial transactions within the Trans-Appalachia West. As in the previous chapter, Genêt did attempt to initiate filibustering campaigns in the Kentucky region much as he supposedly did in Charleston. The Kentucky Society, however, never changed its position on free navigation nor expanded its rhetoric to draw more common cause with the French Revolution. By early 1794, the policy of free navigation represented a democratic issue in that it stymied growth and opportunity and did not reflect the needs of the citizens of Kentucky.

Among all of the Democratic Societies, the Kentucky Society proved most successful; as discussed in the next chapter, the Society’s agitation eventually led to the fruition of their goal. As discussed previously in terms of the other Societies, rhetoric played a significant role in how the society crafted its political narrative. While they initially saw fit to voice similar phrases and

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ideologies to those of the Philadelphia Society, the citizens in Lexington rapidly recognized the fluidity of the political discourse. In the passing of a few short months, Breckinridge and his followers applied the rhetoric of radical democracy to a concrete issue: free navigation of the Mississippi River.

“20,000 United Irishmen Would Land in America” – The Federalist Voice

Amidst the tumultuous gubernatorial 1799 election season in Philadelphia, both parties used the public sphere to ramp up their rhetoric. Republicans and Federalists viewed the municipal elections in Philadelphia as an indicator for the presidential and congressional votes the following year. Pronouncements and indictments both flowed from rallies, newspapers, and pamphlets as the city’s streets seemed awash with political discourse and rupture. As the polling day neared, the Republican candidate for governor, Thomas McKean, found himself forced to address a pamphlet to his supporters. Instead of the traditional platform statements or discussion of policy, McKean instead used the aptly titled “To the Republicans of Philadelphia” to reject accusations from his opponent, Mr. James Ross. These proved to be no simple accusation; Ross and his “partisans” has taken to the press to announce that McKean had conspired with foreigners so that “20,000 United Irishmen would land in American” and had sought to create a clear diplomatic rupture between Great Britain and the United States.70 A vote for McKean, Ross claimed, meant the overthrow of the republic at the bayonet of radical Jacobinists.

McKean’s short pamphlet helps us recreate the world of political rhetoric in the pre-Jeffersonian era. Much as historian Jeffrey Palsey has noted, newspapers and pamphlets quickly

70 Thomas McKean, “To the Republicans of Philadelphia,” December 1799, Special Manuscript Collection, LCP.
politicized the early republic’s public sphere. The “unbiased press” did not exist. Rather, newspapers and pamphlets acted as a public venue to discuss and debate political ideology and party formulation.\textsuperscript{71} As noted earlier, Hamilton and others openly used the Federalist press to explain the early stages of the Washington administration’s policy. He and other Federalists avidly believed that the press played an integral role in party formation, and cultivated a Federalist press to counter the Republican’s efforts in this realm. The public sphere served as a political battleground, a particularly violent and personal one considering the chaotic nature of party formation during the 1790s.

This perspective of the politicized public sphere lends itself to a top-down construction of rhetorical debate. Hamilton’s “No Jacobin” essays provide a clear example of this in practice. At the same time, the Federalist press served a clear purpose beyond simply describing policy or constructing party platforms. Much as the Democratic Societies did during the early 1790s, the Federalist press created normative rhetorical devices in which to structure the opposition.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, by 1800, the seemingly absurd notion that a candidate in a local election would beseech the support of foreign radicals or conspire to break apart international treaties would appear normal in the context of an election cycle. Unlike the Democratic Societies, the Federalist response ignored the particulars, focusing instead on the radical portions of the societies’ rhetoric. Thus, they could overlook the acquisition of territory through filibustering, but not the conspiratorial nature of backroom dealings with the radical French; and they could agree that free traffic of the Mississippi would benefit the commerce of the United States, but not the grassroots militarism of

\textsuperscript{71} Palsey, \textit{The Tyranny of the Printers}, 3-13.

the frontier. And most importantly, it clearly rejected the notion of social or political radicalism, painting it as akin to the worst of the blood-soaked guillotine portions of the French Revolution. The problem, as the Federalists press saw it, was “Jacobinism,” a loosely defined anarchic radicalism that many thought would sweep the globe.

The Federalist press, by 1795, had reached a full-throated roar excoriating the Democratic Societies as un-American anarchists. Initially, pamphleteers and authors, often working under the pseudonyms like “William Playfair” or “Peter Porcupine,” drew clear ideologically and conspiratorially linkages between radical French Jacobinism and the “democratic impulse” gradually spreading in the United States. William Playfair, in his 1796 pamphlet “History of Jacobinism,” described Jacobinism as a radical anarchic movement that, emanating from France, had spread across the English Channel and, ultimately, the Atlantic. As he noted, “this ‘declaration of rights’ is evidently worded as if they were legislating for the human race, and not their own country alone.” In fact, Playfair noted revolutionary rumblings in England helped serve as “proof of their [Jacobin] existence, [and] that a Paris club [again Jacobin] publicly boasted of propagating its principles in all nations.” Jacobinism existed and operated like an epidemic, clearly crossing over international boundaries and natural barriers through the minds of “infected” individuals, ready to enflame an unprotected populace.73

Playfair clearly saw the radicalism created by the French Revolution as a global threat to liberty. He outlined the failure of the ideology in France; Jacobinism had, by 1796, produced no discernible improvement in French society, politics, or governance. In fact, Playfair noted, “how far must the country fall back in so long a period, and how great the share of individual misery

must be on that account, is not difficult to conceive.” And the rupture created by Jacobinism extended well beyond the genial sphere of radical politics and national affairs. Playfair shared several “eyewitness reports” from what he claimed to be the remnants of a grassroots-style French press. Apparently, as Jacobinism swept the rural French countryside, mobs of peasants and small farmers had risen up and attacked Catholic priests, local officials, and the landed gentry. These attacks proved more than just symbolic, as Playfair detailed families being “cut to pieces,” a noble wife being “shot” by and axe over her head, and priests whose feet were burnt off.”

Jacobinism, as an ideology, sought social upheaval and rejected any notions of civil governance.

Playfair’s commentary helped lay the foundation for those that decried global Jacobinism as a threat to world order. But many worried that the time for defending against its arrival had passed. As Peter Porcupine explained in his November 1796 pamphlet “History of American Jacobinism,” the “Jacobins of Paris [had already] sent forth their missionaries of insurrection and anarchy, their professed object was to enlighten the ignorant and unchain the enslaved.” And the United States could prove to be very vulnerable to Jacobin subversion, Porcupine opined. The Jacobins had directed their missionaries to “countries alone where the greatest degree of personal liberty already [was] found.” The nature of the American republic, with its guarantee of individual rights and suffrage among its citizenry, would create ample space for French radicals to operate and spread their noxious message of social upheaval and political anarchy. In fact, carrying out this subversion might be easier in the United States than it had been in France. A bloodless Jacobin coup could take place within regularly scheduled elections as the radical

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74 Ibid., 287 and 289.
missionaries subverted the public sphere to spread lies and half-truths about the course of the republic and the policies of its administration. In this manner, the Jacobins could “draw as many nations as possible within the votes of their own savage system.”

Building a fifth column of radicals within a republic and attempting to subvert it from the inside became a particularly prevalent mantra in the Federalist press and ideology throughout the 1790s. Thomas Bradford printed a tongue-in-cheek condemnation of the “democrats” in his 1795 pamphlet, “A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats.” The author of the pamphlet drew a clear connection between possible Jacobin missionaries and “democrats,” the manifestation of Jacobinism within the United States. And these “democrats” were not ephemeral or faceless groups. They were the “under-strappers of Democratic clubs” that had so recently begun voicing their opinions and ideology within the public realm of the United States, so coincidentally timed to coincide with the radical stages of the French Revolution they so warmly appeared to endorse. And a Jacobin missionary of the type that Porcupine described also existed: Citizen Edmund Genêt, the recipient of numerous toasts from Democratic Societies throughout the country. The notion that Genêt founded the Democratic Societies became entrenched in Federalist lore. Washington himself expressed this idea in his personal letters.

The author of the pamphlet described how the Democratic societies would “deadden the limbs of government, and then seize the reins themselves.” He also described that year’s

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75 Peter Porcupine, *History of American Jacobinism*, Philadelphia, November 1796, 7; in *American Imprints Series I*, viewed at LCP.

76 *A Bone to Gnaw on For the Democrats*, 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, printer, 1795; Special Manuscript Collection, LCP.

Whiskey Rebellion as the start of “an epoch of sans-culottism” and “the beginning of the Western Rebellion.” Such machinations proved that Jacobin subversion existed and was having an effect on American politics and governance, and just like Porcupine stated, the nature of the American republic allowed for these radicals to spread their destructive ideology. Although their sway appeared to be decreasing in the United States (maybe in response to the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion), the author recognized that the public political space allowed them to spread their gospel of anarchy. He even went so far as to label them “anti-federalists,” blatantly utilizing the political rhetoric of the ratification debates to draw parallels between the “democrats” that sought to subvert the republic and those that never wanted it to be formed at all. The newer group proved worse, however, in that they disdained government in its totality. These Jacobin/democrats hated the British and United States governments not purely in relation to their hostility and indifference, respectively, to France, but rather due to the fact they “have both the same radical defect, a power to suppress anarchy; to say all in one word, because they are governments.” “They seize every opportunity,” the author proclaimed, “in reviling the government, representing every tax as oppression, and exciting the ignorant to insurrection.”

A later pamphlet, entitled Guillotina, or a Democratic Dirge, further added to the rhetorical vitriol levied at the Democratic Societies and their adherents. “Come Guillotine, Muse divine,” the unnamed author wrote,

Whose voice o’erawes the tuneful nine;
Come sing again! Since Ninety-Five,
Has left some Antis still alive;

78 A Bone to Gnaw on for the Democrats, 22-33.
Some Jacobins as per as ever,
Tho’ much was hop’d from yellow fever...79

The author turned the damning image of the blood-soaked guillotine against itself, wishing public executions upon those left alive through the political battles of the previous years. The mention of the yellow fever indicates that the author specifically sought to indict the members of the Pennsylvania Democratic Society, so damaged by the epidemic of 1793. Further on, the author outlined a dramatic timeline of such whom would claim to be democrats of Jacobins. Evoking images of Rome, Chaucer, Noah, and Arcturus, he claimed that anarchical elements had existed throughout history, often claiming to represent the public while hiding designs on “speculation” and personal wealth. And each time they found success, be it in land or riches, the democrats turned upon each other, leading to further chaos and rupture.

Leaving a mythological past for a contentious present, the pamphlet discussed how this same element, allowed to foster within a republican system, had arrayed itself against John Jay and his mission to England. Bowing to hyperbole, the author crafted John Jay into a new born infant, sitting before a collection of named politicians who will decide whether he shall live or die. The descriptions used to describe the politicians fell back upon the same devices used prior to the publication of the Guillotina: “Irish,” “vagabond and traitor,” “host of thieves,” and “mongrel throng” (this describing Southern politicians, clearly a nod to fears of race-mixing under Jacobin radicalism). He even goes as far to compare one democratic blusterer to a “stingless hone,” described in a footnote as a “creature of doubtful gender.” Rising to a

79 Guillotina, or a Democratic Dirge, author unk., 1795/6, 1, Special Manuscripts Collection, LCP.
crescendo, the motley mob chose death for the infant Jay, but from the babe’s cradle arose instead “a giant” who wastes no time and “trampled on the dastard throng.”

What should fascinate the modern reader of Guillotina is the maturity of the Federalist rhetoric by 1796. Over the preceding three years, Federalist commentators had built a strong foundation on which to defend their political designs. Distrustful of the burgeoning political dissension within the republic, they especially derided the advent of grassroots political movements that took their protests to the streets. The Democratic Societies, united by rhetoric but divided by goals, provided the most opportune foil to Federalist writers. Looking past the specifics, the Federalists focused on the rhetoric of radicalism to create an “us versus them” division in the political debates informally held in the public political space. In essence, they did the same as the Societies by creating a unifying rhetoric that could fit each partisan group, no matter their unique situations or goals. In that manner, all opposition to the administration became dangerous and conspiratorial, and liberty and freedom were at stake.

At the same time, Guillotina foreshadowed upcoming political battles for the just-now-forming Federalist Party. Again, rhetorical flourishes help illuminate these points. As noted, the author of the pamphlet called out “Irish” and the “mongrel throng,” combining elements of xenophobia in terms of emigration and miscegenation. Later in his writing, the author also mentions “Emigration [‘] s drain,” further adding to the xenophobic perception of the radical element. Such xenophobia does not come purely from a place of ethnic hatred of fear. Rather, as the pamphleteers outlines, all of these “patriots’ that espoused democratic principles actually “fingered foreign gold” and “bear strong resemblance to the traitor” [Judas Iscariot from the

80 Ibid., 8-11.
Bible.\textsuperscript{81} A mass conspiracy existed within the republic, and its caricature as an apocalyptic struggle of near-mythic beasts and giants reveals the lack of any political middle-ground within the present political contest.

By avoiding complexity, the Federalist press allowed for their rhetoric to flourish and travel, sweeping the network of pro-administration newspapers across the country. By 1798, \textit{The Palladium} of Frankfort, Kentucky, had begun a full throated indictment of democratic elements within the state, most notably, the popular Jeffersonian Republicans who had started out as members of the Democratic Society. “A mob assembled on the 24 of July [1798],” \textit{The Palladium}’s editor stated, and, mimicking their own voice, noted that they “resolved that thar es sufushunt resen to beeleev and wee doo beeleeve that our leebertee es in dainger and wee plege ourselves too echother and too ouer cuntery that we will defend um against awl unconstentional ataks that mey bee made upon um.”\textsuperscript{82} \textit{The Palladium} clearly decided to portray the democratic element in Kentucky as uneducated, and earlier statements in the paper described “ambitious DESIGNING MEN” who sought to lead the masses into “anarchy and confusion.”\textsuperscript{83} Conspiracies abounded for the Federalist press, and radicalism lay behind it.

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During the first half of August 1793, a broadside entitled “A Peep into the Antifederal Club” began to appear on the walls of the buildings that neighbored Market Street in

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{The Paladium}, November 6, 1798.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{The Paladium}, September 18, 1798.
Philadelphia. An early example of political cartoon-style satire in the Early Republic, some modern historians tend to catalogue it with the numerous diatribes generated by both sides during the ratification debates. A closer inspection reveals that it can only be a product of the early 1790s and the burgeoning Federalist critique of radicalism, in general, and the Democratic Societies, in particular. Satan sits at the bottom right, proclaiming, “I never knew an institution equal to this since the creation...What a pleasure it is to see one’s work thrive so well.” An obese glutton drinks ale while those around him, all wearing different shades of collusion and conspiracy, damn the federal government. An African-American derisively named “Citizen Mongo” stands in the upper-right, a clear connection between Jacobin radicalism and the recent assertiveness of the African-American population in Philadelphia. Edmund Genêt and David Rittenhouse, a member of the Pennsylvania Democratic Society, peer through a telescope to read a satirical rendering of the Society’s pledge. Comments such as, “Governments but another home for aristocracy,” “All means are justifiable to a good end,” and “The Society up and the else down” run from top to bottom. This antifederal club, a den of atheists, drunkards, and heathens, clearly seek out the means to overthrow the administration and create something anarchic in its own image.

Among the rabble, standing on a table and apparently helping to incite the antifederals around him, is Thomas Jefferson. The satirist penned a version of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy coming out of Jefferson’s mouth, asking “To be or not to be a broker, that is the question,”

84 “A Peep into the Antifederal Club,” August 16, 1793, Images and Lithograph Collection, LCP.

85 It is the cover to Saul Cornell’s work on the anti-federalists during the ratification debate; Saul Cornell, The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788 - 1828 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
following up with whether it was to build something with the hammer in his hands, or “with this head contrive some means of knocking down a government and on its ruins raise myself to Eminence and Fortune.” Jefferson, at least in the broadside, belonged amidst the “antifederals” and the other radical Jacobins in the Democratic Societies. Such a caricature helps illuminate the status of party formation in the middle portion of the 1790s. As in the last chapter, the heads of the still-forming party apparatus had shifted towards a policy of paranoia, hoping to prevent French intrusions into and against the United States. At the grass roots level, newspaper editors and satirists had developed a rhetorical foundation based on the radicalism of the Democratic Societies that condemned their supposed-anarchic roots and ties to Jacobin spies and conspirators. It should not surprise that, during the final years of Washington’s presidency, Federalist politicians, editors, and agitators drew clear linkages between conspiratorial radicalism and the now-just forming Republican Party. As we shall see, the policy decisions of this time reflect the worries of 1793 - ports that served as ideological battlegrounds and frontiers that seemed ready to either go up in flames or shear off from the nation.
Chapter 3

“Fresh Symptoms Every Moment Appear of a Dark Conspiracy:” The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Hardening of the Political Frame

At some point during the first half of 1793, a band of Native Americans “stole” some of Harry Innes’ slaves. Stolen, run away, fled — this mattered little to the federal judge and sometime conspirator. In his view, his property had been taken from him, and he saw fit to appeal directly to Thomas Jefferson and ask him to intercede on his behalf with the presently convening Indian commissioners. Secretary of State at the time, and responsible for overseeing the negotiations, Jefferson sought to soothe Inne’s angst. In a letter written in May 1793, Jefferson voiced calm, saying that he would speak with the designated commissioners on behalf of Innes. More importantly, he also hoped to craft wide-ranging treaty obligations between the United States government and the indigenous nations on the frontier in terms of “private property,” a nice euphemism for runaway or captured slaves.¹

In the following paragraph, Jefferson took his commentary further. “It is interesting to the US to see how this last effort for living in peace with the Indians will succeed,” he opined, worrying that, “if it does not, there will be a great revolution of opinion here as to the manner in which they are to be dealt with.” The Secretary admitted that chaos appeared to reign along the frontier, running from Kentucky down to the “Southern quarter.” Jefferson seamlessly transitioned from discussing these issues on the frontier to the now-boiling European war. “It is very necessary,” he noted to Innes, “for us to keep clear of the European combustion.” He also claimed that the ongoing events in Europe, which by written proximity appeared so close to

¹Thomas Jefferson to Harry Innes, May 23, 1793, Harry Innes Papers, 335N, box 1, LOC.
issues in Kentucky, might force the republic into a “change of government.” Perhaps with an
unknown sense of foreboding, he closed the letter to his Kentucky friend by stating, “This
summer is of immense importance to the future conditions of mankind all over the earth; and not
a little to ours.”

Jefferson’s letter to Innes could easily be disregarded as a piece of bureaucratic business,
or maybe just a rudimentary letter among friends. A more careful analysis, however, gives a
unique perspective into the Washington administration’s view of the frontier as the 1790s
progressed. Jefferson’s letter lays out three clear concerns. First, and the most pressing for Innes,
Indian raids coupled with the seizure of slaves and other captives highlighted the government’s
inability to cement its legitimacy in the borderlands. This had occurred throughout the young’s
nation history, but appeared increasingly pressing now given that the next several months
ushered in further questions of American legitimacy in its own ports. Second, Jefferson’s easy
transition from issues with Indians to war in Europe showed a common intellectual linkage
shared by many within Washington’s cabinet. Few saw the frontier as a line demarcating
civilization from empty space. Rather, most viewed it as a zone of ideological and imperial
contention, of which Jefferson would ignominiously play a part. Finally, these crises — the new
one in Europe and the simmering one on the frontier — would play a significant role in
determining the future path of the United States, potentially leading the nation on a course far-
removed from its current trajectory.

2 Ibid.

3 For a concise overview of Federalist’s designs on the Trans-Appalachian West, see Andrew R. L. Clayton,
“Radicals in the ‘Western World:’ The Federalist Conquest of Trans-Appalachian North America,” in Federalists
Reconsidered, ed. Ben-Atar and Oberg, 77 - 90.
While so far the present narrative has charted the summer of 1793 and revealed Thomas Jefferson’s resignation and self-induced exile in Monticello, his words to Innes betray much about Washington and the cabinet’s thoughts regarding the nature of the frontier. Washington, Knox, and Hamilton all echoed Jefferson’s concerns about the frontier in 1793, adding a heightened sense of anxiety to their worries throughout the decade. All three would make a concerted effort to solidify U.S. legitimacy on the frontier. At the same time, their words and actions aligned with the burgeoning Federalist public voice that warned of foreign subversion and internal subterfuge. Events that transpired on the furthest boundaries of the republic either appeared to prove the preconceived notions of the Federalists, or seemed amorphous enough that they could be construed to meet the demands of the still-forming Federalist ideology.

This chapter charts these occurrences through the last two years of the Washington presidency, showing how the events on the frontier served as further tests of American legitimacy just as Washington, and others, arrived at an intellectual point in which they conceived these crises as part of a larger plot. By beginning with the chaotic nature of the frontier in the later-1780s and early-1790s, we can perceive the general uneasiness that permeated policy makers as they discussed how best to pull this region into the greater whole. The Whiskey Rebellion only quickened this thinking, leading many to view the events in western Pennsylvania as a sign of the nation’s weakness and the machinations of outside sources. The Washington administration took concerted measures in 1795 and 1796 to bring order to the frontier, favoring treaties instead of deploying the nation’s almost non-existent military force. Jay’s Treaty represented one of several legalistic means to rectify the commingled issues of the

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4 Ibid., 85 - 94
frontier and legitimacy, but best demonstrates the intertwined nature of domestic concerns and
international crises. By the time the nation’s newspapers inked his Farewell Address, Washington
still cautioned for American neutrality, but more importantly, he viewed the last three years of his
presidency as a slide towards fracture, one he blamed on Jacobin-inspired radicals.⁵

Most historical treatments of the era in general, and particularly the waning days of the
Washington presidency, gloss over these events. Elkins and McKitrick’s classic one volume
treatment of the Federalist presidencies allows these events to meander over three lengthy
chapters. The narrative focus of these pages fall more to explaining the development of a
coherent opposition to the Washington administration, touting a rising “Populist Impulse” that
began to label Washington a “Patriot King,” if not to his face, then at least in the press.⁶

DeConde views the Washington presidency through a decidedly foreign affairs-centric lens, the
main point of his narrative explaining the collapse of the Franco-American alliance so critical to
the American War of Independence. And his answer: “Like all men, they appear mortal, with
human strengths and weaknesses, with petty faults, at times with heroic virtue.” In essence, the
policy makers of the 1790s were human and made mistakes. DeConde does notably claim that
the Federalists benefitted from luck, making quick decisions that allowed them to benefit from
the opportunities created by Europe’s internal rupture.⁷ While we must appreciate DeConde’s
iconoclastic take on the Founding Fathers, this supposedly haphazard careening through history
belittles the thoughts and actions of the men who attempted to steer the United States through the

⁵ For an overview of Washington’s opinions as he reviewed the Farewell Address, see Gilbert, 135 - 136; and Sharp, 139.

⁶ Elkins and McKitrick, 375 – 528 generally covers the last several years of the Washington presidency. For the
discussion that refers to the quoted terms, see 487 – 488.

storm-whipped waves of revolutionary warfare. Hofstadter and Banning also hand-wave this portion of the chronology, focusing instead on the development of party ideologies than the actions that would best seem to betray their inner thoughts.\(^8\) Ben-Atar and Oberg hardly mention Washington in their study of the Federalist Party.

Most biographical treatments follow this same pattern of thought. Although he did label Washington “The Indispensable Man,” Flexner titled the chapter dealing with the last year of his presidency “Downhill.” And while the Whiskey Rebellion does receive a fair (if sparse) treatment, the several chapters that detail the events of 1794 – 1796 are laden with terms like “tragedy” and “disastrous.” Ferling’s biography has only two chapters on Washington’s last term, but these do contain a brisk five page amount of the Whiskey Rebellion.\(^9\) Two chapters devoted to Washington’s last two years in office in McDonald’s \textit{The Presidency of George Washington} ably outline the events, but leave one with the impression that Washington sat above the teeming hordes, a spectator to the unfolding events and turmoil around him.\(^10\) Chernow gives these years little regard although he, of all the modern biographers, does show Washington and his administration more in control of the events around them.\(^11\) Historians, authors, and biographers still repeat the same mantra: the story must focus on Hamilton, Jefferson, and the inevitability of the election of 1800.

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\(^9\) Ferling, \textit{The First of Men}, 447 - 452; and Flexner, 312 – 346.

\(^10\) McDonald, \textit{The Presidency of George Washington}, 139 – 175.

A true appreciation of the last several years of the Washington administration requires a renewed focus on national legitimacy and foreign interference. Such a conception brings the frontier and its role in domestic politics squarely to the fore. Frontier regions went through a historiographical renaissance following the publication of Richard White’s *The Middle Ground*. Historians began to conceive frontiers, now commonly referred to as “borderlands,” as sites of transitive nationalist and, at times, enduring ethnic identities. In this portrait, individual and communities, while impacted by rising nationalism and imperial competition, tended towards older and more established conceptions of self and whole. Being English, French, or American meant less than being Creek, Ulster Irish, or Arcadian. Granted, each of the latter terms entailed a level of imperial construction, but an individual or community could exist as these identities while existing amidst, in-between, or through the larger overlapping imperial classifications.12

In an iconoclastic 1999 article, Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron argued against this trend in Borderlands studies. “New” Western and Frontier historians had reformulated the borderlands as a “zone of intercultural penetration,” favoring socio-cultural continuity in the face of structural change. Adelman and Aron readily recognized and welcomed the new historiographic spotlight placed upon the borderlands (however you defined it), but contended that the new culturally-minded historians had written out a significant portion of the borderlands narrative. “Students of borderlands neglect the power politics of territorial hegemony,” the authors stated, while they also “overlook[ed] the essentially competitive nature of European

imperialism and the ways in which these rivalries shaped transitions from colonies to nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.”¹³

An analysis of the frontier region in the early period of the United States shows that it played an important role in determining issues of national sovereignty and legitimacy. As Richard Kohn argues, frontier “issues” came to define the federal government’s relationship with the states and the citizenry. The dual crises of 1794, defeating the Indians in the Old Northwest and suppressing the Whiskey Rebellion, confirmed the utility of force to Federalist legislators and thinkers. Force, in these two instances, came to symbolize what a standing army could do: “win the peace” and “maintain order.” This belief in militarism and the uncompromising utility of force, Kohn grandly argued, “were destined to ultimately destroy the Federalist party.”¹⁴

The two defining events of 1794, although linked, appeared to Kohn and others as separate incidents, one external and the other internal. Historain Wiley Sword’s narrative of the U.S. – Indian conflict of the early 1790s, the only truly synthetic work that covers these military actions, disregards much of the political context within which they take place. Instead, the work focuses on the campaigns and personalities that molded them. To its credit, the book works hard to bring in the often overlooked native voices and provide a more complete rendering of the


¹⁴ Kohn, 140 – 142.
conflict. The narrative tends towards inevitability, however, something that Sword promotes in his preface.\textsuperscript{15}

Historians do a better job incorporating the Whiskey Rebellion into a more nuanced political framework. Perchance this owes to its portrayal as an “internal” dispute fundamentally linked to Hamilton’s whiskey tax. Any analysis or retelling of the event must include a questioning of federal fiscal policies, an easy segue to further framing the Jeffersonian/Hamiltonian governmental divide of the early republic. The prominent works on the rebellion follow this trajectory, typically painting the federal response to the rebellion in a less than positive light. Slaughter claims that the Whiskey Rebellion marked the “epilogue to the American Revolution.” This epilogue proved no shining accomplishment. Instead, the crisis “provoked and sustained the War of Independence.”\textsuperscript{16} Slaughter’s underappreciated work challenges many of society’s most cherished notions about the Revolution and the founding fathers, forcing us to reassess the meaning and principles of the conflict and the divergence from them throughout the early national period.

The questioning that Slaughter and Kohn’s works inaugurated helped foster a pronounced Federalist backlash among a generation of scholars studying the mid-1790s. This historiographical trend viewed the machinations of Washington and Hamilton as authoritarian correctives to a wide-ranging democratic impulse that challenged the conservative understanding

\textsuperscript{15} Wiley Sword, \textit{President Washington’s Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790 – 1795} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); for discussion of inevitability, see xiii — xiv. Sword’s work does present an interesting argument that Washington’s ability to subvert and defeat the tribes of the Ohio River Valley set the conditions for all future western expansion and U.S.-Indian relations; see xiv and 3 – 10.

\textsuperscript{16} Thomas P. Slaughter, \textit{The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); quote from pg. 4.
of the Constitutional consensus. Elkins and McKitrick, while arguing that the rebellion was not just about the whiskey tax, do eschew any notion that Hamilton or others believed the crisis was truly a conspiracy. Instead, one has to understand the relationship between western Pennsylvania and the federal government. “[T]here were probably more grounds for disaffection and hostility to the federal government in western Pennsylvania,” they claim, “than was the case with any other region of the country.”17 Writing later, Terry Bouton characterized the rebellion’s suppression as part of the Federalist’s goal to “tame democracy” in the young nation. Much as Elkins and McKitrick, he downplays the direct correlation between the excise tax and the rebellion, believing that historians have “mischaracterized this protest because they have examined it within too narrow a context.”18 Hogeland’s recent popular history, while also downplaying the tax, does see the rebels as testing the issue of American sovereignty in the new national era.19

All of these narratives focus on Elkins and McKitrick’s “populist impulse,” but ignore the burgeoning Federalist ideology concerning foreign subversion and radical overthrow. The apparent anarchy of the frontier region mimicked the issues of legitimacy the Washington administration faced in its port cities during the last half of 1793. This experience, when coupled with the competing public politics of the democratic societies and the Federalist rhetoricians, laid a sturdy foundation for Washington and others to view the crises as direct challenges to the republic. Unlike many current historians, Federalists did not view Indian warfare and popular

17 Elkins and McKitrick, 469.
18 Bouton, 217.
uprisings as separate issues. Rather, they categorized it as more evidence that the nation faced both external and internal threats to its very survival.

“This is an alarming affair to Kentucky.” – The frontier as a fight for legitimacy

The news of St. Clair’s defeat along the Wabash River gripped the nation during the winter of 1791 – 1792. Bostonians awoke on December 19, 1791, to a multi-page broadside that provided a full “melancholy account” of the decimated western army. Meant to establish a permanent military outpost west of the Ohio River and amidst the restive Miami confederacy, St. Clair’s expedition was instead ambushed and routed during early November by an allied conglomeration of several Native tribes. Boston’s broadside began with President Washington’s initial statement urging calm and promising communication to the legislature recommending future steps that would need to be taken. After this three paragraph introduction, the broadside apparently sent calm to the wind, running column after column with bold-faced titles that printed St. Clair’s initial reporting of the defeat alongside names of the dead and wounded. If this proved not alarming enough, the broadside closed with a brief copy of a letter from Cape Haitien, San Domingue, concerning the ongoing warfare against the “negroes” in that quarter. While the situations on the western frontier and in San Domingue’s jungles proved markedly different, many contemporary observers must have drawn connections between the two defeats of white men, even though separated by thousands of miles.  

Kentuckians, though, did not benefit from being thousands of miles away from the disaster on the Wabash. The fighting of 1791 represented only the prime example of an extended

20 “Melancholy Account Respecting the Western Army,” Broadside, December 19, 1791, Manuscripts Collection LCP.
instability within the region that predated Ratification. In a late 1780s letter to Virginian John Brown, the ubiquitous letter-writer Harry Innes crowed against the ongoing discussions in the congress and its oversight of Kentucky’s security. “The troops on the banks of the Ohio, between Fort Pitt and the rapids, are of no consequence to us,” the judge declared, adding that, “our militia law and the several ordinances of the executive only serve to tie up our hands and the last ordinance of congress doth not mean to give us that protection which our part of the federal union entitles us to.” Innes inveighed against John Jay, whom he claimed had stated during a discussion of a commercial treaty with Spain that free navigation of the Mississippi was not a significant issue. Innes could not stand such petulance and blatant disregard, laying out a ten point counter-argument that implied that such rhetoric was illegal.\(^\text{21}\) The anti-administration elements on the frontier, and in Kentucky in particular, retained the rhetorical gist of this argument throughout the 1790s.

Much like Jefferson’s earlier-mentioned letter to Innes represented something more than simple correspondence, Innes claims about the federal government ignoring Kentucky and its issues expose a prominent trend in frontier politics that lasted throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century. Many Kentuckians would view the instability of the frontier as a failure of federal governance, be it from a lack of legitimacy or a lack of caring. As noted, a rising clique of young, democratic-minded Kentuckians began loudly voicing a critique of the Washington administration’s actions and inactions along the frontier. Free navigation of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers coupled with frontier security to become pressing needs for these

\(^{21}\) Harry Innes to John Brown, date unknown, Isaac Shelby papers (sc727), KHS. While the recorded date has been destroyed, the context of the letter and its location within the collection would seem to indicate that its from between 1788 – 1790. See its reference of new Congress, Jay’s commercial treaties with Spain, taxation in Virginia, and account of Indian depredations.
Kentuckians. Their rhetoric, laden with the radical metaphors borrowed from the zeitgeist of the Democratic Societies, argued for expanded federal control while also warning that the group was prepared to take matters into their own hands. This zone of instability created foreign and domestic issues for the Washington administration.22

And these issues were more than just political playthings. The frontier during the period leading up to and immediately following St. Clair’s defeat seethed with tension and violence. In his previously mentioned letter to Brown, Innes also rattled off a striking toll from the last several years: “300 dead — prisoners 50 – homes stole 20,000.”23 Depredations by native tribes continued well into the 1790s. They became particularly acute following the United States’ reverse on the Wabash. Samuel McDowell, a force in early Kentucky politics who presided over nine out of the state’s first constitutional conventions, maintained a running account of Indian violence. During the spring and summer of 1792, he related to his colleague Andrew Reid several reverses of local militia and ad hoc bands of Kentuckians along the Ohio River. Numerous raids, mainly to steal horses, had savaged the western counties, forcing back the secure line of settlement dozens of miles. The Shawnee killed Washington’s emissary to the tribe, Colonel John Hardin (an influential Revolutionary veteran and Kentucky militia leader), that summer while he slept. Hardin was a well-known Kentuckian with deep connections to the Washington administration. As McDowell claimed to have heard, Hardin and his group had been “tomahawked” in their sleep, with McDowell claiming that Hardin’s body had later been burned.24

22 Forney, “Radical Rhetoric, Conservative Goals,” 449 - 457; and Orihel, 413 - 417.
23 Harry Innes to John Brown, December 7, 1787, Isaac Shelby Papers, KHS.
24 Samuel McDowell to Andrew Reid, April 18 and August 12, 1792, Samuel McDowell Papers, FHS.
In light of these events, many Kentuckians doubted the ability of the federal government to affect a change to the security environment on the frontier. Early indications of this began as St. Clair’s force moved through Kentucky and crossed the Ohio River. Notices from unit commanders searching for deserting soldiers dotted the pages of the Kentucky Gazette during the summer of 1791. The July 9 edition included notices from three different units, with three more added two weeks later. These notices listed the name, unit, and occasionally a general description of the deserter. In an interesting turn, they oftentimes mirrored the notices for runaway slaves printed beside them.25

Kentuckians increasingly gave voice to questions about the federal government in the wake of the Battle at the Wabash. McDowell, in a letter passing along news of the battle to Reid, called the debacle “a bloody affair.” The army, in its haste to retreat, had left behind over eight hundred dead and wounded soldiers among the camp followers, all unable to flee. “This is an alarming affair to Kentucky,” McDowell stated, “but I am persuaded by accounts I have heard that their must have been some very bad conduct.”26 An attempt by the Washington administration to meet with the Shawnee and the Miami during 1793 met with a sharp rebuttal in a February edition of the Kentucky Gazette. “An enquirer,” lambasted the federal government’s overtures to the native tribes. “I have thought of a new plan for the Indian treaty,” he quipped, “in the first place to inform the Indians that we make a point of not treating with them, unless they all treat, and be accountable for each other in that quarter of the country; and that we make a point also, to have only one half of our people to join in the treaty, and that we cannot be

25 All Kentucky Gazette editions from the summer of 1791 include these desertion notices, I have listed two of the most striking. See, Kentucky Gazette, July 9 and 23, 1791.

26 Samuel McDowell to Andrew Reid, December 8, 1791, Samuel McDowell papers, FHS.
accountable for those who do not come and join us.” This bitingly sarcastic recommendation preceded a scathing critique of federal Indian policies that appeared to placate the tribes at the expense of white citizens.27

The Washington administration did not take the instability in western Kentucky lightly. A series of petitions and letters arrived for the president and the secretary of war’s perusal throughout the first half of 1793 attesting to the dissension in the state. That January, Secretary Knox forwarded to Washington a request from Christopher Greenup, then a representative from the state, for the establishment of two small fortifications “in the Wilderness…[of] Kentucky.” Tobias Lear, the president’s erstwhile secretary, remarked to Knox that “the President observes that if the request therein containd [sic] can be complied with, it ought to be done as he thinks it would attend with good affects.”28 Anthony Wayne, placed in charge of all military operations on the western border following St. Clair’s defeat, noted in an April 1793 letter to Knox that the Virginia and Kentucky counties bordering the Ohio River were in dire need of “spies or Scouts.” Wayne lacked any concrete intelligence picture in the vicinity of the river; he recounted the story of a traveler who witnessed several large rafts conveying an Indian raiding party across the river into Virginia, noting that, “this does not look much like peace.” Knox acceded to this, ordering that Wayne “put them forth without delay.”29

As the year progressed, word came to the administration regarding the insecurity and questions of legitimacy and instability along the frontier. That June, attorney general Edmund

27Kentucky Gazette, February 16, 1793, KHS.

28Tobias Lear to Henry Knox, January 18, 1793, PGW 12, 27.

Randolph recounted to Washington some second-hand news he heard from an acquaintance. George Nicholas, another prominent Kentucky politician, had shared this his father-in-law “inveighs bitterly against what he calls the inattention of the government to the defence of Kentucky.” The father-in-law took his criticism a step further, claiming that Kentuckians should look outward to another power that could better provide for the state’s defense, federal Constitution be damned.³⁰

Such rhetoric harkened back to the arguments made for Kentucky leaving the union during the “Spanish Conspiracy.” Starting in 1787, former General James Wilkinson corresponded with the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Fransisco Miró, and outlined three main issues that threatened to cleave Kentucky from the United States: traffic of the Mississippi, frustrations with the federal government, and a lack of protection from Indian raids. Wilkinson believed that seeking Spanish vassalage would help protect Kentucky and made more sense given the closeness of Spanish outposts.³¹ While not overtly insurrectionist, Robert Breckinridge, an early voice in Kentucky politics and an original advocate of breaking Kentucky away from Virginia, voiced concerns over ratification of the Constitution at the same time as Wilkinson penned his damning correspondence to Miró. Writing to his son, James, Robert argued that, “many Kentuckians [sic] execrate the plan [the Constitution] because some leading in that country anticipate dangers in the nation.” The primary “dangers” that Robert foresaw? — guaranteeing navigation of the Mississippi River and protecting the frontier.³²

³⁰ Edmund Randolph to George Washington, June 11, 1793, PGW 13, 61.

³¹ The “Spanish Conspiracy,” discussed last chapter, is generally outside the bounds of this project. It does, however, have an enduring rhetorical influence and exhibits the continuing legacy of disregard that many Kentuckians felt towards the federal government. See the Pontalba papers, FHS and Green, The Spanish Conspiracy.

³² Robert Breckinridge to James Breckinridge, July 2, 1788, Breckinridge Papers, FHS.
The arrival of many of these warnings occurred just as Genêt made his eventful arrival to Philadelphia and the Democratic Societies began to build rhetorical steam. In the midst of haranguing Genêt and his followers in his “No Jacobin” pieces, Hamilton received a letter from Medad Mitchell, a surveyor of the Old Northwest and representative for several east coast businessmen. Mitchell recounted how the Spanish authorities in Natchez had detained him with a charge of espionage, then attempted to entice him into spying for Spain. As he told Hamilton, this occurred “frequently.” Spanish and English authorities both encouraged American soldiers to desert their frontier garrisons, guaranteeing money, property, and land in their imperial possessions. Mitchell also described the relationship between “Canadians” and the Native tribes. Although never fully defining whom the “Canadians” were, he did lead one to believe that they are the vestiges of the French fur empire that, through marriage, breeding, and commerce, built a highly influential relationship with the frontier Indians. Now living in Spanish territory, the Canadians swore allegiance to “his Most Holy Catholic Majesty” and acted as interlocutors between the Spanish and Native governments.

“The pernicious consequences arising from a foreign Commerce being carried on with those Savages on the frontiers of the United States, cannot be unknown to the Secretary,” Mitchell wrote, “having seen some of the consequences…[I] shall not hesitate to communicate my thoughts on the subject to the secretary, so far at least, as it effects the immediate Tranquility of the Southern frontier of Kentucky.” Mitchell related some stark consequences:

The Spaniards supplies the savage with every instrument of Death, and urges him on to acts of barbarity. He congratulates him upon his Success, buys his plunder, While the Savage, giddy with Success, recounts the many Scalps he has taken from defenseless Women and Children that fell in his way, and imagines everyone a fresh Laurel to his
brow. The Savage know no other way to acquire fame, but by war, he wants no pretext for that, but ability.

And to make matters worse, Spanish authorities on the frontier had made further inroads with the Native tribes over the last several years, the opposite of the trend in U.S.-Indian relations over the same period. As Mitchell noted about the American relationship with the native tribes, “the United States have lost their friendship.”

The immediate impact of Mitchell’s letter proves hard to gauge. “No Jacobin IX” appeared the day after the letter’s arrival, and although Hamilton did not state anything about foreign designs on the frontier, he did elevate his vitriol while attacking Genêt and radicalism. Several months later, Washington felt strongly enough about the issue of Spanish subversion to specifically address Congress on the matter. While he did mention relations with the Native tribes on the frontier in his critical December 3 message to Congress where he discussed military preparedness and foreign subversion, he treated them as entities of their own will. The Indians, on December 3 at least, appear as independent nations that the Americans treat with or march their army against (as they were doing at that very time against the Wabash and Miami).

By December 16, Washington had crafted a different narrative. In an address for Congress specifically concerning relations with Spain, the president outlined steps taken to formalize relations with the imperial power. The focus of these negations fell on “boundary, navigation, and Commerce” in general, with particular attention given to “restitution of property escaping into the territories of each other [runaway slaves], the mutual exchange of fugitives from justice, and above all the mutual interferences with Indians lying between us.”

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33 Medad Mitchell to Alexander Hamilton, August 27, 1793, PAH 15, 288 - 300.

34 “To the United States Senate and House of Representatives,” December 3, 1793, in PGW 14, 465 – 466.
best reason to believe that the hostilities threatened and exercised by the Southern Indians on our border,” Washington added, “were excited by the agents of that government.” He did go so far as to concede that Spain argued the same point from their perspective, but then quickly turned this idea around when he recounted how Spanish ministers refused to entreat with the Americans until the United States enforced their respective boundary and oversaw the Native tribes within the republic’s borders. Washington bridled against this notion and the accusations of supporting Indian depredations in Louisiana amidst the turmoil on his own nation’s frontier. Acquiescing to such a notion left the republic open to “savages committing daily inroads on our frontier” and “the scalping knife and tomahawk of the savage.” Although Washington had sent a message directly to the Spanish king asking for a quick resolution of the matter, the old general promised that the republic would not sit idly by while suffering such attacks.35

Spain proved not the only foreign power with designs on the United States’ frontier. As discussed earlier, the initial arrests of the leaders of the Republican Society of South Carolina during December 1793 revolved around accusations of filibustering. According to the accounts of the investigation forwarded by governor William Moultrie to president Washington, Minister Genêt had reached out to members of the Republican Society and promised them French commissions and citizenship, weapons, and land if they mobilized a force to attack into Spanish Florida. The negotiations and planning also entailed allying with friendly Native tribes and using them as guides and reconnaissance forces. Washington ordered the written manuscript of the

35 “To the United States Senate and House of Representatives,” December 16, 1793, in PGW 14, 531.
South Carolina legislature’s investigation and subsequent arrests printed and distributed to the Senate and House during January 1794; the formal notes soon made its way to the press.\textsuperscript{36}

Genêt’s machinations in Charleston proved only a foretaste of larger designs to come. Prior to his arrival in Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society inaugurated a subscription campaign to raise the money needed to send a French botanist, André Michaux, on an expedition to explore and describe the interior of North America. The subscriber’s list served as a veritable who’s-who list of early republican Philadelphia; Washington, his entire cabinet, and prominent political leaders all guaranteed funds to support Michaux’s travels. By late 1793, Jefferson had lobbied the Society to support such an exercise and penned the “Subscription Agreement” and its instructions to Michaux. He most likely used the leverage within the cabinet to gain approval and funding from cabinet members.\textsuperscript{37}

Little did Jefferson expect that Michaux would delay his initial departure once he received word that Genêt would arrive in Philadelphia that May. Soon after his arrival, Genêt met with the botanist, whereupon the minister gained his support in a wide-ranging endeavor: raise an American army, led by Revolutionary hero George Rogers Clark (then in Kentucky), in order that this force could invade Louisiana and liberate it from the Spanish. Genêt met with Jefferson on July 5, 1793, and made him aware of his plan. According to Jefferson, the Frenchman explicitly told him that he intended to recruit among the inhabitants of Kentucky and that he personally knew of “two generals in Kentucky” who could lead the force (assuming that

\textsuperscript{36} Copy of the Senate and House’s printed account of the South Carolina investigation, January 15, 1794, Manuscript Collection, LCP.

\textsuperscript{37} “American Philosophical Society’s Subscription Agreement for Andre Michaux’s Western Expedition,” January 22, 1793, in \textit{PTJ} 25, 81 – 84.
one is Clark). Although Jefferson stated that, “enticing officers and soldiers from Kentucky to go against Spain was really putting a halter about their necks; for that they would assuredly be hung if they commenced hostilities against a nation at peace with the United States,” the secretary did not attempt to dissuade Genêt, nor did he spell out the ramification of his actions. In fact, he went so far as to write a letter of introduction for Michaux to Governor Isaac Shelby of Kentucky, one that intimated at the botanists larger designs but never stated them directly.38

This served Jefferson well, for that August, amidst the turmoil created by Genêt’s recruitment of privateers and the yellow fever epidemic that struck Philadelphia, the Spanish ministers to the United States forwarded to the secretary a copy of Genêt’s address advocating insurrection in Louisiana. According to the Spaniards, a “society of French Jacobins” within Philadelphia had printed the letter and funneled it into Louisiana. And to make matter worse, the address announced ongoing recruitment and training taking place inside of Kentucky. Jefferson forwarded the ministers’ letter with the copy of Genêt’s address to Washington on August 29, apparently never discussing this issue prior to that point. He also forwarded the address to governor Shelby, beseeching him to “be particularly attentive to any attempts of this kind among the citizens of Kentucky.”39

If pressed, Jefferson could claim that he never officially authorized the filibustering campaign in Louisiana. His apparent silence regarding Genêt and Michaux’s intentions to Washington leaves more questions than answers. What did he envision as the outcome of any expedition against Spanish Louisiana? Was the Secretary, as some have claimed, attempting to

38 Anas, July 5, 1793, 361 – 363; Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Shelby, June 28, 1793, in PTJ 26, 393 – 394.

39 Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Shelby, August 29, 1793, in PTJ 26, 785; and Thomas Jefferson to Josef Ignacio de Vair and Josef de Jaudenes, August 29, 1793, in PTJ 26, 786.
find a middle ground between war in Europe and Spanish intransigence on the border? How did
this fit into his later views about American expansion and building an “empire of liberty?”
Modern day observers can only conjecture.

What is clear from subsequent writings and addresses from the Federalist-minded
members of the Washington administration is a marked increase in the demands of military
expansion and the preservation of the republic. The warning of possible Kentuckian insurrection,
when combined with increased Indian depredations and foreign filibustering plans, played into a
growing Federalist obsession: foreign subversion. Much as the crisis over neutrality in American
ports ultimately entailed a fight over American sovereignty, frontier turmoil also appeared to
bring the republic’s legitimacy into question. And the explicit complicity of Americans in the
machinations of Genêt, never mind the thinly veiled threats of the Democratic Society of
Kentucky, made the frontier crisis a domestic issue, as well. Jefferson’s dispatches with Genêt,
made public to Congress and then the nation during the winter of 1793 - 1794, did not reveal his
knowledge of the Kentucky filibustering campaign. They did belie a particular closeness between
the secretary and the French minister, though, and part of his resignation must be viewed within
this context. Washington must have worried about the loyalty of his own cabinet, and from 1794
on we see him increasingly turning to those individuals that exhibited the strongest connections
to him.

As 1794 began, the Washington administration realized that they must do something
about the crisis of American sovereignty. While the expansion of customs collectors’ powers
appeared to slow the recruitment and manning of privateers in American ports, the president
sought the means to address the situation on the frontier. General Anthony Wayne’s new
expedition against the Wabash and the Miami had already begun its march towards the Old Northwest. The administration had also dispatched emissaries to several foreign powers and Native tribes in an attempt to quell this shatter-belt region. The eruption of a seemingly-radical minded anti-tax movement that had festered on the frontier for years came to symbolize all the issues that plagued the republic, and Washington decided to address this new crisis with increased verve and authority.

“The Western insurgents are quelled…” – Fear and Loathing in Frontier America

Many historians conjecture as to when the Whiskey Rebellion started. Those seeking the “easy” answer point to the summer of 1794, particularly the confrontations taking place at the residence of John Neville, the federal representative charged with collecting the abhorred federal excise tax in western Pennsylvania. An *ad hoc* assembly of disgruntled small farmers and laborers had confronted Neville on the road to his house on July 15 and Neville had disbanded the group by quashing some of their rumors about unjust seizures and arrests. The upbraiding he gave the group angered them, and they met again that night to debate their future course of action. They collected at Neville’s residence the following day, their number swelled due to anger over the tax and Neville’s attitude. Shots rang out and the *de facto* head of the populist assembly died that night. A fully enraged mob returned the following day and exchanged gunfire with Neville and federal soldiers from Fort Pitt. Neville and the soldiers fled, the mob burned his house, and western Pennsylvania reeled from a paroxysm of populist violence. Small farmers, laborers, and other frontiersmen united in opposition to what they believed to be unjust federal
actions, and their example soon drew similar response in the partially-settled regions of western Maryland, northwestern Virginia, and eastern Kentucky.40

A more complex answer charts the growth of frontier populist instability well before those fateful days in July. Frontier agitators had begun closing roads and harassing excise tax collectors throughout the frontier region almost as soon as they received word of the passage of the excise tax during the early 1790s. Frontier violence and radicalism had animated the debates leading up to the Constitutional Convention and Ratification, best typified by the apparent delayed success of Daniel’s Shay’s Rebellion. And if examined further back, frontier instability had defined colonial America and, although Boston and other port cities led the way in radicalization against British rule, issues created by the frontier ran throughout the American debates prior to the War for Independence. Many historians portray the Whiskey Rebellion as either the last vestiges of revolutionary fervor or the first proof of American sovereignty.41

However we, as latter-day observers, choose to define or categorize the Whiskey Rebellion matters less than determining how the Washington administration did. The president and the majority of his cabinet took the events then transpiring in western Pennsylvania and placed them within a stark contextual and symbolic content. First, they saw the rebellion as part of an unbroken chain of radical dissent and subversion started the summer before. As such, the rebellion never existed rhetorically as a purely domestic event; it was framed alongside the

40 Best coverage of events in Hogeland, 97 - 116; and Slaughter 109 - 124 and 175 - 189.

imperial dynamics of the contested frontier. Second, the rebellion became a symbolic test of American legitimacy. The Washington administration imbued the events with a deep meaning and portrayed it as a test to determine the republic’s future. This in mind, the rebellion became a “rebellion,” not a militarized protest against taxation, and the protestors became “insurgents.” When these strains of thought intertwined, the administration could argue that they had been forced to aggressively respond to the crisis in western Pennsylvania to prove the republic’s sovereignty and its right to govern its citizens.

Washington and his cabinet members had followed the events in western Pennsylvania well before the protest’s escalation during the summer of 1794. Hamilton appears to have first alerted the president to the sometimes violent refusal of western Pennsylvanians to pay the excise tax early in September 1792.42 Seeking a moderate yet stern tone, Washington followed the news two weeks later with a proclamation stipulating that all citizens of the United States would, in fact, follow the excise tax to the letter.43 By early 1793, the situation appeared to have calmed; Washington replied to a group of ministers from the region that their vows to support the administration and work to quell any unrest left him encouraged. Dissent did not seem to be universal and he approved of local leaders handling the situation at their level.44 Later, he pardoned two men indicted for “inciting a riot” connected to protests against the excise tax, claiming that they were innocent yet too poor to adequately defend themselves.45

42 Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, September 7, 1792, in PAH 12, 331 -333.
44 “To the Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Fayette County, Pennsylvania,” January 30, 1793, in PGW 12, 63.
Unrest continued into 1793. “The people in the western part of this state [Pennsylvania] have been to the excise officer and threatened to burn his house,” Jefferson noted to James Madison in a letter from May 19, 1793; “they were blacked and otherwise disguised as to be unknown.” Jefferson also recalled that Hamilton stated that, “there is no possibility of getting the law executed there, and that probably the evil will spread.”\textsuperscript{46} Arthur St. Clair, as governor of the Northwest Territory, wrote to Hamilton that August to applaud him for toughening the execution of the excise law. He noted that, “the opposition began with the distillers who were in combination against the people, but it has been fostered by others, and for very bad purposes.”\textsuperscript{47} What these ‘bad purposes” might be, St. Clair did not expound upon. By the start of the next year, Tench Coxe, then serving as the assistant treasury secretary, reported to Hamilton that not all revenue supervisors had completed their annual reports. “In justice to some of the supervisors,” he explained, “the impediments are partly the opposition to the Revenue from a very small proportion of the Citizens of the United States.”\textsuperscript{48}

The general lack of concern relating to apparent tax resistance within the republic seems off-putting when viewed from the present day. It could be that the members of the administration found themselves harried by other problems that year. While we have shown they shared a clear concern for the potentially fractious nature of the frontier, no one at the time appeared to connect the unrest to anything beyond the immediate issues involving the excise tax. St. Clair’s warning of “bad purposes” comes the closest to any articulation of conspiracies or intrigues in relation to

\textsuperscript{46} Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 19, 1793, in \textit{PTJ} 26, 62.

\textsuperscript{47} Arthurs St. Clair to Alexander Hamilton, August 9, 1793, in \textit{PAH} 15, 211.

\textsuperscript{48} Tench Coxe to Alexander Hamilton, January 6, 1794, in \textit{PAH} 15, 623.
the protests and, at that point, low-level violence.^{49} Outbreaks of violence erupted episodically, did not seem to be coordinated, and did not gravely threaten the legitimacy of the administration or the republic. While pro-Washington members of the administration found no issue with gradually painting Genêt and the Democratic Societies with broad-brush strokes of subversion, they did not leap to any such conclusion about the tax resisters prior to 1794.

Washington and his cabinet markedly reversed their thinking about excise tax resistance during 1794. After word reached Philadelphia during late January that the home of another revenue collector’s house had been ransacked and the collector assaulted, the president saw fit to offer a reward of two hundred dollars for each individual identified as responsible for the altercation and brought to justice. While Washington kept his comments reference the proclamation and rewards short and legalistically to the point, his decision to now offer rewards for information and turning in protestors exhibits the beginning of a divergence from his prior thinking. The late 1793 assault on a federal tax collector did not mark the beginning of anti-excise tax violence. Yet, by 1794, Washington and his administration changed the tenor of their response, even if in a small manner. He now sought federal involvement in what he before labelled a local matter.^{50}

It is also important to examine what the proclamation does not do or say. It by no means inaugurates a general campaign against the tax resisters. As worded, the proclamation deals only with the specific incident from the preceding November. Washington makes no sweeping pronouncements against the tax resisters. In fact, Pennsylvania governor Thomas Mifflin went

^{49} Arthurs St. Clair to Alexander Hamilton, August 9, 1793, in PAH 15, 211.

^{50} “Proclamation on Violent Opposition to the Excise Tax,” February 24, 1794, in PGW 15, 275 – 276.
far further than the president did a few weeks later in a circular he penned for the “officers of the Commonwealth.” In his letter, he did not link the tax protests to a larger conspiracy. He did, however, claim that the resistance to the excise tax represented more than just a local issue. Outlining the interrelationship between the ongoing war in Europe and America’s neutrality, Mifflin situated the tax resistance as going against “any friend to the peace and happiness of the country.” Tax resistance would “attract particular notice” among foreign powers and demonstrate the weakness of the federal government, and by extension, the so recently ratified Constitution. Mifflin shared this letter with Washington, as well as first person narratives that again sought to dispel any notions of outright rebellion west of Pittsburgh.

The events at Neville’s residence, as well as further confrontations that played out over the last half of July and early August, clearly marked an amplification of the protest from the years prior. Now organized and creating the workings of a governance system, the soon-to-be labeled “insurrectionists” had transcended the symbolic and episodic violence that typified the resistance so far. But did such actions represent the “civil war” that some in Pittsburgh claimed them to be? Washington decided to poll his cabinet members, and, at an August 2 meeting, asked for each member to outline his thoughts reference the violence.

The written assessments followed along ideological lines and probably did not surprise the president. Hamilton and Knox both vociferously recommended military intervention; Knox went as far as to provide the numbers of the militia to call out from the surrounding states. They found themselves joined by William Bradford, the new attorney general. He argued for military

51 “Circular Letter,” March 21, 1794, Executive Correspondence, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, (hereafter PMHC), Harrisburg, PA.

52 “Conference Concerning the Insurrection in Western Pennsylvania,” August 2, 1794, in PAH 17, 9 – 14.
intervention from a winding legal perspective. Noting the administration’s likely inability to find
the justices of the peace needed to administer the rebelling counties, Bradford believed that
enforcing the rule of law through the militia remained the only option. Randolph, now Secretary
of State, proved the lone dissenter. While he did not doubt the legal reasoning to call out the
militia, he did worry about the “expediency” of such an act. He listed eleven reasons for initially
demurring in calling out the militia, his main concern that an executive overreaction could
galvanize a more-wide ranging popular resistance. Washington eventually acceded to Randolph’s
call to send forward commissioners to determine the dissidents’ exact grievances while delaying
the mustering of the militia.53

While Randolph did voice patience and caution, his words also belied two now-
simmering assumption about the tax resisters. First, he and the other cabinet members labeled the
protesters in western Pennsylvania “insurgents” or “insurrectionists.” While commonly called the
Whiskey Rebellion in the present day, the cabinet members, as well as those that advised them,
referred to the actions as an insurrection. From the beginning of the August deliberations, each
member of the cabinet placed the activities as separate and unique from the dissent and violence
that preceded it. In his written opinion, Hamilton claimed that, “The Opposition has continued
and matured till it has at length broke out in Acts which are presumed to amount to Treason.”
The insurgents had called for a convention, he stated, “probably with a view to systematize
measures more effectual to Opposition.” Bradford echoed Hamilton’s words, dubbing the
dissenters “insurgents” and labeling their actions “High Treason” that amounted to “levying

53 For each cabinet members’ response, see Hamilton, August 2, 1794, 460 – 463; Knox, August 4, 467 – 469;
Bradford, August 5, 1794, 472 – 477; and Randolph, August 5, 523 – 529; all in PGW 16.
Beyond mere protest, the violence west of the Alleghenies now appeared to the cabinet members as organized and open opposition to the federal government’s legitimacy.

Hamilton reinforced this notion in a report, commissioned by Washington, that examined the details of the events and the excise tax. Arriving three days after his written opinion, Hamilton’s report outlined the resistance from the moment of the excise tax’s passage into law, detailing accounts of public dissent back to 1791. He clearly portrayed the area west of the Alleghenies as a legal no-man’s land. Distillers had bypassed the tax by shipping their products west, using the loosely maintained border region with Canada and the Northwest Territories to smuggle their product out of the country and compound their profits. While Hamilton did accede that most of the troubles had been precipitated by a “small combination of Malconteants [sic],” his overall portrait of Pennsylvania’s western region fell into line with the administration’s notion of the centrifugal frontier. Whereas before the minor frustrations of tax resistance did not warrant much beyond a cursory note, the amplification of violence seemed to confirm the fears of those that saw the frontier region as an issue of American legitimacy. Federal officials feared traveling the roads, as each appeared “beset by insurgents.” And as he reiterated from his written opinion, the upcoming call for a convention of like-minded resisters could only further empower the insurgency in Pennsylvania’s western counties.55

Such notions also played into the other fear that Randolph mentioned in his written opinion: foreign subversion. In letters written to the president on the same day, Randolph and

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54 Hamilton, August 2, 1794, 460 – 463; and Bradford, August 5, 1794, 472 – 477; both in PGW 16.

Mifflin both alluded to suspected British machinations in western Pennsylvania.\(^{56}\) Whether as precipitators of the rebellion or as primed to step into the political vacuum created by the anti-governmental fervor, Britain seemed to be lurking in the dark shadows near the fork of Ohio River. And western Pennsylvania was not the only locale rumored to be under foreign subversion at the time; several months earlier, Brigadier General James Wilkinson notified Major General Anthony Wayne that sources reported “that the officers and emissaries of the British were the sole cause which prevented a treaty [with the Native confederacy].”\(^{57}\) Such news, given some eight months prior to the escalation of protest and violence in Pennsylvania and dutifully forwarded to Secretary of War Knox, only added further credence to proto-Federalist fears of foreign subterfuge.

After reviewing the collected opinions, Washington decided to navigate a middle course. Attorney General Bradford would leave at once to head the commission to meet with the insurgents. He would read to them a proclamation announced by Washington on August 7 forbidding further protest and ordering the collected dissenters back to their homes by no later than September 1. Washington did not hedge in the proclamation; he accused the “insurgents” of “perpetrating acts which…amount to treason, being overt acts of levying war against the United States.” If said “insurgents” returned home and paid the excise tax, no issues would be raised. If the rebellion continued, Washington saw no choice but to call forth the militia of several neighboring states to suppress the insurrection. Bradford would work to quell the violence prior to the marching of the militia, but Washington ordered Knox to send word to the governors of

\(^{56}\) Thomas Mifflin to George Washington, August 5, 1794, 514 – 519; and Edmund Randolph to George Washington, August 5, 1794, 523 – 529; both in *PGW* 16.

\(^{57}\) James Wilkinson to Anthony Wayne, September 14, 1793, James Wilkinson papers, KHS.
Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey to ready their militias to march across the Alleghenies.58

As Bradford and the other commissioners worked their way towards Pittsburgh and their meeting with the “insurrectionists,” Hamilton again took up his pen and published a series of four pseudonymous editorials. Writing under the name “Tully,” Hamilton inveighed the public about the perfidy of the rebels and their threat to the republic. Some historians have argued that the “Tully” pieces evinced Hamilton’s anger at what he perceived as a personal affront.59 While this may be the case, its important to gauge the nature of the rhetoric he employed. First, by taking the common name of “Tully,” Hamilton discarded the more classical names he had used in the past — “Pacificus,” “Americanus” — as well as the inflammatory “No Jacobin.” The tone of his essays reflected his attempt to reach a populist commonality; the Tully pieces addressed the readers as “you” and spoke of “your constitution.” This supposed familiarity allowed him to drive home another point: the insurrectionist actually subverted democracy. Their use of violence went fully against the grain of the democratic principles enshrined within the recently ratified constitution. The rhetoric of the insurrection tried to make the citizenry “dupes of artifices so detestable, of a scheme so detestable.” In Hamilton’s words, the rebellion became a conspiracy, one that he had no issues connecting with rumors of “the aid of a foreign nation.”60

Hamilton brought the burgeoning Federalist argument against dissent full circle by the last “Tully” tract. “Fresh symptoms every moment appear of a dark conspiracy,” he wrote,

58 “Proclamation,” August 7, 1794, in PGW 16, 531 - 537.
59 Hogeland, 195 – 196.
60 “Tully No.1,” August 23, 1794, 132 – 137; “Tully No. 2,” August 26, 1794, 148 – 150; and “Tully No. 3,” August 28,1794, 159 – 160; all in PAH 17.
“hostile to your government, to your peace abroad, to your tranquility at home.” The actual enemy proved to be “jinglers who endeavor to cheat us,” rich men who benefitted from disregarding the laws of the republic. They had incited a passion among a small clique by claiming that the issue at hand entailed definitions of liberty and freedom, when there action actually subverted the rule of law and infringed upon the popular liberty of the whole. Even if the nation descended into civil war, the side of law and order would win, stamping out anarchy and faction.61

Hamilton’s characterization of the insurrection carried forward rhetorical pieces he first introduced in “No Jacobin” a year before, as well as some flavoring from the burgeoning anti-democratic society Federalist press. Instead of painting the contest as a referendum on his excise tax, he instead made it into an existential test of the republic’s resilience. The issue was not the tax, but instead the nature of republican government. Insurrectionist forces, most likely supported by foreign interlopers, sought to dismantle the work done so recently to craft a constitution to manage the new nation. Such forces subverted the naturally democratic formulation of the republic, instead creating some above the law that had access to different levels of access and deference. And, even if a fractious war ensued, the government must face the new threat head on and protect the sanctity of the United States.62

Western Pennsylvania did not present the only quarrelsome region that summer. After remaining silent for several months, the Democratic Society of Kentucky returned with a veritable roar during May 1794. The quiet had masked a flurry of grassroots planning, for on

61 “Tully No. 4,” September 2, 1794, in PAH 17, 175 – 180.

62 Elkins and McKitrick, 467 - 471.
May 24, the Democratic Society convened, in Lexington, a convention of like-minded individuals from throughout the state. At the convention, the now-gathered Society drew up a list of eight resolutions, all of which dealt with relations between the United States, Great Britain, and Spain. “Resolved, that the inhabitants west of the Appalachian Mountains,” the first resolve went, “are entitled by nature and by stipulation, to the free and undisturbed Navigation of the Mississippi.” The federal government, “either through design or mistaken policy, adopted no effectual measures for its attainment.” Furthering their accusations of an eastern conspiracy, the members of the society pointed out how quickly the administration appeared to react to the claims of harassment leveled by Atlantic merchants against British warships and the general inattention to Kentucky’s issues. “Nothing shall be considered as a satisfaction,” the resolves ended, “that does not completely remove their grievances; which have a stronger claim to satisfaction, both from their atrocity and continuance.”

Perhaps buoyed by the coming together of democrats from throughout the state, the Society penned another remonstrance for the President and Congress. This time, the Society took a more conciliatory tone than in the remonstrance that preceded it. Instead of claiming to take matters into their own hands if their protests were not addressed, the Society now swore direct allegiance to the republic and promised full support, however needed, in the nation’s tricky relations with Great Britain and Spain. The first two paragraphs recounted the abuses that Great Britain had heaped upon the United States. For the first time in an official statement, the Society discussed how the English “supplied arms, ammunition, cloathing [sic] and provisions to those merciless Savages, who have so long ravaged the Western Frontier of these states.”

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63 *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), May 31, 1794.
remonstrants then drew common cause between the nation’s ongoing issues with Great Britain and Kentucky’s issues with free navigation of the Mississippi River. Demanding immediate answers about the status of negotiations between the United States and Spain, the Society decried the secret nature of the proceedings, again falling back on a radically democratic interpretation of the government’s responsibility to its citizens. In closing, the Society declared “it is the duty of the General Government to protect the Frontiers, and that the total want of protection, which is now experienced by every part of the Western Frontier, is a grievance of the greatest magnitude.”

The May convention, resolves, and remonstrance represented the peak of the Democratic Society of Kentucky’s political ingenuity. Their rhetoric and strategy had gone through something of a renaissance in the months between its first official petition to Philadelphia and the mature political calculations taking place during the spring of 1794. Whereas the first remonstrance presented the Washington administration with several thinly veiled threats of filibustering and disunion, the actions in May showed a more adept reading of the political currents then breaking in Philadelphia. The Society now claimed that the issues of frontier defense and free navigation were of national import, not just a regional demand. Adding these issues to the now growing list of international abuses that the United States faced allowed the Society to craft a holistic vision of the nation’s crises that deftly linked domestic and foreign issues into a manageable series of policy discussions.

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64 “Remonstrances of the Citizens West of the Allegheny Mountains to the President and Congress of the United States.” N.d., Harry Innes Papers, 335N, Box 1, LOC

At the same time, the Society had crafted a uniquely western interpretation of democracy. This had gone through a maturation process, as well. The Society’s earliest statements echoed much of the Jacobin-inspired rhetoric of the eastern seaboard — down with “monocrats,” support republican France, and revive the democratic impulse of the Revolution. As noted above, these platitudes gradually wore off as members of the Society transitioned to agitating for free navigation and frontier defense. These issues had long affected Kentucky, and the “populist impulse” awakened by the democratic society movement sweeping the country during the 1790s helped unite Kentuckians while also providing a common rhetoric with which to forward their claims. By the spring of 1794, the Society no longer discussed monocrats or republican France, but could use the language inspired by other democratic societies and Jacobin France to argue for concrete policy issues. Free navigation was a natural right, federal government inaction on this issue stymied the growth and development of the state’s able citizenry, and the central government had a duty to protect its citizens and promote Kentucky’s development.

By 1794, observers could clearly see that the Democratic Society of Kentucky represented something far different from the general anti-administration and anti-aristocratic trends of the larger democratic movement. President Washington definitely noticed. The House of Representatives reviewed the Society’s remonstrance and resolutions after its arrival in early June and demanded that the administration reveal the current state of negotiations with Spain – just as the society requested. Edmund Randolph, serving now as Secretary of State, found the matter “very momentous.” “The temper of that country is roused to the extreme,” he added, for the Kentuckians “entertain suspicions that it is not the wish of every state in the Union that they
should enjoy the Mississippi, or should continue members of the Union.”

Several weeks before the president received the Secretary’s letter, Washington received word from an acquaintance in Virginia that “there is existing at Kentuckey [sic] a powerful faction for placing that Country under the protection of the British Government, & of separating from the Union of the United States.”

Determining the best means to handle the Whiskey Rebellion, Washington now found himself facing renewed political unrest in Kentucky. As his reply to the erstwhile Virginian that supplied him intelligence of conditions in Kentucky shows, Washington made tentative steps toward claiming common cause between the perpetrators of the Whiskey Rebellion and the complainants in Kentucky. “That there should exist in this country such a spirit as you say pervades the people of Kentucky (and which I have also learnt from other channels) is, to me, matter of great wonder,” the president admitted. Washington argued that no portion of the republic received more attention from the federal government than Kentucky. The common disregard of this fact within the state could only be blamed upon “those societies who under specious colourings are spreading mischief far and wide either from real ignorance of the measures pursuing by the government, or from a wish to bring it, as much as they are able to, into discredit — for what purposes, every man is left to his own conjectures.” Washington linked the Democratic Society of Kentucky and the “insurgents” in Pennsylvania with apparent ease.

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67 Charles Mynn Thurston to George Washington, June 21, 1794, in PGW 16, 258.
68 George Washington to Charles Mynn Thruston, August 10, 1794, in PGW 16, 547.
Randolph soothed the president, arguing for nuance in the handling of Kentucky’s dissent. On the same day that Washington issued his proclamation calling for all the insurgents west of Pittsburgh to return home, the attorney general penned a letter advising the pursuance of a more conciliatory tone in Kentucky. While he conceded the irresponsibility of making all information regarding the secret negotiations available to the people of Kentucky, he did recommend that Washington “depute [deputize] some sensible and firm man to go to Kentucky; carrying with him the most accurate knowledge of the whole transaction.” This individual would present the administration’s case and the status of the negotiations to the state’s legislature, answering questions relevant to the negotiation’s proceeding. Washington would also charge him to bring back from Kentucky an accounting of any unaddressed issues. Randolph believed this step “urgent,” particularly given the crisis in Pennsylvania and rumors that the British intended to gain traction in the now-calamitous frontier.69

Washington agreed, and Randolph asked Virginia attorney general (and relation to Harry Innes) James Innes to fill this role. Innes agreed, leaving for Kentucky during mid-November, 1794. “Col. Innes left this city [Philadelphia] on Sunday on his way back to Kentucky,” wrote Representative Charles Greenup to his friend and future Supreme Court Justice Thomas Todd (and clerk of the Democratic Society of Kentucky) on November 22, 1794; “I expect he is to appear before your legislature to impart some thing of great moment which could not be intrusted [sic] to any person in Kentucky.” Greenup admitted that he knew not what news Innes carried, but we can clearly assume it was the information requested by the Society. Prior to Innes’ departure, Randolph had informed Kentucky governor Isaac Shelby of the plan, requesting

that he would call the state legislature into meeting as soon as Innes arrived. Such a move, Randolph claimed, exhibited “further proof of the anxiety of the President to remove all grounds of dissatisfaction” within Kentucky.  

Word of the news preceded Innes’ arrival. The tenor of dissent within Kentucky lessened as autumn drew on. In a series of letters from early October, Randolph relayed to the president proof of the existence of “a greater stock of patience relative to the Mississippi, than hitherto [thought].” The attorney general recounted multiple sources informing him of the development of a wait-and-see mentality among the former remonstrants. A second convention proposed by the Democratic Society never formed, although one of Kentucky’s senators, John Edwards from Bourbon County, had volunteered to go before the Society and address any questions they might have. While Randolph thought such a move reflected a loss of “all public dignity,” it resembled what he had proposed to the president some months before.

The apparent resolution of the crisis in Kentucky coincided with the collapse of the resistance in western Pennsylvania. Bradford’s commission worked wonders for the administration. Starting on August 20, the commission held a firm line against the protestors, informing them that only complete submission to federal authority would stop a military occupation. At the same time, members of the committee met separately with purported moderates in an attempt to divide the insurgency. Such maneuvering worked; a vote by the

70 Notes regarding Edmund Randolph to Isaac Shelby, in PGW 16, 538.

71 Edmund Randolph to George Washington, October 4, 1794, 13; and Edmund Randolph to George Washington, October 6, 1794, 24 – 25; both in PGW 17.
committee formed to meet with the federal commission agreed to submit to federal control and
the excise law by the slimmest of margins on August 28.  

The closeness of the vote disturbed Bradford. Fully two-fifths of the committee voted for further resistance. He believed the insurrection to be fractured, but not quelled. The arrival in Philadelphia several weeks prior to the vote of a letter from Hugh Brackenridge reinforced this notion. Brackenridge, a prominent and vocal leader of the rebellion, had written to Tench Coxe, the nation’s revenue commissioner, in the hope of defusing the situation. As a moderate, he feared that a military operation in western Pennsylvania would ravage the region and only lead to further abuses. Fully aware that insurgents along the road to Philadelphia had taken to opening and reading official mail, Brackenridge found himself forced to resort to a level of masochistic chest-thumping to maintain his own legitimacy in case rebels seized his letter. As such, he stated that, “the United States cannot effect the law in this country” while he also attempted to find a means to have the excise law rescinded. A veiled threat within the letter involving the insurrectionists marching on Philadelphia erased any notion of moderation once Coxe forwarded the missive’s contents to Hamilton and the remainder of the cabinet. Brackenridge’s attempts to bolster his bona fides in Philadelphia and western Pennsylvania backfired; his letters most likely helped spur Hamilton on to publish his “Tully” pieces.

Taking heed of Bradford’s assessment of the situation, Washington ordered the militia forward during late September. The advance met no resistance and moves to arrest the ringleaders of the rebellion netted dozens. In a statement issued to both houses of Congress

72 “From the Commissioners Sent to Western Pennsylvania,” September 24, 1794, PGW 16, 702 – 713.

73 Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, August 15, 1794, in PAH 17, 96.
during mid-November to mark the cessation of the operation, Washington outlined his decision-making throughout the crisis, ultimately arguing that his duty “to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States” colored his actions and served as his touchstone. His statement built on the administration’s perception of the insurrection that had been building all summer. One could not characterize the events that took place in western Pennsylvania as a form of popular democratic protest. Instead, the rebellion had been “fomented by combinations of men, who, careless of consequences, and disregarding the unerring truth of that those, who rouse, cannot always appease a civil convulsion.” This was perfidy, conspiracy, and subterfuge, not democracy, Washington intoned, and he gladly reported its suppression.74

The president took to his personal correspondence to more exactly lay fault for the rebellion. In a series of personal letters penned between late August and late September, Washington squarely blamed the democratic societies for the insurrection. “I consider this insurrection as the first formidable fruit of the Democratic Societies,” he wrote to Henry Lee.

[T]hat these societies were instituted by the artful and designing members…primarily to sow the seeds of jealousy and distrust among the people, of the government…is not new to anyone, who is acquainted with the characters of their leaders, and has been attentive to their maneuvers…I see under a display of popular and fascinating guises, the most diabolical attempts to destroy the fabric of human government and happiness, that has even been presented for the acceptance of mankind.

The groups’ anarchical tendencies owed to the societies’ “father,” Genêt, and his “real plan” to “shake the government to its foundation.”75

74 “To the United States Senate and House of Representatives,” November 19, 1794, PGW 17, 181 - 188.

75 All quotes from George Washington to Henry Lee, August 25, 1794, PGW 16, 600 – 605. See also George Washington to Burgess Ball, September 25, 1794, PGW 16, 722 – 723 for a further and darker articulation of the president’s views.
Although Washington voiced these concerns in private, a pamphleteer known only as “Germanicus” made them very public during late 1794. Over a series of letter-style publications, Germanicus forcefully argued that the democratic societies held sole blame for the insurrection. The pamphleteers drew common cause not only between the societies and the rebels, but also ran a contextual chain back to the Jacobins of France. At no point did Washington or the administration seek to suppress civil liberties or impinge upon the right to gather and protest, Germanicus stated. Rather, the administration understood that the societies “baneful principles” provided derision without progress. Lacking any sort of concrete policy, the societies simply duped a public that then let their passions get the best of them, in the process tearing down the republican edifices of the nation. If such societies never existed, he wrote, “the liberty of individuals in the United States would have been, what it is now, superior to the fraud of ambition, and the assaults of tyranny.” The dissent of the societies actually weakened democracy in the United States, allowing citizens to be subverted by foreign ideologies and the machinations of an empowered few. Such things had happened in France, Germanicus intoned, and the blood and anarchy there should serve warning to what could happen in America.76

The statements made by Washington and Germanicus overlooked the list of complaints raised by the insurrectionists. Bradford’s report of his commissions meeting with the rebels did note the issues raised by the rebelling group. Their list of grievances, besides the specific issues with the excise tax, mirrored many of those mentioned the year prior by the Democratic Society of Kentucky: the central government’s inattention to frontier security; the prohibition of free travel on the Mississippi River; and a general sense of federal favoritism towards the population.

76 “Germanicus,” Manuscripts Collection, LCP. Quote p. 16.
east of the Alleghenies. While the excise tax represented the focal point of their pent-up anger, the “conferees” voiced a repeated strain of frontier dissonance that reverberated the farther west one travelled from the Atlantic. Nowhere in their grievances did they state a desire to remake the federal government or alter the nature of governance within the republic. While they did intimate a bias towards eastern merchants within the federal government, they did not claim that a conspiracy of aristocrats and monocrats were subverting the principles of the Revolution, a tenor struck by several of the democratic societies during 1793. They had a specific grievance (the excise tax) and sought a specific policy — repealing of the tax.77

Such a characterization of the rebels escaped the popular narrative. A wide-ranging opposition narrative failed to materialize throughout 1794 and well into 1795. As Tully and Germanicus found wide-readership and reprinting, the normally vocal anti-administration press went almost silent. The democratic societies, so maligned by Germanicus outright and Washington by innuendo, mounted few protests. The faction in Philadelphia did mount one protest against the excise tax, in general, but mainly as part of a plan to favor manufactures, not in solidarity with the rebels in western Pennsylvania. Their 1794 Independence Day toasts offered no word on the broiling rebellion, nor did any of its other actions over the remaining year and a half.78 And even though the Washington County (Pennsylvania) version of the societies wrote a unity address after reviewing the Democratic Society of Kentucky’s remonstrance on free navigation of the Mississippi, the members in Lexington never published any official statements referring to the rebellion. In fact, when Kentucky representative Christopher Greenup

77“From the Commissioners Sent to Western Pennsylvania,” September 24, 1794, PGW 16, 702 – 713.
wrote back to Thomas Todd, clerk of the Kentucky society, about Innes’ pending trip to Lexington in 1794, he noted in passing that “the Western insurgents (as they are called) are quelled and several are now lodged here in jail, and many more are apprehended.” Greenup shows no remorse over the rebels suppression and by labeling them as insurgents, he shows the success of the Federalists in winning over the public narrative of the crisis.

“The most open and daring act of the British agents” — the year of treaties

As 1794 ended, Washington and his administration could count several victories. Word began trickling into Philadelphia of Wayne’s victory at Fallen Timbers just as the militia mustered to advance against the tax resisters. Wayne’s official word reached Washington September 30. Although the president lauded the victory, he tempered it with caution. In the same November statement to Congress in which Washington explained his actions during the whiskey insurrection, he noted that the news from Wayne appeared to be good, but the campaign had yet to be concluded and peace with the Native tribes remained the administration’s primary goal.

Wayne’s August 1794 victory at Fallen Timbers appeared only to address some aspects of security in Kentucky. The frontier still roiled through early 1795. Starting early in the year, Isaac Shelby, governor of Kentucky, found himself flooded with a series of letters and petitions describing repeated and violent Indian raids on the frontier. By April, over one hundred families

79 “Remonstrance to the President and Congress on Opening Navigation of the Mississippi River, March 24, 1794,” in Foner, ed., 127 - 129; and Christopher Greenup to Thomas Todd, November 22, 1794, Christopher Greenup Papers, Box 1, FHS.

80 See Edmund Randolph to George Washington, September 30, 1794, PGW 16, 750; and Enclosures to Henry Knox to George Washington, October 8, 1794, in PGW 17, 32 - 38.

81 “To the United States Senate and the House of Representatives,” November 19,1794, PGW 17186 – 187.
petitioned the governor for protection at a series of blockhouses situated on a north-south line along Brush and Pine Lick Creeks. Residents beseeched Shelby for additional defenses or a general mustering of the militia. The governor’s hands were increasingly tied. As he noted to William McDowell during mid-January, the legislation passed to fund frontier defense had expired at the end of 1794 and would not be considered for extension until the next legislative session.\textsuperscript{82} Clearly the victory at Fallen Timbers had not fully resolved the issues on the Kentucky frontier.

Prior to the events of the summer of 1794, Washington had dispatched Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay to Great Britain in order to negotiate a treaty that avoided war with Great Britain. All sides of the current European war took liberty in seizing American shipping, and Jay’s appointment represented another facet of Washington’s neutrality project. In his formal orders to Jay, Randolph listed the commercial depredations first, but listed evacuation of the forts in the Northwest Territory and cessation of support to the Native tribes as “not inferior in dignity to the preceding, though subsequent in order.” Randolph conceded that the British would disavow any support of the Indian attacks, but argued that, “one of the consequences of holding the posts has been much bloodshed on our frontier by Indians.” And even if support of Indian raiding was not official policy, the United States possessed proof that British agents supported the raiding. “It is incumbent upon that Government [Great Britain],” Randolph concluded, “to restrain those agents; or the forbearance to restrain them cannot be interpreted [sic] otherwise

\textsuperscript{82} See Isaac Shelby papers from January to May 1795, Isaac Shelby Papers, sc727, KHS; also see Isaac Shelby to William McDowell, January 14, 1795, Isaac Shelby Papers, 544, Folder 3, FHS.
than as a determination to countenance them.” Randolph believed that the current state of affairs on the frontier had left the United States in an almost perpetual state of war.  

Washington wrote to Jay during late summer 1794, just as the rebellion in Pennsylvania reached its crescendo and the Kentucky question demanded attention. He added particular verve to Jay’s instructions, helping to focus his envoy on what he perceived to be the most pressing matter between Great Britain and the United States. The machinations of one Mr. Simcoe, a British trade representative in the Ohio River Valley, greatly troubled the president. “This may be considered as the most open and daring act of the British agents in North America,” Washington argued, “for there does not remain a doubt in the mind of any well informed person in this country…the murders of helpless women and innocent children along the frontiers, results from the conduct of the Agents of Great Britain in this Country.” The president, obviously agitated, declared that no “state of amity” would exist between the two countries “if the posts are not surrendered.” Washington closed by stating that any expected peace between Great Britain and the United States required an agreement about evacuation of the forts.

Washington’s missive to Jay probably reflected more about the ongoing events in the nation than his present assessment of the negotiations with Great Britain. But they are revealing in that they show where the president viewed the primary issue to lie. Commercial depredations obviously concerned the president, but peace rested upon the evacuation of the British forts in the Northwest Territories. Warfare with the Native tribes, the frontier insurrection, the political

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83 President Washington to John Jay, 6 - 7; and “Instructions to Jay and Envoy Extraordinary,” May 6, 1794, 10 – 21; both in Henry P. Johnston, ed. The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, vol. 4 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893) (hereafter JJ).

84 George Washington to John Jay, August 30, 1794, in PGW 16, 613 - 616.
issues in Kentucky – all of these issues came to a head during the summer of 1794, and
Washington viewed them through the same lens of American legitimacy that he viewed the crisis
in the nation’s ports the year prior. Having somewhat resolved that issue, the president sought to
secure the frontier, the region that now presented him with not just crises, but with the greatest
challenge to the future of the nation. If the United States could not protect its citizens, could not
uphold the principles of representative democracy on which it was based, then it only existed as
a country in name only and the Constitution, which Washington would later argue was his to
protect, amounted to nothing but paper.

In this light, Jay’s Treaty, and Pickney’s Treaty and the Treaty of Greenville that
followed, represented a clear line of continuity that the Washington administration had been
building since the spring of 1793. Washington intimated as much in his first letter to Jay after
returning from overseeing the initial muster of the militia against the rebels. “The insurrection in
the western counties of this State has excited much speculation, and a variety of opinions
abroad,” the president imagined, further guessing that the events would “be represented
differently according to the wishes of some, and the prejudices of others, who may exhibit it as
evidence of what has been predicted ‘that we are unable to govern ourselves.’” He again blamed
the “self created societies” for the crisis, going a step further than he had previously in stating
that they sought “to effect some revolution in the government.” This note may have stemmed
from Brackenridge’s late summer missive to Coxe or simply be an assumption based on the
creation of a rhetorical perception of the democratic societies. Nevertheless, Washington
informed Jay that he intended his upcoming account to Congress of the insurrection and its
suppression more for foreign than domestic consumption. He warned his envoy that the speech
may appear too detailed, but he meant it as such. Washington viewed this speech as the primary means of disabusing Great Britain and others from the notion of American fragility in the borderlands.\footnote{President Washington to John Jay, November 1, 1794, \textit{JJ 4}, 128 – 132.}

Jay’s mission, without being directly stated, entailed proving American legitimacy on the other side of the Atlantic. Washington’s quest for legitimacy started in the republic’s ports during 1793, had moved to the frontier by 1794, and now had gone transatlantic, the battle now waged without muskets and canon, but with a pen. And, according to Jay, it went well. He continually reported on the popularity of the Americans, and Washington in particular, throughout late 1794 and 1795. “It may seem strange,” Jay wrote to Tench Coxe towards the end of 1794, “and yet I am convinced, that next to the king, our president is more popular in this country than any man in it.”\footnote{John Jay to Tench Coxe, December 18, 1794, \textit{JJ 4}, 153.} This popularity, along with the ongoing and wider conflagration with Republican France, likely helped speed Great Britain’s negotiations and acceptance of the treaty. When Jay wrote to Washington to report the treaty’s signing, he claimed that it “must speak for itself.” On the same day, he informed Hamilton that, “if this treaty fails, I despair of another.” In his official account of the negotiations forwarded to Randolph, Jay admitted that not every issue had been resolved, but thought that the current treaty could not be any better than its current state.\footnote{John Jay to President Washington, November 19, 1794, 133 – 135; John Jay to Alexander Hamilton, November, 19, 1794, 135; and John Jay to Edmund Randolph, November 19, 1794, 137 – 144; all in \textit{JJ 4}.}

The first article of the treaty dealt with the forts in the Northwest Territory; apparently Washington’s August tirade against British interference helped move this issue to the top of the negotiations. Agreeing to evacuate the forts but claiming to need more time to establish a new
plan of trade with the native tribes in their region, the British basically acceded to American demands first stipulated at the end of the War for Independence. The remaining articles dealt with various aspects of trade and commerce, and here Washington and his administration anticipated protest. Article XII of the treaty established some confining and embarrassing requirements on trade with the British West Indies, limiting both ship tonnage and what could be re-imported from the islands.88

The Senate sat from June 8 - 24 to debate the treaty’s ratification, eventually agreeing to each article with no protest except for Article XII. This article served to unite the pro- and anti-administration forces, now formally labelled Federalist and Republican, respectively.89 A vocal contingent of New England Federalists sought the article’s removal from the overall treaty, and Republicans derided the treaty in its totality. Federalists forwarded a motion to approve the treaty minus Article XII late in the session, and the vote ran along party lines, carrying in late June.90

Over the next eight weeks, Washington wrangled with how best to handle the Senate’s actions. As he polled his cabinet, the president relied on a set of new faces. Both Hamilton and Knox had left the cabinet to return to personal life, although each remained in regular correspondence with Washington. In their place now sat, two steadfast Federalist, Timothy Elkins and McKitrick, 406 - 450; and DeConde, *Entangling Alliances*, 101 - 140. For a recent and very well researched rendering of Jay’s Treaty, see Samuel D. Negus, “‘Further Concessions Cannot be Attained:’ The Jay-Grenville Treaty and the Politics of Anglo-American Relations, 1789 - 1807” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2013).


89 Here I readily agree with Elkins and McKitrick’s assessment of party formation. They argue that the debate over Jay’s Treaty formalized the nascent party system as the as-yet congealing party ideologies began to cement in scope. Elkins and McKitrick take to calling the parties by their names before the Jay Treaty debates, but clearly see the summer of 1795 as the defining moment of party formation. See Elkins and McKitrick, 417 – 421. I also agree with Pasley’s masterful account of the election campaign of 1796. His work outlining a theory of popular politics defining the parties during the era, as well as the notion that parties “existed” without formal names up until 1796 significantly flavored the present narrative. See Pasley, *The First Presidential Contest*, 1 – 15.

Pickering at War and Oliver Wolcott at Treasury. Bradford remained as the Attorney General while Randolph, appearing closest to the president, advised on the overall ratification procedures as Secretary of State. The three newest members of the cabinet wanted immediate ratification and a dismissal of the Senate’s amendment. Much as he had done during the crises and in Pennsylvania and Kentucky, Randolph argued for patience and caution. Rumors of further British depredations on American shipping had reached Philadelphia and the Secretary of State saw no reason to hurry the proceedings until all facts had been gathered.91

Washington did not want to wait. Protests in- and out-of doors rocked the nation as Republicans and the remnants of the democratic societies began a vocal campaign against ratification. Societies in New York, Boston, and particularly Philadelphia mounted a vigorous anti-ratification campaign that appeared to revitalize the democratic society movement. The secret proceedings of the negotiations, the drawn-out Senate approval process, and Washington’s silence reference his decision to sign, amend, or withdraw the treaty created a rhetorical vacuum that Republicans and other anti-administration elements filled with a counter-narrative of duplicitous aristocratic elements and the subversion of the democratic processes established by the Constitution.92 The president, who such a short time prior held up the tax rebellion as an example of a colluding undemocratic force, now appeared to be threatening to move in the same direction.

A closer look at the anti-administration elements would have revealed some divisions in their ranks. The democratic society movement never composed a solid political bloc. Rather, the

91 DeConde, Entangling Alliances, 110 - 136.
92 Elkins and Mckitrick, 415 - 431.
common Jacobin-inspired rhetoric allowed these diverse groups to give voice to their own particular set of demands. Thus, it comes as no surprise that those who benefitted from Jay’s Treaty did not participate in the protests. Most notably, the Democratic Society of Kentucky fell silent during this period. While 1795 witnessed the return of Jacobin-inspired rhetoric and populist unrest along the eastern seaboard, in Kentucky, the members of the Democratic Society appeared to sit back and take stock of the present situation. The society in Lexington released no official statements regarding the treaty nor did the groups editorial mouthpiece, the Kentucky Gazette, release any bombastic editorials. In fact, many in Kentucky could begin to celebrate the fruition of their earlier protests. Harry Innes wrote to Isaac Shelby to notify him of the rumors traveling around Philadelphia concerning Jay’s Treaty, as well as the ongoing deliberations between Thomas Pinckney and the Spanish. “The anxiety of mind which you have felt for sometime past,” Innes smilingly wrote, “will now shortly be relieved, as the commissioners of the general government by the present opportunity begins his communication on that all important subject, the navigation of the Mississippi.”

The society from the recently recalcitrant western counties of Pennsylvania also stayed mute during the deliberation, either from fear of reprisal or from a sense that the evacuation of the British forts lay in their best interest.

Nonetheless, Washington perceived the protests as irresponsible, and held his old bugaboo, the democratic societies, to blame. The generation of a formalized political opposition also frustrated him; he cut short a week a recuperative retreat at Mt. Vernon due to “the violent and disturbing proceedings” taking place. Upon his return to the capital, Washington found his

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93 Harry Innes to Isaac Shelby, January 17, 1794, Isaac Shelby papers, SC727, KHS.

cabinet in shambles. Pickering interrupted a meeting between the president and the Secretary of State and asked to speak to Washington alone. After he had the president to himself, Pickering informed him that Wolcott had been handed a letter from the French counsel, Jean Antoine Joseph Faucet. The ship that Fauchet had attempted to forward the letter upon was captured by the British; the captain of the British vessel forwarded it to his nation’s emissary in Philadelphia. The purloined letter potentially implicated Randolph in a series of offenses, the chief among them being espionage and bribery. The Secretary of the Treasury presented Washington with the letter that night.⁹⁵

Washington met with the cabinet in mid-August to poll their opinions one last time before he went forward. The votes went as planned, with Randolph alone voicing delay. As soon as he completed his dissent, the president arose, stated “I will ratify the treaty,” and left the room. Dumbfounded, Randolph proved further shocked when Washington presented him the acquired letter before the cabinet a week later. Stammering, Randolph mumbled a reply, then asked to be excused so he could draft a written explanation. He resigned that afternoon. A self-published pamphlet seeking to exonerate Randolph appeared several weeks later, but only served to muddy the waters.⁹⁶

Purported French designs had now subverted Washington’s first two Secretaries of State, first Jefferson, now Randolph, both Virginians like the President. The Federalist press painted Fauchet’s ignominy as the second coming of Genêt, accusing the French consul of conspiring to

⁹⁵ Best brief summation is Elkins and McKitrick, 424 – 427. See also DeConde, Entangling Alliances, 415 – 416.

⁹⁶ Ibid., see also Edmund Randolph, A Vindication of Mr. Randolph's Resignation (Philadelphia, 1795), Manuscript Collection, LCP.
separate “all of the western country from the United States.” Whether Randolph actually conspired with Fauchet seems unlikely. The perception of collusion, however, stained Randolph, and by extension, the democratic societies, the Republicans, and any other anti-administration elements. Many of the democratic societies lost their momentum during the fall of 1795 and the winter of 1796. A Federalist-leaning Connecticut paper noted the dissolution of the Philadelphia Democratic Society during mid-January 1796. “As this has been considered the Mother Club in this country,” it exclaimed, “there is reason to conclude that the various germs which have sprouted from that root of anarchy, will wither and die.” The Democratic Society of Kentucky faded from existence; the arrival of and rapid ratification of Pinckney’s Treaty during February and March 1796, along with General Wayne’s Treaty of Greenville with the Native confederacy effectively addressed all of their earlier remonstrances. Although other societies existed throughout the remainder of the decade, they lacked the vitriol and passion the movement put forward from 1793 to 1795. Subsumed in the congealing of the party system, their Jacobin-inflected rhetoric also proved unpalatable as France continued to look like more and more of an aggressor.

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By the national election of 1796, the Washington administration had much to show for itself. The previous four years had gravely tested the president and the young nation. Although the monster of partisanship lurked just below the surface upon the president’s second inauguration, it had not yet leapt forward to throttle the political will of the nation. The radical

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98 American Mercury, January 25, 1796.
turn of the French Revolution had released the beast from his bonds, however, and forced to contend with it, Washington crafted a strategy that reinforced American legitimacy at a time when it could have easily crumbled. First by holding firm to neutrality and waging a legalistic battle in the nation’s ports, then later mustering the militia to suppress a popular rebellion, the president confirmed the nation’s ability to enforce its laws within its own borders. The year of treaties extended this legitimacy internationally. For some concessions on transatlantic commerce, Washington addressed domestic concerns about the stability and security of the frontier while also formalizing international boundaries that had troubled the United States since the end of the War for Independence.\textsuperscript{99} All told, the nation in 1796 appeared more capable, organized, stable, and secure.

But two disturbing trends arose concurrently during this period. First, while taking strong executive measures to enforce the legitimacy he sought, Washington provided fodder for anti-administration forces to argue that a perversion of the nation’s republican ideals was taking place. What Washington viewed as actions necessary to protect the Constitution and the republic, others would argue about their heavy-handedness. While most of these issues had been addressed, the nature of partisanship had not. By the election of 1796, formal party machines had either taken shape or were in development. The idea that factions subverted democracy no longer held dominant sway throughout the nation. John Adams’ victory over Thomas Jefferson during the 1796 presidential election had turned competitive, although nowhere near where it would go in 1800. Whether he liked it or not, or even fully grasped its meaning, Adams proved to be the first party-aligned president.

\textsuperscript{99} Negus, 30-65.
At the same time, the now-dubbed Federalists did not concede that the party system represented the new normal in the nation’s political affairs (neither did the Republicans). Faction subverted democracy, and the radical rhetoric of the democratic society movement inaugurated an intense paranoia among the Federalists about radical rhetoric and foreign subversion. While anti-administration forces decried Washington’s neutrality or the administrations supposed undemocratic bias, Federalists counterattacked. For them, the lesson of Washington’s second term was that conspirators stood ready to use the nation’s democratic principles to foist a demagogue to power. Such notions did not attack democracy; it held it as a principle to be protected by logical and reasonable men. Fault did not lie with the American people, but instead, with foreign puppet masters that sought to make the nation a marionette for the European powers, or worse, topple the United States completely. The campaigns of 1796 reinforced these notions, for although Washington (and by extension Adams) preserved and reinforced the legitimacy of the nation, the Republicans created false notion of aristocratic forces driving the party to stir up a public that did not fully understand the nation’s present state. Running against Jay’s Treaty, the Republicans won some seats in the House, but did not gain in the Senate and obviously could not claim the executive office.

As part of an increasing paranoia, the Federalists turned to the military as a sure means to guarantee against either foreign invasion or domestic strife. Towards the end of his address marking the conclusion of the rebellion in Pennsylvania, Washington struck a somber note. The mustering of the militia represented the truest form of the citizen-soldier ideal, but delays and wants had hampered the march west. He advocated for changes to the militia law that would provide better federal oversight and professionalization, much as he did at the end of 1793. The
president even pondered having to occupy the western counties for an extended period of time, something currently not allowed under the existing militia law or the latest Congressional budget. Congress had allowed contracts to improve and build fortifications to lapse, leaving the frontier and the ports under-protected. These concerns had also been voiced the previous year, and Washington despaired that no changes had been made. The United States, with radicals agitating in the streets and foreign instigators in their midst, did not possess the means to protect itself effectively. And the current partisanship not only failed to address these issues, but actually exacerbated them.

The Congressional debate surrounding Jay’s Treaty appeared to crystallize the president’s decision to not seek a third term. Much as the Republican’s had done, Washington and his supporters wagered their political capital in support of the Treaty. Had the House rejected the Treaty’s enforcement, the Washington administration would most likely have collapsed. And this would prove only a small part of a grander collapse, Washington believed. Writing to his friend Charles Carrol the day after the house affirmed the funding needed to execute the Treaty’s provisions, Washington argued that the debate represented a shockingly unconstitutional expansion of the House’s prerogative. The vitriol of the dissenter’s anger brought the Constitution “to the brink of a precipice.” Either accepted or rejected, Jay’s Treaty would mark the end of Washington’s presidency. The Treaty’s eventual acceptance had appeared to affirm the

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100 “Speech of the President of the United States to both houses of Congress,” November 19, 794, Print Americana, Harlan-Crowe Collection, Dallas, TX.


administration and its position, leaving the President slightly more confident in the republic’s future in the revolutionary Atlantic World.

Amidst this tumult, Washington began editing his Farewell Address. The president had reached out to Madison for help drafting a similar missive during 1792 while he deliberated taking on a second term. Four years later, the president forwarded this draft to Hamilton, hoping that his confidante might draft an address that could heal the political scar running through the nation. Sent just two weeks after the critical vote on Jay’s Treaty, Washington clearly believed that an opportunity to capture and contain the chimera of partisanship existed. To this end, the president shared dinner with Madison in mid-May and informed him of his intent to use his previous valedictory as a capstone to his tenure. And, by attaching Madison’s initial draft in his letter to Hamilton, Washington clearly showed his desire to build on his fellow Virginians work. Under his eye, the president hoped that his words would rise above the political fray.103

Hamilton envisioned other designs. For the former Treasury Secretary, the address represented a chance to warn the population about the dangers of faction and foreign subterfuge. From the beginning, he understood his words would cement not only his legacy, but that of Washington’s and the nation’s, as well. Whereas some may decry his bias regarding the task, Hamilton could point to the events of the last several years as demonstrable threats to the future of the republic. As he had stated repeatedly in pages and pages of incisive essays, domestic and foreign policy coexisted in an increasingly more delineated partisan realm; they could not be separated. The preservation of the republic depended upon not only recognizing this reality, but

103 George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, May 15, 1796, WGW 35, 48-60. See also, Gilbert, 125.
also de-politicizing the one to allow for clear-headed thinking regarding the other.\textsuperscript{104} The democratic societies’ rejection of neutrality, the deleterious nature of relations on the frontier, the close-run nature of Jay’s Treaty – each of these events affected stakeholders within and without the country. The preservation of the republic necessitated the rejection of partisanship not just to ease domestic tension, but to protect the nation from foreign influence and subversion.

To this end, Hamilton worked some chicanery on the president. He forwarded a draft of his new address in late July, 1796, stating that his edits to Madison’s initial draft (and Washington’s assumed foundation of the address) would follow shortly thereafter. Once the president received both copies, he could then decide how best to weave the two drafts together, a significantly harder task than simply revising a single work to express the key themes of your vision. And, by arriving first, Hamilton’s draft established a tone and narrative bereft of Madison’s point of view; although elements of his work might be added during the editing process, the key points benefitted from their initial momentum. By the time Washington received Hamilton’s edits of the initial draft in mid-August, the president clearly exhibited a familiarity with and liking of Hamilton’s work.\textsuperscript{105}

With such overt machinations taking place during the drafting process, it is odd to consider that most historians and observers hold up the Farewell Address as a foreign policy document and not a testament of political vision. As one historian noted, many disregard the fact that the Address is “\textit{mainly} devoted to a plaintive warning against sectionalism and party


\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.; Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, August, 10, 1796, \textit{PAH} 20, 293 - 294 ; Gilbert, 125 – 127; and Sharp, 139.
factionalism and to an appeal for unity in domestic politics,” instead viewing it as a foreign policy speech. Of the nine issues brought forward in the address, over half overtly concern themselves with “factionalism,” while three — maintaining neutrality, keeping the peace for a generation, and observing treaty obligation — all had become politicized during the Jay Treaty debates.

Painting the address as a purely timeless or foundational document robs it of its contexts and closes off historic introspection into the politics of the Early Republic, as well as Washington’s presidency. For no better document than the Farewell Address exists that completely encapsulates Washington’s political thinking. While he does argue that Americans should take pride in the distinctive nature of the United States, he repeatedly warns against factionalism. Most notably, he warns of the necessity of political unity in the face of the destructive interests of foreign powers. This may appear as a harmless platitude until one views it from Washington’s perspective of the Whiskey Rebellion and Jay’s Treaty. For Washington, foreign subterfuge lurked all about him, changing the course of political dialogue, igniting western tensions, and leading a deceived public into the streets. For a president that increasingly turned towards party identification during his final term in office, Washington ironically used his address to condemn party identification. For him, his gravitation towards Hamilton and the still-forming Federalist party was based on a necessity: the need to preserve the republic against foreign powers that exploited the nation’s democratic principles to execute their bidding. He wanted nothing to do with party, but found himself repeatedly managing fewer choices to counter what he viewed as existential national crises.

106 Sharp, 139.
John Adams inherited Washington’s problems. As vice president, Adams found himself outside Washington’s braintrust and exempted from the policy discussion of his presidency. The election of 1796 served as a political wake-up call to a young nation that still struggled defining political expression and culture at the national level. Adams, more so than Washington, strove to govern “above party,” but found himself frustrated by a political system increasingly defined by party. As we will see, his answer to crises, both foreign and domestic, followed and expanded upon Washington’s legacy. Emphasizing general paranoia against foreign powers, an increased reliance on military measures, and a fear of popular unrest, Adams and the Federalist entered the last four years of the eighteenth century more likely to brandish swords and pens against their perceived foes.  

Chapter 4

“To Delay Relief…Might Render the Blacks Impatient and Unbelieving”: The Search for Stability in the Caribbean

During the summer of 1798, President John Adams received his mail at his personal residence in Quincy, Massachusetts. Summering at Quincy allowed him and his family the opportunity to escape the miasmal season in Philadelphia while also providing a restful retreat for his sick wife, Abigail. A vast amount of his correspondence dealt with the undeclared naval war with France (later known as the Quasi-War) that the Adams administration had inaugurated the preceding May. The administration, feeling political pressure from its own Federalist party, had authorized a response to the seizure of American merchantmen by French privateers at the end of May; the president had forwarded instructions to the newly founded Department of the Navy to “seize take and bring into any port of the United States . . . any armed vessel sailing under the Authority or Pretence [sic] of Authority from the Republic of France, which shall have committed, or which shall be found hovering on the Coasts of the United States, for the purpose of committing Depredations on the Vessels belonging to the citizens thereof.”\(^1\) In response, the Congress passed several acts that focused on defending American merchant vessels and expanding the navy to take the offensive against piracy and privateering. Congress assigned Benjamin Stoddert, the new Secretary of the Navy, the task of overseeing all of these new actions.\(^2\)

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After assuming the role of Secretary, Stoddert fully backed this policy and quickly mobilized the still small navy to protect the American coastline. Accounts of “depredations” had filled the air since before the Adams’ presidency, and particularly close ones at that. Captain John Pittman related, in a letter written at the same time as the issuance of instructions to attack armed French ships, that he had come across a Captain Very of Salem in the Chesapeake Bay. Very had the crew of five American ships on board his vessel, their ships all taken “on our coast.” Congress charged the Adams administration with determining the scope of French privateering activity against U.S. commerce and reports soon flowed from the cabinet detailing seizures off Newfoundland and Long Island, as well as the Chesapeake Bay; prizes ships being sold in Curacao; and helpless sailors being deposited with none of their belongings in foreign ports, sometimes after being whipped by privateer captains. Congress passed several acts focused on defending American merchant vessels and authorizing actions against French warships and privateers. In its early stages, the Quasi-war focused on legalistic issues of maritime law, neutrality, and national sovereignty, particularly.

Writing to Adams during late July, 1798, Secretary Stoddert pled for a strategic shift in the ongoing hostilities; as the heat of deep summer enveloped Philadelphia, he became restive. After assuming the role of secretary, Stoddert backed the administration’s policies to the hilt, mobilizing the navy to protect the coastline of the republic. Now, in July, he theorized that the impending hurricane season would drive French privateers back into the protection of French harbors in the West Indies. This reprieve would allow the navy the opportunity to reshape the

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3 “Extract of letter from Captain John Pittman, concerning Captain Very’s ship being boarded by French privateers,” May 28, 1798, NDQ 1, 60.

course of the conflict. Stoddert preferred fighting French privateers in French colonial waters, not near American cities. “By keeping up incessant attacks upon the French Cruisers on their own ground,” Stoddert believed, “they will in a degree be prevented from coming on ours.”

This idea not only served a strategic end, but also spoke to another facet of the conflict, one that had been gestating for over half a decade among men who shared prominent ties to the Adams administration. Henry Knox, now retired from his secretaryship but still an avid letter writer, penned a notable letter to Adams a month before Stoddert’s request. Obviously agitated about the situation with France, Knox opined that, “posterity will be astonished, at the constant perseverance of the different succession of French Rulers rising upon the ruins of each other, and yet holding steadily the same unjust conduct towards us.” The citizenry of the United States would follow the president’s lead, he continued, rallying around Adams during this time of strife and providing the virtuous fortitude to end the depredations of the anarchic French Directorate.

For all of his bombast, however, Knox voiced caution. Rather than solely advocating naval expansion in order to protect American merchantmen and attack rapacious French privateers, he also outlined the steps necessary to protect the nation from invasion. Knox concerned himself most with the southern states, which he believed were “vulnerable . . . to an alarming degree.” He acknowledged that currently only the wooden walls of the British navy kept the wily Jacobins from launching a force of “blacks and people of color” onto the shores of the slave South. “Under such circumstances,” Knox warned, “the slaves would instantly join them, and greatly encrease [sic] their force.” Fearing that he would sound alarmist, Knox

5 “To John Adams from the Secretary of the Navy,” July 30, 1798, *NDQ*, 1, 255–56.

6 “Henry Knox to the President of the United States [John Adams],” June 26, 1798, *NDQ*, 1, 139.
reminded the president that “the event [black/mulatto invasion of the South] is possible, and whatever is possible the enemy will have the enterprise to attempt.”

These two disparate ideas—a desire to shift the area of battle to the West Indies and a fear of Jacobin invasion—animated Stoddert’s recommendation to President Adams, as well as the plans he enacted to execute his strategy during the next few months. In this process of transition, the Adams administration completely reconfigured the Quasi-War with France and recast the foreign policy of the United States. The navy became the primary instrument for executing this policy, and it acted far beyond the stated goals of stopping French depredations. By 1799 every ship in the navy (except for one) had orders to sail south to the Caribbean. After the spring of 1798, the American coastline never again faced the scourge of privateering and depredations. Commerce rebounded handily.

This chapter will attempt to unite the various threads of historical insight about America’s first foreign military engagement and weave them into a coherent tapestry that shows a clear and distinct theme: During the Adams administration, national policy combined with military action to create a new imperial reality within the Caribbean, one where the young United States rejected revolutionary rhetoric in favor of pragmatically pursuing a plan of stability. Only by accepting this truth can we understand how thoughtful men in power could side with an ex-slave general in Saint-Domingue who still claimed fealty to the same French government that the United States engaged in an undeclared war. Beginning with a discussion of the Adams administration’s concerted drive to increase the navy, this chapter will trace the development of this expansive foreign policy through its initial attempts at the containment of radicalism in Guadeloupe, the

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7 Ibid., 140; see also Alan Taylor, The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772 - 1832 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company 2014), 55 - 112.
transition to a more interventionist policy in Saint Domingue, and finally, the full application of American might in an attempt to build stability in the Caribbean.

Present-day conceptions of the Quasi-War conjure images of mammoth wooden frigates pounding away at each other in the Atlantic Ocean and struggles over imperial shipping lanes. The reality is far different. After almost a half-decade of near continuous warfare in Europe, the French navy moldered in its ports, lacking funding and hemmed in by the British blockade. American merchants grabbed the opportunity to wedge themselves into the West Indies trade during the 1790s, freely exporting wheat and lumber to the French islands lacking goods from the European continent. While France did strengthen the provisions that allowed privateers to interdict American vessels that potentially might trade with England, the majority of the depredations occurred along the American coastline and in the vicinity of France’s Caribbean outposts — particularly Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe. Political turmoil in France spread to the imperial periphery, best epitomized in the Haitian Revolution, but also seen in events taking place throughout their Caribbean outposts.

The historiography of the Quasi-War divides roughly into two segments: diplomatic/political histories driven by charismatic historical figures, and naval, tactical histories that concentrate on military actions alone. Most historians regard Alexander DeConde’s work, *The Quasi-War*, as the classic account of the conflict. Falling in the first group, DeConde’s narrative focused primarily on the diplomatic transactions between Paris and Philadelphia (later, Washington, D.C.). He acknowledges that the conflict with France dominated Adams’

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presidency, and that Adams, in fact, served as a war-time president. Earlier, Depression-era, foreign policy studies of the U.S role in the West Indies, most noticeably Montague’s *Haiti and the United States* and Logan’s *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti*, also over-emphasized personalities and subsumed economic forces and social movements in retellings of diplomacy of the highest order. Some later updates, particularly Arthur Scherr’s *Jefferson’s Haitian Policy*, still rely on “great man” narratives to examine the U.S. relationship with the West Indies.⁹

Gardner Allen’s *Our Naval War with France*, published in 1909, preceded DeConde’s book by almost six decades. Allen penned a straightforward tactical history of the conflict, sparing no time in interpreting events or attempting to engender a wider understanding of the conflict. Michael Palmer’s *Stoddert’s War*, published eighty years later, updated Allen magnificently, drawing tactical, strategic, and bureaucratic conclusions from the naval battles of the period. Like Allen, Palmer ignored the socio-political ramifications of the war, choosing to focus almost purely on the military parameters of the conflict. Palmer does not stray from the operational roots, yet it lacks the policy or ideological backdrop that dominated earlier works in the field. ¹⁰

Palmer benefited from the Navy Department’s commissioning of the *Naval Documents of the Quasi-War with France*, compiled during the 1930s. Collected in seven volumes, this

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collection helped recreate the role played by the navy in the Quasi-War, politically and militarily. Unfortunately, neither the Naval Department’s collection, nor the other works listed, synthesize the political, military, and social aspects of the Quasi-War into a holistic treatment. Recent scholarship concerning the Quasi-War and its era have not fully studied the confluence of policy and military action, and definitely has not advanced significant new scholarship involving politics, strategy, and the role of the U.S. Navy in the Caribbean.

Perchance due to its made-for-drama confrontation, or maybe it’s easily identifiable and personal nature, the XYZ Affair (or as some contend, the WXYZ Affair) has overshadowed the Quasi-War almost in totality. As a later historian claimed, “Historians have long recognized the significance of the WXYZ affairs of 1797-1798,” Historian William Stinchombe argued, “and rightly so, for such matters as the balance between Republican and Federalist parties, the divisions among the Federalists, the politics of the provisional army, and the passage of the Alien and Sedition acts cannot be understood apart from the WXYZ affair.”

Several volumes and articles have pored over the correspondence among and from the diplomats negotiating in Paris, all striking a similar chord: French diplomatic perfidy, here answered with “Not one cent for tribute,” created a schism not just with the French, but within the United States. The reality, as touched upon here and fully explored in the next chapter, conveys a different historical narrative.

In many regards the public release of the events surrounding the WXYZ Affair initially united

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the nation against the French, striking an electoral hammer blow against the now-formed Republican Party in the gubernatorial elections of 1798 and 1799.

The pro-American historiography of the XYZ Affair and the Quasi-war ignores the “battleground” where the navy and the Adams’ administration focused their strategic gaze: the French (and thus Radical Jacobin) Caribbean. In terms of this geographic region the historiographies vary as widely as the events taking place on these disparate islands during the era. Although quite expansive, the historiography of the Haitian Revolution still evinces the legendary impact of C.L.R. James’ The Black Jacobins. A powerful work, The Black Jacobins generally ignored the role of the United States in the latter portions of the Revolution. Thomas Ott’s more recent work, The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804, attempted to integrate the Revolution into global affairs. Newer works have explored many different facets associated with the war, but none have yet fully examined the place of U.S. foreign policy during the greater conflict. Philippe Girard’s studies of the French military machinations in the Revolutionary Caribbean and the agency of L’Ouverture has helped create a coherent narrative that ties the region and era into the greater context of the French Revolution, but still, for the most part, foregoes the action of the United States during the Quasi-War. Revolutionary Guadeloupe lacks a definitive history, but Laurent Dubois’ A Colony of Citizens comes closest. Dubois links revolutionary ideology with slave emancipation, believing that the two together greatly recast

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social relations throughout the Caribbean, with Guadeloupe figuring as the crossroads of thought and action.¹⁵

Two more recent works have attempted to synthesize the various and diverse themes that connected the United States with the Revolutionary Caribbean, seeing the Early Republic’s own struggle with the concept of slavery as a lens through which to view these relations. Tim Matthewson’s *A Proslavery Foreign Policy* casts the relationship between the United States and Haiti (néé Saint Domingue) as a continuum of pro-slavery ideology from Washington through Jefferson’s Virginia Dynasty. Matthewson argues that, as president, Adams attempted to craft a policy of *realpolitik* when dealing with revolution and rebellion on the island, but still found himself constrained by racist hierarchies that never allowed him to view the struggling nation as an equal. All executive and legislative actions taken in terms of Haiti revolved around the continued promulgation of slavery in the United States. Ashli White’s *Encountering Revolution* demonstrates how the struggle to classify the status of Saint Dominguan refugees within the United States forced the nation to confront the inherent contradiction of republican slavery. An admirable work, White’s book correctly shows how the inability to create clear ideological linkages between the republican spirit of the early republic and the revolutionary impulse in Haiti generated a “boogieman” of slave insurrection to socially bind the nation together.¹⁶

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Such a slavery-centric narrative foregoes a more fulsome understanding of the conflict. Fear did motivate the Federalists, but not necessarily fear over the end of slavery or slave insurrection. These events represented symptoms of a larger and more dangerous disease: Jacobinism. No coherent anti-slavery/abolitionist political ideology had taken root within the United States during the late eighteenth century; a long and distinguished historiography has charted the actual loosening of slavery’s strictures, due to manumission and the transition to wheat in the Upper South, during the Federalist era. These changes developed along socio-economic lines and did not create a prevalent anti-slavery rhetoric within the United States. The true fear was that the Jacobin-inspired anarchic radicalism would use the French Caribbean as a spring board to infiltrate and invade the United States. As Knox argues, the nation should not fear the ex-slaves, but instead should guard against the Jacobins that could land a multi-racial army of conquest and emancipation, buoyed by radically iconoclastic propaganda, on the American coast.

While the action in the Caribbean can be portrayed as America’s first foreign intervention, they also can be seen as an early form of containment. While the traditional view of containment entails the Cold War of the post World War II world, the Quasi-War, particularly in the Caribbean, appeared very similar — a war to stop the spread of radicalism in which the

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United States created some interesting allies. As Adams stated in an address to Congress given in December 1798, “An efficient preparation for war can alone insure peace.”

“The ruination of our voyage” – The Revolutionary Caribbean 1793-1798

The Watson and Paul merchant company represented but one of many Philadelphia merchant houses that carried on a brisk trade with the French Caribbean, particularly with the island of Saint Domingue. The National Gazette filled it back pages with lists of goods from throughout the Atlantic, including sugar brought from the island’s main port, Cap Francois. These back page listings did not exhibit how fickle the French Caribbean trade had become during the last half of the 1790s. Thomas Baker, one of the company’s captains, wrote several letters home during the fall of 1796 from Cap Francois relaying news of his transactions. Arriving in mid-October, Baker noted that a recent “imbargo” on flour could prove to become the “ruination of [the] voyage.” He still sounded a despondent chord a few weeks later. Having only moved a fraction of his products, Baker hesitated to move to another port on the island; the ongoing internecine warfare unsettled him. Specifically, he claimed that word had reached him that the “conduct towards our flag, if it may be called in the least, is abominable.” And yet, a mere eighteen months later and amidst the height of French depredations, another captain wrote to Philadelphia that he expected to receive a full one hundred percent profit from his trade in Cap Francois. Merchants could gain wealth in the increasingly anarchic French Caribbean, but it proved risky, at best.

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18 “President’s Speech,” broadside from Providence, RI, December 15, 1798, Manuscript Collection, LCP.

19 Watson and Paul Business Records, Box 1, LCP.
The French Caribbean appeared to be the nexus of revolutionary fervor during the last half of the 1790s. The Washington administration handled the revolution in Saint Domingue unevenly, and understandably so. The revolution began when free blacks and mulattoes, swept up in the Jacobin fury of the revolution in the home country, unseated the white planter aristocracy that governed the colony. As the fighting between the two factions slowly moved towards a stalemate, the schism in the social hierarchy that the revolt created helped to inaugurate a slave rebellion that quickly spread throughout the colony. Some outsiders perceived the formation of a race war in the now-floundering island, but one that still maintained vestiges of revolutionary idealism and unity with the wider cause of liberty. The British invasion of the island and subsequent arming and support of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the leader of the ascendant slave faction on the island, further muddied the water.²⁰

American reaction to the rebellion matched the muddiness of events in the colony. At first assuming the revolt an aftershock of the French Revolution, most Americans only took notice of events on the island as scraps of eyewitness accounts, filled with stories of rape, plunder, and massacres, started arriving in 1793. Not far behind these stories came a wave of white and mixed race refugees from the island, composed predominantly of the vestiges of the ruling planter class. U.S. port cities took in the refugees, but had problems finding a recognizable identity for the new visitors.²¹ Good Samaritans in Philadelphia, for example, sought the means to raise funds for the tidal wave of refugees that landed in the city during the spring and summer of 1793, but crafted no coherent municipal policy prior to the outbreak of

²⁰ Scherr, 60-69; and Ott, 76-99.

²¹ National Gazette, July 27, 1793, 1; and Carey, 10-13.
yellow fever that struck the city during the late summer of that same year. Charleston took a strikingly different tack; the citizens of that city sought the expulsion of all free blacks and mulattos from that city during the summer of 1793, afraid that refugees might have the contagion of radicalism upon them and would spread it to the slaves within the city.²²

By 1798, French commissioners residing in Saint-Domingue proclaimed that the island still belonged to the French empire, but all observers realized that L’Ouverture and his chief foe, the mixed-race general Andre Rigaud, made all decisions concerning the colony. The revolution against the ruling, slave-owning class on the island inaugurated in the early part of the 1790s had devolved into the “war of the knives,” a particularly savage civil war that pitted L’Ouverture and his slave army versus Rigaud and his weak coalition of mixed race and white land owners. Both sides claimed to maintain threads of continuity with the ideals of the French Revolution, but both also realized that French imperial prerogative mattered little in the colony while the mother country fought for its survival in Europe. England’s invasion of the island had met defeat to L’Ouverture and tropical diseases and French agents negotiated with both sides in an attempt to regain nominal control of its premier colony. By 1798 L’Ouverture appeared to control most of the island and its population, but his eventual victory was far from guaranteed.

Guadeloupe proved the antithesis of Saint-Domingue. Political suasion in the colony solidified in 1794 upon the island’s reconquest by Jacobin general Victor Hugues. The British occupied Guadeloupe, along with the majority of France’s other smaller imperial islands, at the onset of war between the two imperial powers. Once cementing military control on the island,

the British appealed to the royalist, and predominantly white, plantation class of Guadeloupe to assist with civil administration. Victor Hugues arrived off Guadeloupe during April 1794 with a small fleet of warships and some French soldiers. Landing away from the main city of Point Petre, Hugues campaigned throughout the island’s interior, emancipating slaves and enticing people to his revolutionary cause. In the face of daunting odds, the motley force of soldiers, civilians, and ex-slaves defeated the British and royalist, reclaiming the island for republican France.  

Hugues did not stop at Guadeloupe, though, and soon he led his army on an active campaign of imperial reconquest and revolutionary expansion throughout the Windward Islands. He repeatedly defeated the British and their allies, apparently giving credence to the “superhuman” rumors that travelled ahead of Hugues and his forces. By 1798, Hugues controlled the majority of the Windward Islands, utilizing France’s legitimization of privateering to control the narrow sea lanes in the region and keep future British designs in check. Europeans outposts all along the southern rim of the Caribbean Basin feared Hugues and his double-edged threat of slave emancipation and Jacobin ideology. While internecine chaos seemed the most pressing issue in Saint-Domingue, Hugues’ rapid consolidation of power in Guadeloupe and the southern Caribbean proved another vexing matter.

Given the extent of the British blockade, and the tactical reverses of the French fleet, privateering became a staple of commerce for France’s beleaguered colonies. More than just localized depredations in the context of a global war, seizures of merchantmen maintained a flow

23 For best account, see Dubois, 192-193; and Girard, “Rêves d’Empire,” 389 - 412.
24 Dubois, 230-236.
of food, goods, and material into the islands. Evidence for this state of affairs lay in the manner that colonial administrators treated the sailors of American vessels following their capture. France’s stated policy instructed privateers to deposit sailors at convenient ports, not as combatants, but more akin to individuals caught up in the current of events beyond their control. Much of the early correspondence that changed hands among members of the Adams administration at the start of the Quasi-War included details about private ships commissioned to search sea ports for stranded American sailors. Many reports from the West Indies reveal that the captains left the ports empty handed. In fact, numerous accounts from Guadeloupe reported mistreatments, whippings, and imprisonment in sub-standard facilities.\(^{25}\) Far beyond being a tactic used on the battle lines of France’s revolutionary wars, privateering in the West Indies took on a pernicious vigor that disregarded human life in comparison to cargoes.

The Washington administration possessed few options to counter this privateering threat when it began to develop during the end of his presidency. After Jay’s Treaty and the formalization of trade between England and the United States, the word went out that France would readily issue letters of marque to would-be privateers. The United States, on the other hand, possessed no ships under to sail to protect its own coastline, let alone project power into hostile waters. Under Washington, a fiscally-conscious Congress delayed and postponed the construction of six frigates authorized to be built under the Naval Acts of 1794 and 1796; builders had only completed three by the beginning of Adams’ presidency.

The existence of a peace-time navy became a political issue throughout the middle years of the 1790s. Albert Gallatin, an adherent of the Jefferson-Madison proto-Republican clique, and

\(^{25}\) For an example, see Timothy Pickering to Sam Sewall, December 27, 1797, \textit{NDQ}, 1, 20-21.
others argued mightily against completion of the stated number of ships, seeing in them a drain on the economy, a centralization of power, a means for the Federalists to dole out patronage, and a ready-made pawn for the use of the European powers. Members of both Washington and Adams’ cabinets believed that a navy would not only provide protection for the nation’s coastline and port cities (a concern for them dating back to 1793), but also hoped that a robust American naval presence could provide an opening into untapped international commercial markets while advancing American prestige on the global stage. The contesting parties had not resolved these issues by the time word reached Philadelphia of the XYZ Affair.26

Adams faced significant issues in attempting to craft a coherent naval policy prior to receiving the news of diplomatic failure in Paris. He had begun applying pressure to Congress for renewed focus and investment in the navy during the autumn of 1797, well before news of the XYZ Affair reached Philadelphia. No matter the outcome of the still ongoing negotiations, Adams claimed that, “tranquility and order will not soon be obtained.” He argued that French depredations had so undercut the national honor that American citizens believed the federal government unable to protect its own commerce.27 Here again the specter of French actions hung over the political rhetoric of the United States. While Adams did not strike the same tone as several more-reactionary minded Federalists, he did paint French actions as having an impact beyond the purely commercial scope. The confidence of the citizenry for the national

26 The two best works to explore the political debates over the navy are Marshall Smelser, The Congress Founds the Navy, 1787 – 1798 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959) and Craig L. Symonds, Navalists and Anti-Navalists: The Naval Policy Debates in the United States, 1785 – 1827 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980). Smelser is a little thin in terms of building a theory of why some supported a navy and others did not; he generally turns to what I believe to be a hackneyed regional argument. Symonds does a better job in tying naval expansion to political ideologies and showing how the naval issue could break apart still-forming political coalitions.

27”Address to Congress,” November 23, 1797, Original in the Adams Papers; here quoted in Brown, 72-73.
government had weakened as a result of the French attacks and only a strong military response, no matter the state of the ongoing negotiations, would serve to solidify their patriotism.

Adams’ plea for patriotic defense fell on deaf ears in 1797. Although most could admit that French privateering had a deleterious impact on American commerce, no clear consensus existed on how to fund this naval expansion and how efficacious it would prove to be. Much of this debate faded away after news of the XZY Affair reached Philadelphia. With an act passed on March 27, 1798, Congress authorized the full funding of the already approved but unfunded frigates United States, Constitution, and Constellation. This act opened the floodgates for several successive pieces of legislation that Congress passed over the next several months. Exactly thirty days after the funding of the first three frigates, Congress authorized Adams to build, purchase, or hire up to twelve more vessels, then three days later approved the creation of a separate department of the navy (of which Stoddert would head). And barely a week later the new Department of the Navy carried through on this legislation, purchasing the merchant ships Adriana and Ganges, allocating money for their conversion to warships, and commissioning captains to command them.

Did these new navy captains, their peers, and those that followed after them adhere to generally Federalist political views? It is hard to say. Christopher McKee, in his landmark social history of the founding of the naval officer corps, attempts to demonstrate that the institution

28 “An Act for an Additional Appropriations to Provide and Support Naval Armament,” March 27, 1798, NDQ, 1, 46.

29 “An Act to Provide an Additional Armament for the Further Protection of the trade of the United States; and for other purposes,” April 27, 1798; and “An Act to Establish an Executive Department, to be Denominated the Department of the Navy,” April 30, 1798; from NDQ, 1, 58-59.

30 “Purchase of Ship Adriana” and “Purchase of Ship Ganges,” May 3, 1798, NDQ, 1, 62 – 63.
remained apolitical from its founding to the conclusion of the War of 1812. His evidence, however, comes from after 1801, when young men hoping to gain appointments as midshipmen appealed to Republican-led houses of Congresses. McKee provides no evidence of partisan leanings from amidst the Adams presidency.\textsuperscript{31}

It may be that such evidence does not exist. But we can make some general suppositions based on what evidence we can ascertain. Most of the prominent naval captains from the Quasi-War navy had first gained their martial experience during the revolution.\textsuperscript{32} While such a shared background does not a Federalist make, one can argue, as Kohn does, that the shared community and war trials helped to create a unique self- and group-identity among veterans, particularly officers. A shared sense of sacrifice tied many of these veterans to the nation ideologically, seeing weakness in acts that did not protect or preserve the republic.\textsuperscript{33} Their later actions and social networks also provide a clue to political proclivities during an earlier age. While modern historians often make too strong a connection between geography and politics, observers should note the preponderance of New Englanders in the positions of authority during the Navy’s early years alongside the general Federalist leanings in those regions.

While we do not want to paint naval captains with a broad Federalist brush during the Quasi-War, if one places their actions during the conflict on a political spectrum, they will see an apparent imbibing of the Federalist rhetoric of anti-Jacobinism and a search for stability. Captains repeatedly stretched the prerogative of their stated orders to effect change in the


\textsuperscript{32} Isaac Bailey, ed., \textit{American Naval Biographies} (Providence: 1815), microform, \textit{Biblioteca Americana} Series.

\textsuperscript{33} Kohn, 293 – 296.
Caribbean, change that confronted perceived radicalism where it resided and sought to prevent its spread. One did not need to be a stated Federalist to have their politics and their views on French radicalism and its threat to the nation shaped by the press. As we shall see, naval officers in the Caribbean represented an unbroken ideological chain from Federalist policy-makers in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

“Keeping up attacks…on their own ground.” – Changing Strategy

Captain Thomas Truxton, commander of the Constellation, after circling the island of Guadeloupe and guarding American commercial convoys for several weeks, finally sighted a French man-of-war on the open water during the late afternoon of February 9, 1799. Truxton, a veteran of the American Revolution, had overseen the Constellation’s construction and actively sought action against the French, going so far as to provoke a shore fortification several days earlier. This afternoon, the Constellation bore down on L’Insurgente, a French flagged vessel that Truxton had initially sighted a week earlier when it lay under the protection of a shore battery off the entrance to Guadeloupe’s harbor. Now, Truxtun adeptly ordered his ship alongside L’Insurgente, drawing within hailing range before throwing a full twenty-four gun broadside into the ship. Over the next hour and half, the Constellation decimated the French ship, crossing her bow several times before the L’Insurgente surrendered just prior to nightfall.34

Truxton’s victory sent shockwaves of glee throughout the United States. Newspaper accounts of the battle quickly proliferated throughout the nation, painting Truxton in a heroic light. Word first reached the nation during early May, three weeks after the fighting. Upon the

34 The contemporary recounting of the battle against L’Insurgente appeared in several newspapers, see NDQ 2, 326 – 337. The best and most dramatic retelling is in Eugene S. Ferguson, Truxton of the Constellation: The Life of Commodore Thomas Truxton, 1755 – 1822 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 160-169.
Constellation’s return to Hampton Roads on May 20, the ship’s captain was met with open arms, escorted to numerous public feasts and meals in his honor. Such public rejoicing carried on through the summer, where the erstwhile naval officer found himself flooded with invitations and requests for speaking engagements for numerous Independence Day celebrations. Timothy Pickering, the Secretary of State, upon learning of the forwarding of another trio of delegates to negotiate with France, commented that “the only negociation [sic] compatible with our honor and safety is that begun by Truxton in the capture of L’Insur gente.”

Citizens of the republic raucously made toasts and recited odes in Truxton’s honor, but few appear to have fully grasped the import of the battle, or more appropriately, its location. The Constellation’s victory, well into the Caribbean and against a French ship that was not actively engaged with attacking American shipping, showed that the Quasi-War had quickly moved past its earlier stated objectives. And Truxton’s success only represented the most publicized and dramatic account of this shift in American policy. Stoddert’s letter to Adam asking to shift the undeclared war’s strategic focus much further to the south resulted in a speedy and pronounced readjustment of the United States' still raw naval might. By the close of 1798, the gross majority of all U.S. warships patrolled the Caribbean.

This bubbling cauldron of emancipation, revolution, and depredations contextualized Stoddert’s decision to shift the Quasi-War from a defensive to an offensive struggle. He initially directed his ire, and the preponderance of the U.S. Navy, against Guadeloupe, beginning in August 1798. Having heard no reply from Adams concerning his recommendation a month earlier, Stoddert informed the president that he had begun executing his recommendation on

35 Best account of Truxton's return is Ferguson, 170-173; quote from 170.
August 25. “The French have from 60 to 80 Privateers out of the little island of Guadeloupe,” the Secretary informed Adams, the colony relying on captures to provision the island due to the lack of French trade. While Stoddert recognized that he was orienting his forces against the heart of French power in the Caribbean, he did not worry, for the majority of the privateers operating in Guadeloupe were small and seldom armed, mainly designed to convey boarding parties to unarmed merchantmen. Stoddert believed that nothing in Guadeloupe could “equal our 20 Gun ships.” Reports also indicated that were “a great many American captains and supercargoes prisoner in Guadeloupe,” and that “Americans carried into Guadeloupe are put in irons and thrown into prison.”

The arrival of American warships off the coast of Guadeloupe created quite a stir. Captain Alexander Murray, aboard the Montezuma, sailed into Pointe Petre during November 1798 to return French prisoners to the consul located there. At that time, he counted no less 150 privateers in the harbor, mostly smaller, lightly-armed ships. Although Murray conceded that the privateers had acquired great skill at skulking amidst the rocks and shoals that formed Guadeloupe’s coast, he positively exulted as he related that the majority stayed in harbor, as “we find they already fear to go too far off the land.” Other reports indicated that Hugues sought to arm frigates in Guadeloupe and force a decisive confrontation with the Americans in order to break the current blockade on privateering. Such news excited Stoddert; the capture of actual French warships not only would relieve the monotony of seizing weakly-shipped and poorly-

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37 “Captain Gay’s account of the capture of the Schooner Liberty,” *NDQ*, 1, 400.

38 Captain Alexander Murray to Benjamin Stoddert, November 29, 1798, *NDQ*, 2, 57.
supplied privateers that had become the standard fare of the U.S. Navy in the West Indies, but also allowed the vessels to be reclaimed and used in the American fleet.\textsuperscript{39}

Before such events had the opportunity to take place, the only capture of a U.S. warship during the entire Quasi-War elicited one of the key intelligence coups of the conflict. Lieutenant William Bainbridge, commander of the \textit{Retaliation}, surrendered to two French frigates after they drew him close by disguising themselves as British vessels.\textsuperscript{40} Once aboard the larger of the two frigates, Bainbridge discovered that the Directory had sent a replacement for Hugues. General Etienne Desfourneaux quickly assumed his position as governor of the island, and Hugues found himself in chains aboard a frigate heading back to France within two weeks of the new Governor’s arrival. Desfourneaux played a cat-and-mouse game with Bainbridge, offering him his freedom and the return of his ship if he operated against British vessels, in essence, becoming a privateer for Desfourneaux, but still able to fly the flag of the United States. The governor desired that Bainbridge view Guadeloupe (and as an extension, him) as allies under the original Franco-American treaty, repeatedly claiming that he recognized the neutrality of the United States in the European war.\textsuperscript{41}

Such odd statements became much clearer in the context of Desfourneaux’s later correspondence. In a letter written to President Adams two months following the capture of the \textit{Retaliation}, Desfourneaux claimed that the Directory authorized privateers only to attack “the

\textsuperscript{39} Benjamin Stoddert to Captain John Barry, and Stoddert to Captain Thomas Truxton, December 12, 1798, \textit{NDQ}, 2, 83-84.
\textsuperscript{40} Alexander Murray to Benjamin Stoddert, November 23, 1798, \textit{NDQ}, 2, 40-43.
\textsuperscript{41} William Bainbridge to Benjamin Stoddert, January 3, 1799, 122-124; William Bainbridge to Etienne Desfourneaux, December 28, 1798, 124-125; Etienne Desfourneaux to William Bainbridge, January 6, 1799, 214-215; William Bainbridge to Etienne Desfourneaux, January 6, 1799, 215; all in \textit{NDQ}, 2.
enemies of the Republic,” not neutrals and allies. France considered the United States an ally, and Desfourneaux hoped that, “the citizens of the United States may come and exchange their produce, for the productions of the Island of Guadeloupe.” Guaranteeing the merchant’s protection under the law, Desfourneaux promised to “punish with rigour, whoever will dare to oppose them.”

Desfourneaux sought the means to create a separate peace for Guadeloupe, one that ignored the more stringent portions of the French resolutions on American commerce, while opening the door for American trade. The U.S. Navy’s interdiction of the privateers constrained the island colony’s tenuous supply line, and Desfourneaux hoped to reinsert the island into the global marketplace.

The Adams administration viewed Desfourneaux’s letter with contempt. The French governor asked a lot, but guaranteed little. Asking to reopen trade with Guadeloupe, and then claiming that French privateers would stop their attacks on American merchants because French law defined the United States as an ally or a neutral (and always had), Desfourneaux’s letter must have left those reading the letter in Philadelphia scratching their heads. Such a law had done nothing to prevent attacks before Desfourneaux’s arrival. Now, a few months later, he contended that the law governing privateering was and had been in place and he blamed the policy of the United States for restricting trade. In a short, blunt letter, Secretary Pickering roundly derided Desfourneaux’s request. The existence of laws regulating privateering had done nothing to restrict privateering in the past. Noting that attacks by French and French-supported armed vessels had led to the cessation of trade between the United States, Pickering placed the blame

42 “To President John Adams from General Desfourneaux, Commander-in-Chief of the Island of Guadeloupe,” January 17, 1799, NDQ, 2, 248.
squarely on France and its *carte blanche* attitude towards attacking American commerce, or conversely, its inability to regulate its own combatants.

As he closed the letter, Pickering outlined to Desfourneaux the new policy of the United States regarding the reopening of trade. "When the French Republic or any island belonging to it shall cease to violate our rights by such depredations," Pickering informed the governor, "our commercial intercourse may be renewed [italics added by the author]." This addendum to already proscribed policy betrayed the intentions of the administration’s new foreign program and the context in which they viewed the global conflict. The proposal to deal with French colonies separate from France proved that Federalists believed that the rebellious islands of the French empire could be pulled into the nation’s sphere of influence. But, to do that, the stated islands had to reject their ties to their mother country, and in essence, French radicalism. What Pickering described to Desfourneaux was the outline of a system of American capital and political expansion in order to stabilize the region. If the governor halted privateering attacks in the region, thus rejecting the clear guidance of France, the United States would authorize the opening of trade with Guadeloupe. Such a move represented a turning away from French legitimacy to meet the demands of the United States, and a new orientation to U.S. markets and inclusion in a burgeoning American search for ideological stability.

43 Timothy Pickering to Etienne Desfourneaux, March 16, 1799, *NDQ*, 2, 480-481.
“General L'Ouverture has a great desire to see some our Ships of War” – Playing Kingmaker

President Adams signed the act that legislated Pickering’s stated policy transition on February 9, 1799. Secretary Pickering led the international and national negotiations that saw the act come to fruition, and he cherished the idea of a more expansive role for U.S. power in the Caribbean. Aptly titled “Toussaint's Clause,” the act’s genesis began a few months before its signing. L’Ouverture petitioned Adams directly for the resumption of American trade during early November 1798, two months before Guadeloupe’s governor. Pickering immediately divined the import of this outreach. The British still maintained a series of forts on the island’s western shore, but little else, and L’Ouverture’s resistance to declaring his independence from France had slowly soured their relationship. All the ports had been blockaded from French vessels by the British navy, and the United States joined in an active anti-privateering campaign with their British pseudo-allies in the environs around the colony.

L’Ouverture’s overture to President Adams evinced a policy shift for the ex-slave general, but not a reversal by any means. The “war of the knives” against Rigaud continued to grind on in the southern portions of the colony, the French agents sent to represent imperial control contributed nothing to the war effort, and the French frigates sent along with the agents stayed hemmed in their harbors. In conjunction with forwarding his letter to the U.S. president, L’Ouverture expelled French agents from the island, hoping that this exhibition of French renunciation would have the necessary affect on the Adams administration. Secretary Pickering

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took notice; in a letter to the consul at Cap Francois dated November 30, 1799, he noted that the last Congress had passed legislation that prohibited trade “with places under the acknowledged power of France.” Logically, “if the inhabitants of St. Domingo [sic] have ceased to acknowledge this power, there will not, as I conceive, be any bar to the prompt and extensive renewal of trade between the United States and the ports of that Island.” This is the first recording outline of the new policy to Jacob Mayer, the consul in Cap Francois, but Pickering had obviously brought this idea up with others, most likely fellow merchants from Massachusetts. As he noted later in his dispatch, “our merchants…are already preparing to renew that commerce.”

Mayer forwarded this information to L’Ouverture quickly, for the general dispatched Joseph Brunel, a close comrade and personal representative, before the closing of the year to present his views in person to President Adams. While Pickering fought to secure the votes to amend the present prohibitive legislation (primarily through a combination of appealing to merchant interests and stoking fear of a Jacobin stronghold in Saint Domingue), Adams intended to display his regard for L’Ouverture and his cause. Secretary Stoddert, in letters to Captains John Barry and Thomas Truxton, requested that they modify their sailing routes to include station time off of Cape Francois, for “General L’Ouverture has a great desire to see some our Ships of War” off his coast. For emphasis, the Secretary added, “the President has a desire that he should be satisfied.” As he closed with the two captains, Stoddert recommended that each ingratiate themselves with the General, telling Truxton, “Should you see the General, it would be

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45Timothy Pickering to Jacob Mayer, November 30, 1798, Consular Dispatches – Cap Hatien, NARA RG M0009, reel 1.
well to cultivate a good understanding with him.” Stoddert, either wooed by Pickering’s ideas or feeling the weight of Adam’s yearnings, believed it important for his captains to begin building a working relationship with General L’Ouverture.

As the vessels of the United States navy began to mark the outlines of the new “Santo Domingo Station,” Congress passed “L’Ouverture’s Clause” and offered French colonies a plan to reintroduce American merchantmen into their ports. Pickering nominated Dr. Edward Stevens, a close personal friend to Hamilton (he nursed him and his family back to health during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic) and an avowed Federalist, to assume the new position of “Consul General” to Saint-Domingue upon the act’s passing. Steven’s primary task upon arriving on the island involved communicating the provisions of the act to L’Ouverture, particularly the necessity of suppressing the privateering enterprises in the island’s waters. L’Ouverture had also to accede to allowing all U.S. vessels, to include ships of war, to enter Saint-Domingue’s ports for “victuals, water, and refit.” Common practice for merchantmen, Pickering changed the conditions by including military vessels. By making the resumption of commerce contingent on allowing the navy to refit in L’Ouverture’s ports, Pickering turned a French possession into a supply depot for the U.S. Navy, allowing Stoddert to increase the range and time at sea of his fleet.

Pickering did not believe that such a stricture was too much to request, particularly given his recent battle in the cabinet to further wed the policies of the United States with L’Ouverture’s

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46 Benjamin Stoddert to John Barry, Benjamin Stoddert to Thomas Truxton, January 16, 1799, NDQ, 2, 242-243.

47 Timothy Pickering to Edward Stevens, March 7, 1799, Consular Dispatches – Cap Hatien, NARA RG M0009, reel 1.
designs in Saint-Domingue. Brunel, upon his meeting with Adams, forwarded an appeal from L'Ouverture for supplies and provisions for his army. The British blockade, and the inability of the French to break it, had left his army lacking in common goods, particularly uniforms, food, and pieces to mend weapons. Agreeing to this request would pull the United States directly into the conflict in Saint-Domingue, and not as an impartial observer. Forwarding supplies to L'Ouverture would provide the necessary means for the general to end the vicious stalemate in the French colony. In the complicated context of the Quasi-War Caribbean, the United States would ultimately be arming an ex-slave general that still proclaimed ties (albeit loose ones) to the French Republic, based on a promise to halt future depredations of privateering ostensibly under his control.

Adams considered the question before forwarding it to his cabinet for review. Charles Lee, the attorney general from Virginia, dissented from the remainder of the Cabinet. He believed that the United States sending provisions to L'Ouverture was “neither lawful or expedient,” although he conceded that a private merchant might forward the articles to L'Ouverture for a price. Lee described the illegality of the act in a stilted, unclear sentence: “Unlawful because permission may be granted to vessels which shall be solely employed in any purpose of political intercourse, and to none other.” The “political intercourse,” one could surmise, related to the overt meddling in the affairs of Saint-Domingue that the United States would be committing through this act. Such a maneuver also opened the executive department to criticism from the public over perceptions of “interests in adventures.” Lee closed by roundly
stating, “I have no more confidence in the black Frenchmen than the white, and am willing they should suffer in St. Domingo till they actually refrain from depredations on our commerce.”

Pickering wrote the majority decision for Adams, as well as a gruff reply to Lee. “Having been more than any other gentlemen in the way of receiving information of the real situation of L’Ouverture,” Pickering wrote to Lee, not supplying L’Ouverture’s army “endangers [L’Ouverture’s] authority and the peace of the island of St. Domingo.” As stated in this letter, the Secretary equated supporting L’Ouverture with the eventual stabilization of the internal affairs of the island. More than that, however, Pickering believed that such an immediate measure would soothe the aggressive nature of the “blacks.” Harkening to the fears of Jacobin or ex-slave invasion of the like Knox described to Adams less than a year before, Pickering declared “to delay relief…might render the blacks impatient and unbelieving, especially as L’Ouverture himself for some time past have [sic] been feeding them with promises.”

An expansion of privateering seemed the most likely response to delaying the shipping of supplies, Pickering admitted, but his description of the resistive nature of L’Ouverture’s undersupplied “black” army left unsaid an undercurrent of concern for the spread of Jacobin, and emancipated, revolutionary fervor. President Adams approved the supplies.

The actions of the Adams administration, and L’Ouverture’s haste in appealing to American military and commercial interests, did not match the response of Desfoureaux in

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48 Charles Lee to John Adams, February 20, 1799, Consular Dispatches – Cap Hatien, NARA RG M0009, reel 1.

49 Timothy Pickering to Charles Lee, February 20, 1799, Consular Dispatches – Cap Hatien, NARA M0009, reel 1.

50 Scherr rightly argues that no evidence of wide-ranging arms shipments to L’Ouverture’s forces exist; see Arthur Scherr, “Arms and Men: The Diplomacy of U.S. Weapons Traffic with Saint-Domingue under Adams and Jefferson,” International History Review, vol. 35, no. 3 (June 2013): 600 - 648. While Scherr makes a valid point, we can surmise that Adams and his cabinet backed the notion of sending arms, even if the shipments themselves did not move forward.
Guadeloupe. Desfourneaux spent the majority of his time during the spring of 1799 penning letters proclaiming his innocence in privateering and bemoaning the aggressive nature of the United States Navy in his waters. During February of that year, the governor sent an angry letter to Captain Truxton of the *Constellation* in the wake of his taking *L’Insurgente*. Although the French frigate had raised the U.S. flag upon spying the *Constellation*, and then fired the first salvo after not properly responding to semaphore signals, the French captain acted surprised when Truxton took him prisoner, claiming to not realize the existence of any state of war between the two nations. Truxton informed Desfourneaux of the capture, offering to enact a prisoner exchange. Desfourneaux flew into a rage, exclaiming “I have not seen without Astonishment, and Indignation an American Vessel take a French Frigate.” He stated that no prisoner exchange could take place; as a matter of fact, allies and neutrals do not have prisoners. If Truxton did not surrender the *L’Insurgente* and her crew, the governor would find himself forced to seize all American citizens and property on Guadeloupe.\(^51\) Truxton replied that he followed the orders of the President of the United States to capture or destroy armed French vessels, but to not impugn on any neutral vessels that he came across. The U.S. had made sure to communicate this to France and its colonies, and such actions should have come as no surprise.\(^52\)

Desfourneaux did not abide the perceived insults he received from Pickering and Truxton. By mid-March 1799, merchants and sailors throughout the West Indies carried the news that Desfourneaux had declared war upon America.\(^53\) Such an act occupied the opposite

\(^{51}\) Etienne Desfourneaux to Thomas Truxton, February 17, 1799, *NDQ*, 2, 376-378.

\(^{52}\) Thomas Truxton to Etienne Desfourneaux, February 19, 1799, *NDQ*, 2, 378-379.

\(^{53}\) John Barry to Benjamin Stoddert, March 16, 1799, *NDQ*, 2, 475.
extreme of conditions transpiring concurrently in Saint-Domingue, but shared an odd similarity. While L’Ouverture renounced the authority and control of France in all but name, Desfournœaux had taken steps along a path far different than stated French policy, but relied on the stated legality of French acts and definitions of neutrality and alliance to undergird his actions. By the end of the year, reports from Havana implicated Desfournœaux in the arming of fast schooners and providing them with letters of marque, hoping that they could escape the naval ring around Guadeloupe. Word of his replacement did little to change the overall attitude on the island, and privateers still ranged about the colony’s coast line. If anything, naval confrontations increased around Guadeloupe during late 1799 and early 1800, with observers reporting the continued seizure of American ships and the harsh treatments of American sailors. From March 21, 1799 to June 1, 1800, French privateers captured thirty-eight American merchantmen and brought them into Guadeloupe, and “the usage that the Americans meet with is very bad, taken out of their vessels and marched to prison like so many sheep, with a guard of blacks around them. [italics added by author]” The United States would not enjoy the same success in stabilizing Guadeloupe as it had in Saint-Domingue. Containment of the radical threat appeared to present the best chance for success.

“\textbf{A vile set of designing villains}” – \textit{Interference in Colonial Affairs}

The next phase for control of the southern Caribbean involved the small Dutch colony of Curacao. Off the coast of Venezuela, privateers and pirates had used the loose Dutch authority

\footnote{54 “Extract from a letter from Havana, to Editors of the ‘Philadelphia Gazette,’ concerning the conditions at this place,” December 9, 1799, \textit{NDQ}, 4, 508.}

\footnote{55 William Duer to Robert Ralston, October 22, 1799, \textit{NDQ}, 4, 310; and “Captain Mack, of Boston, brings news of his experiences in West Indies, making mention of operations of certain vessels of the U.S. Navy,” January 23, 1800, \textit{NDQ}, 4, 510.}
on the island to their advantage, harboring there to refit and to make repairs. The American consul to Curacao, Benjamin Hammell Phillips, wrote to Pickering during mid-September 1799 and indicated that Curacao had devolved into proto-anarchy. “A vile set of designing villains,” Philips informed Pickering, “a number of these with the French General Deveaux [Desfourneaux] at their head had formed a plot to seize on the gov’t and to new model it, [which] effected the officers not in their interest were to have been murdered and every person who spoke the English language (who they called aristocrats) were to have fallen the same way.”

Although the conspiracy had been found out and complicit locals seized, Phillips still appealed to Pickering for at least two U.S. ships of war to protect American lives and property. If not, Philips feared that, “We are ruined and lost.” Not aware of the ongoing machinations between L’Ouverture and the Adams administration, Phillips shared that many on the island believed that, “a number of small vessels will convey troops here from St. Domingo to further their plan and to destroy us.”

The island’s implicit role in the South American slave trade, coupled with its home country’s opposition to Republican France, appeared to be an inviting target for Jacobin wrath. Stoddert dispatched the two vessels almost immediately after receiving Phillips’ correspondence, instructing Captain Richard Morris to stay in the vicinity as long as he deemed necessary, not to interfere with the friendly government in Curacao, but to attempt to find and arrest a privateer captain that had captured an American merchantman the previous July and murdered the crew within the colony’s jurisdiction.


This undercurrent or subterfuge simmered on the island through the turning of the century. Privateering continued in the region, but the notable news in Curacao during the spring of 1800 entailed the arrival of the large French frigate La Vengeance. Shattered by Truxton’s Constellation off Guadeloupe, La Vengeance limped into Curacao with 140 casualties and eight feet of water in the hold. French authorities in Guadeloupe loaded transports with supplies and sought to repair the frigate in Curacao, hoping it could be made seaworthy. Then, on July 23, five French ships, “all bearing troops and offensive supplies,” arrived at Curacao, potentially to form a strike group around the repaired La Vengeance. Three other ships soon arrived, also laden with troops and supplies, and left along with La Vengeance. Although the frigate set course for France, the ships from Guadeloupe sailed around the island, depositing the motley mixture of soldiers and ship-less privateers that they had in their holds, and the two land and sea elements returned to the port and laid siege to it on September 6, 1800. The group presented a list of demands, foremost being the seizure of all Americans and their property as recompense for the payments they had made to repair La Vengeance. Phillips forwarded a hasty letter to the closest U.S. warship pleading for protection.

Word reached Captain George Cross at St. Kitts a week after the initial French attack, and he quickly dispatched the Patapsco and the Merrimac to Curacao. By September 22, the two U.S. vessels arrived off the island, rendezvousing with a British frigate that had aided in the evacuation of U.S. and British personnel in the wake of the Dutch capitulation four days after its initial investiture. The British captain, as well as Consul Phillips (secure within the British

58 Report by Benjamin Stoddert to the Speaker of House of Representatives, March 20, 1800, NDQ, 5, 332-333.

frigates hull), contended that the only means to ensure the protection of civilians and property left behind in the city would be to sail a ship of war into the harbor and attempt to bombard the Guadelouprians into surrendering or fleeing.

Realizing that such a plan entailed going far outside the limits of their orders to protect U.S. civilians and property, not to mention the stated intent of the Quasi-War to only attack French armed vessels, the two U.S. captains initially demurred. Such a move by U.S. ships to actively engage French and French-associated soldiers on land seemed far outside the parameters of potential naval policy as executed so far during the Quasi-War. Describing the state of American sailors and administrators left behind after the capitulation, Philips and the British captain finally convinced the two Americans that action had to be taken. After transferring the *Merrimac*’s contingent of marines onto the *Patapsco*, the latter ship hove to, and at approximately five in the evening on September 23, Captain Henry Geddes ordered the vessel to fire upon cannons emplaced at the port’s mouth. Bypassing the initial batteries, the *Patapsco* began a two hour engagement, at ‘half musket distance,’” with cannon and soldiers in the fort and on the rooftop of the buildings in the city. Fire slackened as night fell, but snipers harassed the ship throughout the night. Geddes landed fifty marines and sailors at the wharf, ordering them to fortify a defensive position and prepare for further combat in the morning. As the sun rose, Geddes’ spy glass observed an empty enemy camp; the Guadelouprians had retreated. Geddes passed the word back to two friendly ships loitering outside the harbor, and, by nightfall, British forces supporting the U.S. assault had raised the Union Jack over Curacao.\(^{60}\) In the course of one

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evening, one U.S. warship broke the momentum of expansionist Jacobin vigor in the southern Caribbean, primarily by acting in the absence of orders.

To the north, events transpired in Saint-Domingue that further involved the United States in interventionist policies. Commodore Silas Talbot, captain of the *Constitution* and commander of the naval forces around Saint Domingue, ordered Captain Christopher Raymond Perry to sail his vessel, the *General Greene*, around the island of Hispaniola, but to “pay close attention to the South Side of the island.” Hispaniola, and particularly the hotly contested southern portion of Saint Domingue, continued to boil with pirates and privateers. Some of these vessels belonged to L’Ouverture, as the general-in-chief had scrounged together some barges in order to break Rigaud's grip on the southern portion of the island. Rigaud depended on privateering for much needed supplies, particularly since L’Ouverture had begun to receive a trickle of goods from the United States government. Rigaud had retreated to Jacmel in an effort to keep his supply lanes open and maintain access to his privateering fleet as it continued to prey on U.S. and English shipping. Under no circumstances, Talbot ordered, should Perry “capture any vessels (except those from Rigaud’s Ports) within one league of any part of the Island under General L’Ouverture’s Command, or do any one thing, that may justly cause to disturb the harmony between him, and the People of the United States.”

The *General Greene* arrived in the waters off Jacmel during that last week of February and immediately began to interdict Rigaud’s privateers, capturing a “French armed schooner” with a crew of fifty, “mostly white,” on March 11.

61 Christopher Perry to Commodore Silas Talbot, January 18, 1800, *NDQ*, 5, 94.

Shortly after Perry’s arrival off Jacmel, L’Ouverture began to heap praise on the United States and its navy. “I could not be more grateful to you than I am for all the trouble to which you have gone with regards to Commodore Silas Talbot,” he wrote to Consul-General Stevens. “Please, Mr. Consul General, I pray you to convey to Commodore Silas Talbot my heartfelt gratitude for the service which he has done.” In a letter to Commodore Talbot a month later, L’Ouverture continued with his paeans of thanksgiving. “Your good intentions for the prosperity of this colony and that of your government, loads me with satisfaction,” he penned; “I feel all the values of your generous offers, on which I have founded all my hopes.”

Throughout his letters to Stevens and Talbot, L’Ouverture evinced a familiarity with the two men, appealing for logistical help to his under-supplied Haitian army while also discussing matters of the “Santo Domingo Station” and the activity of U.S. frigates to assist his cause.

L’Ouverture repeatedly singled out Captain Perry in his correspondence with the above two Americans. “Nothing could equal his kindness, his activity, his watchfulness and his zeal in protecting me, in unhappy circumstances,” he avowed, adding “he has contributed not a little to the success by his cruise, every effort being made by him to aid me in the taking of Jacmel, also in seeing order restored in this colony.” Such words betray an active partnership between L’Ouverture and Perry, more than just the simple privateering duty that Perry’s orders to the Santo Domingo station stipulated. The ship’s log indicates that L’Ouverture’s aides appeared early after the frigates arrival, making several subsequent trips to confer with Perry. Accounts of these discussions either do not exist or have been lost to time, but future actions taken by the

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64 Toussaint L’Ouverture to Edward Stevens, March 16, 1800, *NDQ*, 5, 309 - 310.
General Green hint at what might have been agreed upon. A letter from an officer aboard the General Greene, later reprinted in a stateside newspaper, acknowledged the standing order from Talbot to sail around the entirety of Hispaniola, but admitted that the cruise took longer than planned, delayed “for the purpose of aiding Gen. L’Ouverture in the capture of Jacmel.” As the officer recounted, “we engaged three of Rigaud’s forts warmly for 30 or 40 minutes; in which time we obliged the enemy to evacuate the town and two of the forts.” Perry even prepared a boarding party of marines and sailors to “take possession of the place,” only stopping when a potential enemy ship came into view and he decided to forgo the ground assault in the hope of capturing a French prize. Rigaud suffered “several men killed and wounded” and, shortly after the bombardment, fled his fortifications.

Far from simply attempting to capture or destroy privateers in accordance with a collection of congressional sanctions passed in an attempt to regulate the now two-year old Quasi-War with France, Captain Perry attacked militants engaged in a civil war with forces loosely-affiliated with republican France and had prepared to seize foreign terrain. Such actions barely resembled the context for which the Adams’ administration inaugurated the Quasi-War in 1798, let alone Perry’s own orders published in January 1800. While one could claim that Captain Perry carried out his Jacmel assault on his own volition, more loose cannon than by-the-book Navy Man, one must also recognize that he was not alone among captains of United States whom made decisions that stretched the limits of the sanctions passed by Congress.

Perry faced an official Court of Enquiry into his actions in and round Jacmel, and the body formally convened at the beginning of October 1800. In the listing of official charges

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65 Christopher Perry to Edward Stevens, March 17, 1800, NDQ, 5, 318.
brought against him, however, no mention is made of the bombardment of Jacmel, or the transgression of orders that such cannonading involved. Rather, Perry faced censure for conduct with the Dutch schooner *William and Mary*, the captain of that vessel stating that Perry detained his vessel off Jacmel during early March 1800 until L’Ouverture’s own privateers could seize the Dutch merchantman. From the hold of the *William and Mary*, L’Ouverture transferred a sizable amount of coffee (rumored at 10,000 pounds) into the hold of the *General Greene*. Such a give and take must have developed quickly between Perry and L’Ouverture, for the fourth violation in the list against Perry described the loading of a “large number of swine [along with the coffee] for the use of his father’s farm.” Finding Perry guilty of all the charges brought against him, the Court of Enquiry recommended his removal from command of the *General Greene* and a three month suspension without pay. President Adams approved the recommendation. Perry left the navy, finding no ships available for his command after his suspension. Settling down in Rhode Island, Perry undoubtedly delighted in the future exploits of his sons, Oliver Hazard and Matthew Calbraith, the former defeating the British designs in the Great Lakes during the War of 1812, and the latter responsible for the “opening” of Japan during 1854. If this case served as a barometer of conduct for captains in the U.S. Navy during the Quasi-War, it seemed clearly stated that pushing the intent of orders to include actively playing kingmaker in a foreign civil war could be overlooked, but interrupting regular commerce or besmirching one’s honor through graft, could not.


67 Benjamin Stoddert to Christopher Perry, November 28, 1800, *NDQ*, vol. 6, 559.
The reverberations from Perry’s actions rippled throughout Saint-Domingue, as well as the U.S. Navy. L’Ouverture appeared ascendant following the capture of Rigaud’s bastion at Jacmel. By May, L’Ouverture’s former-slave army had marched overland and seized Petit and Grand Goâve, immediately announcing the blockading of all ports in the southern portion of Saint Domingue. His drive to consolidate control over the French colony approached its final stages. Stoddert mobilized the navy, hoping that the guns of the U.S. frigates might provide the necessary leverage to assist L’Ouverture in his final victory. Starting during mid-July, Commodore Talbot ordered the *Augusta*, the *Trumbull*, and the *Herald* to Jacmel to resupply L’Ouverture’s forces, and to then sail to aux-Cays, where Rigaud’s remaining large ships anchored. Talbot went as far to instruct the commander of the *Trumbull* to utilize his bread room for extra powder earmarked for L’Ouverture’s forces, the supply bound for the general-in-chief’s army most likely overflowing the ships magazine.

Talbot instructed all U.S. warships operating off of Saint-Domingue to blockade Rigaud’s remaining portion of the island. He intimated that the focus of the ships’ operations should fall to determining the location of Rigaud’s larger ships and either hemming them into their anchorages, or capturing them if they attempted to break for open water. In the meantime, American vessels would take all necessary measures to support L’Ouverture and his continued campaigns on the island. Talbot’s instructions to Archibald Macelroy of the *Augusta* best elucidate the new phase of operations for the navy in relation to L’Ouverture. Talbot ordered Macelroy to “favor General L’Ouverture[‘]s operations against Rigaud, and to protect his small

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69 Silas Talbot to Commander of the *Trumbull*, July 22, 1800, *NDQ*, 6, 165-166.
armed vessels, which are cruising before said ports, in order to stop the supplies going to
Rigaud.” By preventing supplies from reaching Rigaud, the navy forced L’Ouverture’s foe to be
“more distressed, and the sooner reduced to submission.” But, the most striking element in
Talbot’s correspondence regards his perception that Rigaud’s downfall “is of great consequence
[italics added by the author].” Rigaud “has hitherto kept up a constant and cruel warfare on the
lives, and property of the citizens of the United States.” In a later dispatch sending the Trumbull
to assist L’Ouverture, Talbot labeled Rigaud “one of our most cruel and barbarous enemy’s.”70

(It cannot be a republic)

The work of L’Ouverture, Pickering, and their adherents in the U.S. government to
refashion the narrative of depredations is remarkable. In little less than eighteen months (using
the debate over arming L’Ouverture as a start point), the ex-slave general had completely shifted
the onus of privateering and chaotic, murderous warfare onto Rigaud. By appealing to the
United States to open commerce and painting himself as the force of moderation in the
internecine civil war that raged in the French colony, L’Ouverture reversed the roles of the
preceding years of the revolution. The general-in-chief determined that the United States craved
stability in the West Indies, and if he could allay the fear of emancipatory Jacobin revolution, or
shift the embodiment of this ideal from the ex-slave to the mulatto, then the economic,
diplomatic, and military power of the American nation would gravitate towards his faction. He
expertly commandeered the issue of privateering, not only agreeing to halt depredations

70 See orders dispatching Augusta, Herald, and Trumbull to the Saint-Domingue station, NDQ, 6, 139-140, 153-154,
and 165-166.
stemming from his supporters, but also inaugurating a campaign of anti-privateering himself, receiving supplies and armament from the United States to affect this goal. Never mind that L’Ouverture’s former privateers now composed his anti-privateering naval force, nor that this force used their new-found legitimacy to interdict supplies to Rigaud more than it halted privateering.

Most important for L’Ouverture, he capitalized on the closeness of the navy, engendering a warmness that, as Perry’s actions and Talbot’s orders both show, paid large dividends during the course of the campaign. A letter from Captain Alexander Murray to L’Ouverture, dated July 25, 1800, sent upon Murray’s ascension to command of the Saint-Domingue station, best epitomizes this transition. Murray announced that, “I deem it a Duty incumbent on me to offer you my most zealous services in cooperation with you & the meritorious cause in which you are now engaged to bring about order, Peace & Harmony in the island of Hispaniola.” The commander went on, contending that, “time and experience hath evinced to us the importance, & necessity of a close and firm Friendship between our respective countries, so proximate with each other, for the purpose of mutual exchange.” If L’Ouverture harbored a request for Murray that did not infringe against the standing orders of the navy, Murray stated “you [L’Ouverture] may freely command me.”71 In the eyes of Murray, and many of his countrymen, L’Ouverture’s deliberate refashioning as a father of independence, protector of liberty, and possible descendant of America’s own revolution, appeared to be complete.

Secretary Pickering had much to do with this outcome. His argument for immediate shipment of provisions to L’Ouverture’s army provided the concrete assistance that the general

71 Alexander Murray to Toussaint L’Ouverture, July 25, 1800, NDQ, 6, 178-179.
needed to finish his campaign. His work in the cabinet made stability in Saint-Domingue crucial to the administration, not only to ease depredations in the West Indies, but also to quiet fears of potential Jacobin invasions or slave revolts. By approving the appointment of Stevens to the colony as consul general, he ensured the perpetuation of Federalist ideology in this critical region, precluding the formation of dissension in policy matters. While not directly noted, his ideas most likely influenced Adams to request the navy make their presence felt in Saint-Domingue, first with the arrival of ships off Cap Francois, then with the overt actions of the U.S. ships of war on the Saint-Domingue station. If L’Ouverture is to be recognized for defeating Rigaud, then Pickering deserves credit for his unwavering support.

Much as for heralding the strengths and character of L’Ouverture, Pickering also outlined methodical steps to ensure the containment of future emancipatory Jacobin expansion. Originally hoping to open all Saint-Domingue’s ports to commerce, Pickering notified Stevens during April 1799 that he had been persuaded to change this idea by the British representatives for Saint-Domingue, General Thomas Maitland and Mr. Robert Liston. The British favored only opening two ports of entry into the colony, concerned that non-regulated trade would allow Jacobins to leave the country and spread their ideology to the British colonies of the West Indies. Thus, Pickering and Maitland devised a “Heads of Regulation” that outlined the execution of the resumption of commerce with the island. Pickering forwarded these guidelines to Stevens, noting that, “the designs of these articles are obvious — the security of Saint Domingo – the British Islands – and the United States, against mischievous intrigues and revolutionaries.” While Pickering still firmly held to the notion that L’Ouverture provided the best means to
stabilize the situation in Saint-Domingue, he now recognized the need to ensure this stability for the wider region.\textsuperscript{72}

Pickering had previously described this conservative approach to incorporating Saint-Domingue openly into U.S. hegemony. Writing to Hamilton in early February 1799, the secretary described the current situation in Saint-Domingue and what he imagined might be the effects of the passing of “L’Ouverture’s clause.” He believed that L’Ouverture would declare his independence from France as soon as he acknowledged the formal resumption of American trade. In this light, Pickering’s “great anxiety” concerned “L’Ouverture and his Chiefs…fix[ing] on a practicable and efficient plan for administering the government of the island, and settling the right of succession to the chief command (it cannot be a republic).” For all his ardor when it came to supporting L’Ouverture and his movement, Pickering either feared the creation of a republic of ex-slaves or chose not to believe that ex-slaves possessed the ability to govern a republic. Whatever the cause of his assessment, he implored Hamilton to give the issue some thought, particularly the creation of the administration of the state.\textsuperscript{73}

Hamilton immediately slid into the role of state-builder. First, he vociferously spoke out against the United States making independence in Saint-Domingue a prerequisite of support. Allow L’Ouverture to wind his own way to that decision, Hamilton argued, but do not prepare to recognize Saint-Domingue on equal footing with other national powers. If L’Ouverture did pursue independence, Hamilton believed that, “no regular system of Liberty will at present suit St. Domingo.” Rather, he preferred a military government for the island, best if embodied in a

\textsuperscript{72} “Heads of Regulations,” April 20, 1799, Consular Dispatches - Cap Haitien, NARA RG M0009, reel 2.

\textsuperscript{73} Timothy Pickering to Alexander Hamilton, February 9, 1799, \textit{PAH}, 22, 473-474.
hereditary chief, but with a strong life-term executive nonetheless. Administering the fledgling nation’s disparate regions would fall to the “principal military officers,” all beholden to the powerful executive. The males of the country would be compelled to perform military service, and this would be commensurate with land tenure. Hamilton’s vision of society and government in the former colony would be incredibly regimented and hierarchically driven. Clearly, Hamilton wanted a system in place that could control the potential Jacobin-excited population, providing a central figure with whom the United States could operate without fearing political subterfuge from other elements in the imagined country’s opposition.

In a way, the navy precluded the implementation of Hamilton’s governmental outline in Saint-Domingue. French and American ministers signed the Convention of 1800 in Paris at the end of September 1800, effectively ending a war that had never been declared. The two nations agreed to practice free and open trade and would immediately halt depredations and attacks on each other’s vessels, armed or otherwise. The final draft of the convention makes no reference to the situation in the West Indies, but includes several subtle but relevant passages. If American or French officials determine that a merchant possessed war material from a clearly defined list of goods agreed upon by both countries, that vessel could be seized. The civilians onboard, however, were to be treated humanely and fairly. To guarantee this, the convention ordered that a would-be privateer possess between $7,000 and $14,000 (depending on size of crew), as insurance towards remitting payment to disaffected captains and sailors, before a home government could issue a letter of marque. Such a stricture forced France to regulate their

74 Alexander Hamilton to Timothy Pickering, February 21, 1799, PAH, 22, 492-493.
privateering activities in the Caribbean and forego the haphazard issuance of letters of marque that had typified French policy during the late 1790s.75

Foreign privateers could not provision in French or American ports, and their captures would be reclaimed in the ports of the two nations. At first glance, such an article appears superfluous. The United States did enlist privateers during the Quasi-War, but not to the same extent as the French; such a policy, as states, would only refer to them if they were allowing the enemies of France to arm and refit in their ports. The British had no need for privateers; their navy freely owned the seas by 1800. France had no stated allies, so no privateers arrived at their ports for sustenance. This new Franco-American policy only makes sense if one realizes that France decided, in the wake of the their reverses at the hands of the U.S. Navy during the Quasi-War, to strengthen imperial control in the West Indies. No longer allowing such chaotic situations as existed in Saint-Domingue to continue, nor ignoring ambitious colonial officials pursuing policies that ran contrary to governmental policy, France sought to realign and demarcate factions in the West Indies. Not abiding any more middle ground, France forced participants of the emancipatory Jacobin movement to firmly declare for the home country, or find themselves outside the pale.

The United States Navy played one more role in the Quasi-War West Indies, one much more personal and more indicative than the Convention of the conflict’s nature. The American schooner *Experiment* fought and silenced the privateer *Diane* on October 1, 1800, the day after the signing of the Convention. Once the sailors boarded the privateer, the vessel’s captain informed the boarding party that General Rigaud was aboard, having fled his losing cause in Saint-Domingue. Lieutenant Charles Stewart, exhibiting the changing perception of Rigaud, fairly crowed at the general’s apprehension, stating that he had “wrested millions from my countrymen; the depredations, the piracies, plunder, and murders he has committed on my fellow-citizens are but two [sic] well known in the United States; and now the supreme ruler of all things has placed him in the hands of that country he has most injured.”

Stewart transferred Rigaud to the supervision of his commander, Captain Truxton, and he in turned deposited him on St. Kitts until he had determined a proper parole. At St. Kitts, the truculence of the island’s population forced Truxton to send a marine escort to guarantee Rigaud’s safe arrival, for he was certain that they “would have murdered him when passing through the streets.” Conferring with the colonial officials in Guadeloupe, Truxton agreed to parole Rigaud to there, leaving it upon his honor to remove himself from further affairs in the West Indies. The French citizens on Guadeloupe “were so uneasy at his being at large,” Truxton recounted, “that they made application to the Governor for his close confinement, and he was


committed to jail.” Rigaud languished in a French colonial prison, a victim of the United States’ search for West Indian stability. Fittingly, the U.S. Navy was responsible for both.

78 Thomas Truxton to Mr. Myers, October 27, 1800, *NDQ*, 6, 506.
Chapter 5

“Unprincipled men and French Partisans”: The Federalists and the Limits of Political Framing

The intricacies of the Heads of Regulation governing trade and intercourse with Saint Domingue proved important enough for Secretary of State Thomas Pickering to communicate them directly to Edward Stephens, the now duly-enshrined U.S. representative to General Toussaint. The Heads of Regulation represented an American compromise to British interests in the Caribbean, ultimately limiting access and egress to Saint Domingue and Toussaint’s forces. President Adams had bent his course somewhat during the late-winter and early spring of 1799, bowing to British concerns about instability so close to their imperial possessions. As Pickering pointed out in his early May, 1799, letter to Stevens, the Heads of Regulation still allowed trade with and support to General Toussaint, but limited the number of ports open for American Ships. Pickering’s letter communicated to Stephens the Regulations’ approval and asked that they be relayed to the Haitian general at once.

Pickering brought his focus closer to home as he closed his letter. He hoped that the news of resounding Federalist gains in the recent gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New York would bring heart to Stephens. New York, where Pickering stated that the Federalists had carried the state legislature by a ratio of three to two, provided the most obvious example of the party’s resurgence. “The Federalists there [New York], who are the real republicans, and the true supporters of the honor and interest of the country,” Pickering crowed, “now know their full strength.” Federalist gains in Virginia also portended well for the party, as that state appeared to
be the burgeoning home of the Republican brain trust of Jefferson, Madison, and to an extent, Monroe.¹

The results of the state elections that Pickering discussed reflected a broader national trend that saw the Federalists gaining increased legislative power. Federalists won congressional districts in 1798 and 1799 that had gone Republican two years prior. The party made significant inroads in the South Carolina up country, the Chesapeake Bay, and eastern Pennsylvania. Perhaps most surprising, Federalists won races in a Virginia that had voted almost solidly anti-administration and Republican for most of the 1790s.² Observers throughout the republic noted the political sea change. The near-ubiquitous tricolor buttons that Republicans and members of the Democratic Societies had attached to their hats now began to disappear. Jefferson noted to Madison that subscriptions to Republican papers had dropped precipitously after news of the XYZ Affair appeared in the United States. The now-Vice President, maligned and in semi-exile within the Adams administration, told his friend to encourage subscription among fellow Republicans or “republicanism will be entirely browbeaten,” much to the delight of the surging “war hawks.”³ President Adams and his wife, Abigail, previously inconspicuous denizens of Philadelphia society, now found themselves feted at theaters and bowed to in public.⁴

Such a level of political success leaves one to wonder: How did the Federalist, heady from a wave of electoral success, manage to so thoroughly lose their momentum and fall to

¹ Thomas Pickering to Edward Stephens, May 9,1799, NARA, Consular Records - Cap Haitien, NARA RG M0009, reel 2.


⁴ McCullough, 500-501.
electoral defeat in 1800? Few could claim that Jefferson’s victory in 1800 represented anything but defeat for the Federalists. The party’s three candidates (with Adams among them), watched from afar as Jefferson and upstart Aaron Burr dueled for the candidacy. The party itself lay fractured, many pointing to Hamilton’s recent machinations as the reason why the party splintered into “high, or “Hamiltonian Federalists,” and “low,” or “Adams Federalists.” While succeeding decades would still see Federalist legislators holding office and campaigning and finding success throughout the republic, the remaining decade and a half of the party’s existence witnessed the party’s increased entrenchment in New England and lack of national policy ideas outside the realm of general Republican opposition.⁵

The seeds of this defeat lay in the closing of Pickering’s letter to Stephens. After sharing the news concerning the elections in New York and Virginia, the secretary launched into a full tirade against the Republicans, made up of “unprincipled men and French partisans,” sought to “gratify their selfish and ambitious views [by]…yield[ing] the wealth and independence of their country to France.” Pickering noted that several countries throughout Europe had “prostrated” themselves to the French government already, sacrificing their citizens’ liberty for the ambitions of a few. France had become a “despotic power” that ruled others, oftentimes through the crack of the whip.⁶

Pickering’s imagery provided only one example of a rising current in Federalist ideology. By 1798, Federalists had created a public political rhetoric composed of clearly demarcated truths: the republic was under threat of subversion, France and radical Jacobinism were being

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⁵ Banner, 16 - 27; and Broussard, 17 - 23.

exported to and consumed by a deceived American electorate, and the Republican Party had replaced the now defunct Democratic Societies as the standard-bearers of this heretical civic faith. Pickering united all three of these ideas in his letter to Stephens, going so far as to claim that the Republicans, “wish to break the confederation of the states — to break the Union.”7 These political “truths” — formed in public discourse and debate — animated policy during the Adams presidency.

The rising paranoid political rhetoric of the Federalists during the Adams administration, and the actions taken to counter the perceived threats they described, eventually led to the Federalist’s downfall. After a half-decade of outlining a subversive plot to overthrow the liberty of the republic, Federalists viewed the war crisis as the means to enact legislation that protected the nation from both foreign and domestic threats. The intellectuals of the party saw threats all around them, from across the Atlantic to the halls of Congress. No one except for the brave Federalists, their ideology stated, stood ready to make the hard decisions to save the republic. To chart this precipitous rise and fall, we will first start by examining the writings of Federalists in response to myriad European crises that arose during the Adams administration. As a block, these statements outlined a blueprint for the nation’s fall in the events taking place, particularly in Ireland. Next, this chapter examines how this increasing paranoia led to a series of misunderstood, and unconstitutional, pieces of legislation. Lumped together as the Alien and Sedition Acts by historians, these several pieces of legislation exhibit the internal dynamics and evolutions of Federalist rhetoric. In the wake of these acts, however, the Republicans changed the nature of the political debate, emphasizing the contested nature of liberty within the republic.

7 Ibid.
and energizing the electorate to action. This move broke the Federalists, allowing the
Republicans to seize power during the “Revolution of 1800.”

Elkins and McKitrick note the preponderance of a “Jeffersonian” conception of Adams’
presidency in the historiography. They link the partisanship of the 1790s to the prevalence of
“court” and “country” ideologies that historians had previously used to explain the ideological
formation of dissent against the British during the American War for Independence.
Cunningham’s study of early Republican Party formation exemplifies key elements of this trend.
For him, the fall of the Federalists represented the natural ascendancy of the American
democratic process. Beginning during the early-1790s, democratically-minded politicians began to
create the grassroots organizational apparatus which, through work and legislation, propelled
Jefferson to the presidency. Later works modified this notion some, particularly falling in line
with Banning’s refashioning of the parties as “court” and “country” manifestations. While
Banning and his adherents do recast the partisan dynamic of the late eighteenth century, they fail
to shake the visage of inevitability from their portrayal of the first party system. In this fashion,
the country party (Republicans) represents a rejection of the court party’s (aristocratic
Federalists) attempts to enshrine the status quo. This urge to upend a centralized aristocratic
authority pervaded American political society, and again, its natural expression lay in Jefferson’s
election.10

8 Elkins and McKitrick, 13-22.
10Banning, 13 - 42.
Other historians paint the Federalists as a pre-modern faction unable to change to meet the “new” modern political climate. Hofstadter hints at this notion in his *The Idea of the Party System*. For him, acceptance of a regimented party system represents the fullest expression of political modernity. The Federalists never shook their marked aversion to political factions, thus leaving them unable to counter or compromise with the ascendant Republican Party. That said, Hofstadter does concede that Jefferson and the Republicans also disdained party, the primary difference being that they found themselves better situated and more at ease in mobilizing partisanship to their particular goal: attainment of the reins of political power.\(^{11}\) Elkins and McKitrick take this idea a step further, claiming that, “Few indications are discernible that the Federalism of 1800, or any thinkable outgrowth of it, could ever really have served such a function, or perpetuated itself in any form as a serious force in the political future that was then unfolding.”\(^{12}\) Ferling discounts this notion, instead claiming to see the campaign and election of 1800 as inherently modern. Unfortunately, his narrative tends to focus more on personalities than on squaring any questions about party ascendancy.\(^{13}\)

The middle ground between these historiographic trends developed primarily after the publication of Manning Dauer’s *The Adams Federalists* in 1953. Dauer promoted and popularized the notion that internal dissension led to the collapse of the Federalist Party. Federalists, according to Dauer, fell into two loose conglomerations: first, the “high” or “arch” Federalists associated with Hamilton; and the “Adams” Federalists tied to the president. High Federalists overtly advocated for war with France and pushed for the repressive legislation and


\(^{12}\) Elkins and McKitrick, 692 - 693.

acts that followed the publication of Marshall’s accounts from the XYZ Affair. Hamilton pulled
the strings of these Federalists, having them act as legislative stormtroopers pursuing all
necessary measures to silence their opposition. Adams Federalists tended towards moderation,
observing the excesses of the Hamiltonian clique with revulsion. The machinations of the former
secretary of the treasury effectively split the party, guaranteeing failure in the 1800 national
elections. Several historians point out Adams’ desire to act above party as a dispassionate
moderator of internal strife, much as Washington attempted to do (at least rhetorically). Elkins
and McKitrick follow such a tack, but do see such a “dogma of balance” as inherently pre-
modern and Adams’ inability to marshal his fractured party as key to his and the Federalists
electoral downfall.¹⁴

One cannot fully fathom the Federalists’ demise without understanding the legislation
that composed the Alien and Sedition Acts. Most historians do agree that the laws’ passage
served as the Federalists death knell. With that in mind, it’s incredible that so few monograph
style treatments exist, particularly when one considers the ongoing debates about privacy and
censorship in the digital age. While several historians include the legislation in their larger
narrative, no one has penned a concise recounting of the laws in several decades.¹⁵ Miller’s
Crisis in Freedom presents the laws as political playthings intended to destroy the Republican
Party. Hamilton, again, finds himself as the enemy of liberty and the patriarch of American
conservatism. The war crisis with France represented an opportunity to fracture the oppositions

these same ideas a generation later, but more stringently; see Brown, The Presidency of John Adams. DeConde
seconds this notion, focusing on Adams’ conviction to act as a moderator without faction as president; see Alexander
DeConde, The Quasi-War, 3-8. Also see Elkins and McKitrick, 529 – 579.

¹⁵ Stone’s recent work looks at free speech in times of crisis starting with the Alien and Sedition Acts, but as part of
a centuries long narrative project; see Geoffrey R. Stone, Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime From the Sedition
Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005).
under the cover “of patriotism, of concern for the national welfare, and of ‘saving the country.’” Miller never considers that Federalists actually believed the ideas of which they spoke. Writing shortly after Miller, Smith generally agreed with his predecessor, but he did recast the Federalists with shades of McCarthyism. Reactionary and xenophobic, the Federalists (not divided in to “high” or “low” camps) hunted down foreigners and “libelers” while searching for the means to preserve an orderly society, civil liberties be damned. Smith even goes so far as to title one of his chapters “The Hunters and the Hunted,” a ripping narrative that seethes with anonymous informers and night arrests.16

Historians have used these conceptions of the laws to reinforce their characterizations of the Adams administration and the Federalist Party. Both Dauer and Brown portray the acts as brainchild of the High Federalists. According to the former, Adams in fact stymies much of the High Federalists plans when he announced the eventual peace mission to France late in his presidency. The president’s heroic actions stave off Hamilton’s plans to use the Army to repress the citizenry and invade Louisiana.17 Brown does equivocate some, conceding that Adams, while neither writing nor encouraging the laws, did not veto them nor speak ill of them. At the same time, he emphasizes Adams’ lack of enforcement, coupled with his later writings to Jefferson, to paint Adams as secretly opposed to the legislations passage. Again, the specter of the “high/low” split seems to befuddle the narrative.18


17 Dauer, 208 – 211.

18 Brown, 122 – 126.
A closer analysis of the events surrounding the Adams administration, and the Alien and Sedition Acts specifically, show that such distinct demarcations did not exist. As we will see, Federalists introduced and championed the first Naturalization Act, citing fear of subversive elements within the United States. Adams, so often portrayed as the Federalist hero, in fact went on record many years after the end of his presidency and claimed that the passage of the patently unconstitutional laws represented an expedient war measure. “I knew there was need enough for both,” he wrote about the laws, “therefore I consented to them.”

The idea that the laws represented “war measures” and thus allowed a temporary abridgment of constitutionality became a common refrain among many Federalists. The Constitution, barely a decade old, weathered its first direct challenge during the last two years of the Adams administration. Interestingly enough, these challenges came from both ends of the political spectrum. The Alien and Sedition Acts directly contravened key elements of the Bill of Rights. Oftentimes overlooked or explained away as a corrective reaction, the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions also directly challenged the Constitution. Arguing that the Alien and Sedition Acts were (correctly) unconstitutional, the resolutions crafted a new state-versus-federal government theory of balance of power, one not directly encoded within the Constitution’s “more perfect union.” Over the course of two years, men directly linked with the creation of the Constitution, who fought for its ratification, found themselves complicit in challenging some of its core fundamentals. Often overlooked in this narrative is the divisive nature of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolution and how these statements, when combined with the measures pursued by

19 Quote from McCullough, John Adams, 505. McCullough does not spend enough time covering the Alien Sedition Acts, falling prey to the same issues that other historians do of sublimating personalities over policy and structure. That said, his take on Adams and the acts do follow nicely with the main arguments presented here.
the Federalists at the same time, created one of the greatest constitutional crises in the history of
the republic.

How did such events come to be? This chapter will argue against the historiographic
trends, positing that the Alien and Sedition Acts represented the crystallization of Federalist
policy and the pinnacle of Federalist power. But they did not arise out of party fracture or
political fear-mongering, instead coming from a now-cemented Federalist ideology that saw the
United States under attack, by foreign and domestic enemies alike. The last chapter dealt with the
overtly international implications of this ideological concentration; here the focus falls more
concertedly upon the domestic issues of the day. This should by no means indicate that they
represent separate spheres, distinct from each other in action, policy, or thought. Rather, one
illuminated the other, with French depredations building popular support for the Adams
administration while fear of French and radical subversion allowed the growth of the military
and the passage of unconstitutional laws. Ultimately, fear — of subversion, invasion, and decay
— forced the Federalists into somewhat erratic action. At no point should this be considered
illogical, though, for many at the time viewed such actions as coldly rational. After building and
molding a set of political and rhetorical “truths” throughout the 1790s, the party had a sturdy
ideological footing to begin pursing a policy program that, they believed, protected the republic,
individual rights, and the American experiment. If one asked Republicans and Federalists of the
era what each sought, they almost assuredly would both have answered, “Liberty.”

To chart this political rise and fall, this chapter focuses first on the rhetorical turmoil
created by fear of internal rebellion and subversion. Federalist observers could look beyond the
Caribbean, particularly to Ireland, to see the fomentation of proxy rebellions and radical
uprisings. Not only did they provide a blueprint, but these violent paroxysms created a wave of
refugees that increasingly came to America, bringing their personal politics with them. Next, we
will examine the imposition of the Federalist’s domestic policy on the United States. Some
actions, like the various naturalization and alien acts, met with resounding approval, even if their
implementation proved uneven. The creation of a provisional army to ostensibly protect the
nation from invasion, although pilloried by latter-day historians, engendered a less-controversial
contemporary response. The Republicans realized this, focusing on the Sedition Act as a key
political liability for the Federalists as they entered the 1800 campaign season. The Republican’s
adept portrayal of the unconstitutionality of the act, and how they showed its impact on “regular”
Americans, left Federalists struggling to define their relationship to the law. This rhetorical
battle, when coupled with the dissolution of the French threat, fractured the party; outlining this
and its impact on the election of 1800 closes the chapter. Adams and his supporters had no issue
labeling Jefferson as the arch-radical that sought to corrupt and destroy the republic he and his
denizens fought so hard to protect. The party failed to rationalize itself to an unconstitutional law,
nor created a counter-narrative to compete against Republican fear-mongering of a centralized
and despotic power. Failing in both regards, Adams and the Federalists would leave power, best
symbolized in the new capital on the Potomac. Fear had consumed them.

“The Mass of Vicious and Disorganizing Characters who Cannot Live Peaceably at Home”

– Immigration and Foreign Subversion

Harrison Gray Otis, a Connecticut Federalist, strode onto the floor of Congress during a
special May 1797 session and began proselytizing on the evils of the “wild Irish.” A compromise
immigration bill passed in 1795 had allowed any emigrant residing within the United States for
five consecutive years to apply for and receive American citizenship. At the time, this law satisfied both parties: Federalists, bemoaning the influx of radicals; Republicans, the fleeing European aristocrats; and everyone, free blacks. By 1797, however, Federalists no longer felt satisfied with the law. Otis now passionately sought to defend a new Federalist proposal: a “naturalization tax” of twenty dollars when emigrant sought final approval of their citizenship. Republicans sought to destroy the bill, arguing that this “tax” proved to be no tax at all, but rather an underhanded means to limit immigration.\textsuperscript{20} Rather than disavow his Republican opponents of any notion that the stated tax intended to do nothing but raise revenue, Otis instead fully embraced the limiting principles of the newly proposed legislation. The law would hopefully prohibit the immigration of “the mass of vicious and disorganizing characters who cannot live peaceably at home,” he stated, arguing that no invitation should be extended to the “hordes of wild Irishmen, nor the turbulent and disorderly of all parts of the world, to come here with a view to disturb our tranquility, after having succeeded in the overthrow of their own Governments.”\textsuperscript{21}

Otis’ words did not prove the trick; the Federalist legislation failed in the House. But his “wild Irish” speech does provide us some interesting pathways to explore the intersection between Federalist ideology and policy creation. Fear of foreign agents and subversion had been spreading through the Federalist ranks since Genêt’s arrival (if not somewhat before). Starting in 1795, Federalist legislators had begun pushing for immigration control, first compromising in 1795, then seeking to harden the law two years later. At the same time, we must place the ill-

\textsuperscript{20} Smith, 23 – 24.

fated “citizenship tax” on a timeline of Federalist ideology that exhibited an increasingly proscriptive role for the federal government in immigration policy. The Alien and Sedition Acts—of which three-quarters focus on immigration and unnaturalized Americans—thus must be understood as part of a process several years in the making, spurred into passage by the crisis with France.

Events in Ireland accentuated the Federalists’ paranoia over immigration. The Irish Rebellion of 1798 erupted just as the United States debated what measures to take in response to French depredations. Formulated by the Irish dissident Wolfe Tone, who had conspired portions of the revolt while exiled in the United States, the Irish rebellion entailed the mobilization of militant Irish groups throughout the island, the primary goal being the seizure of Dublin and its government. In what Tone envisioned as a master stroke, regular units of the French army, along with military units of exiled Irish dissidents, would arrive concurrent with the onset of the rebellion. Once in Ireland, the Irish-French force would arm local insurgents and form the nucleus of a strike force to counter an assumed British counterattack. Lord Cornwallis, having found later military glory after surrendering at Yorktown, capitalized on weather, difficulties with synchronization among the rebels, and superior numbers to defeat the invading force relatively close to its debarkation. Cornwallis declared and enforced martial law, rounding up Jacobins and rebels alike and wielded the rebellion as a rhetorical weapon with which to consolidate British power on the island.

For an outstanding review of European radicals in the United States, see Michael Durey, Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997). Durey takes a longer view of the role played by European radicals and his assessment of them during the Jeffersonian Era is striking.

Rufus King, the American minister to Great Britain and a firm Federalist, keenly followed the events in Ireland and dutifully reported them to Secretary Pickering. “Everyday supplies new proof of the intimate connection between the Chiefs of the Malcontents and the Directory,” King relayed from London. In a follow-on letter, King shared the findings of the Irish Parliament’s internal investigation in which they determined that, “the principles and views of the leaders of the Rebellion…are so comfortable with those which have prevailed in France, so false and inconsistent with any practicable or settled government.” In an early June letter to Hamilton, King conceded that although the insurgency appeared quelled, a fresh application of French regulars would greatly tip the balance in Ireland’s favor. “So deep and general is the Defection,” he mused, that Ireland teetered on the precipice of revolt once again.  

For King, the prospect of Ireland’s seizure by Jacobin-inspired forces worried him less than the potential blueprint it offered for future revolts. King plainly saw France’s role in Ireland as a model for future events in the United States. Writing to Hamilton during July 1798, King supposed that, “if anything could exceed that past insolence of France, it would be this Attempt to plant in our chief Towns a corps of revolutionary agents under the mark of pub.[public] characters.” France would follow the same plan that had led to success in continental Europe, King warned; “she will endeavor to overthrow us by the Divisions among ourselves which she will excite and support by all the means of which she is a mistress.” Much as Knox and Washington, King believed that the French Jacobins had designs on fracturing the union.

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24 Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton, June 6, 1798, PAH, 21, 488.

25 Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton, July 2, 1798, PAH, 21, 525.
These images of feminine seduction, while apparently posing the French in a feminine caricature, do create a compelling image of how the Federalists viewed French subterfuge by 1798. A formal invasion by French troops would be the denouement of any legitimacy crisis within the United States. The primary work of overthrowing the government would be done by Jacobin partisans well before the invasion fleets even set sail. Seduced by the rhetoric of egalitarian revolution, the pro-French faction would wake up one morning to find themselves, and their country, prisoners of the directory. “Every day brings fresh confirmations of the truths of the predilection to our envoys, that the French Faction in America would go all lengths with their imperious and unprincipled masters,” Hamilton noted in a June 1798 editorial published in the *Gazette of the United States*. Going further, he claimed that “it is more and more evident, that as many of them as may dare will join the standard of France, if once erected in this country.”26

This notion of a French fifth column existing within the United States grew once word reached the capital that some of the chief instigators of the Irish Rebellion sought exile in the United States. King, in a late July letter to Pickering, noted that, “In Ireland the Rebellion is at an end, a general amnesty in place, with a few exceptions, will soon be proclaimed; many of the inferior chiefs will be permitted to go into exile; I have before intimated the Probability of such a measure, and hope the president will have the power to exclude from our country all such foreigners who Residence among us would be dangerous.” Such a move, the ambassador opined, would ravage “our true national character.”27

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26 *Gazette of the United States*, June 13, 1798.

King consumed himself over the next several months following the rebellion’s collapse with ensuring that those dissidents seeking asylum would not find their way into the United States. “Their principles and habits would be pernicious to the order and industry of our people,” King argued, “and I cannot persuade myself that the malcontents of any country will ever become useful citizens of our own.”

King used his position in England to argue mightily against the exile of these Irishmen to America. Writing to the Duke of Portland during the autumn of 1798, King stated that, ‘I certainly do not think they [the Irish] will be a desirable acquisition to any nation.”

The president’s son, John Quincy, himself an attaché to Prussia, agreed with King, adding that the republic had “too many of those people already.” As the year passed into 1799, the British made no move to send the exiles across the Atlantic. Pickering recognized the role King played in preventing such actions, and relayed the president’s appreciation later in the year.

The Federalist press found itself well situated to respond to the perceived threats of United Irishmen émigrés and French subversion. A May 1798 edition of *Porcupine’s Gazette,* made common cause between the Irish rebels, French Jacobins, and the Democratic Societies that had plagued the nation since Genêt’s arrival five years before. The Gazette’s account relied upon the anti-radical political expedients that Federalist writers and editors had used throughout the decade. France and her radical missionaries would use the same strength of the republic, its republican nature, to subvert the nation and destroy it from the inside out. Now, to update this

28 Appendix IV of *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King* (hereafter *LCRK*), vol. 2, ed. by Charles R. King (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 635-649 collects the pertinent correspondence relating to King and his accounts of Ireland.

29 Rufus King to Duke of Portland, September 13, 1798, *LCRK*, 2, 640.

30 John Quincy Adams to Rufus King, August 27, 1798, quoted in Smith, 25.
rhetorical trope, the paper included specific reference to “that restless, rebellious tribe, the emigrated United Irishmen.” The blueprint for the nation’s downfall looked to mirror the (at the time) still simmering rebellion in Ireland: the weaseling of Irish and French radicals into positions of civic responsibility, then the automatic reversal of loyalties once a French invasion fleet appeared on the horizon. Ongoing French restiveness in the Caribbean, assumed to be part of a monolithic revolutionary grand strategy, portended an enemy at the republic’s southern gates.31

Such popular rhetorical conceptions of radicalism made their way across the Appalachians. By 1798, the pro-Federalist Palladium in Frankfort, Kentucky, began a steady drum beat against the Irish and their supposed French allies. As the primary Federalist press on the frontier, the Palladium provides our best view of the Federalist views within the region. Starting that autumn, the paper filled its pages with accounts of foreign chicanery. Fake patriots, “with the alluring sound of liberty on their tongues, are trying to lead you into anarchy and confusion, to an imperious foe, whose minions they may the more easily float your land with blood and effect a revolution, in the whirling vortex of which they hope to rise to power, and that on your ruin.” The “pimps of France” had mislead the population with “some pompous phrases about liberty.”32 Several months later, the same paper reserved the front page of its first 1799 edition for a multi-column account of a cross-examination of several captured United Irishmen.

31 “Detection of a Conspiracy Formed by the United Irishmen, with the Evident Intention of Aiding the Tyrants of France in subverting the Government of the United States of American,” May 1798, Broadside, Manuscript collection, LCP.

32 Palladium, September 18, 1798.
According to the report, the forlorn rebels not only admitted the complete collusion of the French in the rebellion, but also the steps in which it could be replicated within the United States.\footnote{Palladium, January 1, 1799.}

Smith and others have painted King’s response, and the Federalist reaction, to the potential Irish exiles as either Federalist xenophobia or preparation for blatant repression of Republicans. Such notions never overtly appear in their writings. Instead, Federalists couch issues with immigration as political in and of themselves, not tied to larger issues of partisan fighting or ethnographic exclusion. The fear of Irish and French immigrants is that they might be spies or insurgents at the most, or just recalcitrant radicals at the least. One can only fully grasp this notion if they understand the context within which the Alien Acts were passed and then can untether them from the Sedition Act. The Federalists had been building up to the Alien Acts for several years, only gaining the electoral clout for their passage after the announcement of the XYZ Affair, the amplification of the naval depredations of the French, and the recounting of the experiences in Ireland.\footnote{Durey, 221.}

On April 17, 1798, Joshua Coit, a Federalist and one of Connecticut’s representative’s to the House, argued that the compromise 1795 naturalization law should be reviewed to see if it still met the needs of the nation. He referred such action to the House’s Committee on the Defense of the Country and the Protection of Commerce. Publishing its findings two weeks later, the committee agreed with Coit that some gaps existed in the 1795 law. They then recommended a three-fold revision: an extension of the residence requirement for immigrants seeking naturalization; the ability to remove aliens believed to have hostile intentions against the United
States; and the provisions that would allow the seizure of “enemy aliens,” or those immigrants from nations at war with the United States, along with their property, and their ejection from the country.\textsuperscript{35} Legislators would follow these recommendations, for the most part, as they drafted the upcoming immigration legislation.

This did not mean that the measures passed without Federalist criticism. In fact, Otis and South Carolina senator Robert Goodloe Harper mounted a stinging critique from a more stringent position. Harper, most likely representing the strain of expulsion in South Carolina that witnessed the ejection of all free blacks and mulattoes from Charleston in 1793, argued for birth right citizenship only. Current policy had created “great evils,” he declared, and the nation needed to disabuse itself of the notion “of believing that the strength and happiness of the country would be promoted by admitting all the congregations of people from every part of the world to the rights of citizenship.” Otis refined this critique somewhat, arguing for an amendment that would have ostensibly created two types of citizens: naturalized and native. Native citizens would enjoy all the rights of full citizenship, but the amendment would bar naturalized citizens from holding public office. Such a move, Otis argued, would preclude foreign agents from subverting the democratic process and sneakily stealing the reins of government.\textsuperscript{36}

The Republicans in Congress fought back, arguing against the constitutionality of such a measure. Fearing that Otis’ measure would prove too divisive, Massachusetts representative Samuel Sewall proposed dropping it in favor of lengthening the residency and intention

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{AC}, 5th Congress, 2nd Session, May 1, 1798, 1566.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 1568 – 1572.
requirements of each emigrant seeking to become a citizen. Rather than proving residence for five years, aliens under Sewall’s plan would now have to proclaim their intent to become a citizen at the five year mark, then wait another nine years (while maintaining residence in the same location) before attaining citizenship. Little debate met Sewall’s claim, the only real motion against it involving the retroactive nature of the proposal. Sewall argued it should stand, particularly given the recent influx of Irishman and the “present distracted state of the country from whence they had emigrated.” James A. Bayard, a Delaware Federalist, seconded this notion, stating that, “As many Jacobins and vagabonds have come into the United States during the last two years, as may come for ten years hence.” Republicans managed to divide the Federalists over the retroactive provision, however, and managed to kill it in committee. Sewall’s original measure, minus the retroactive feature, became the core of the Naturalization Act, the first of the lumped-together Alien and Sedition Acts, and President Adams signed it into law on June 18, 1798.

The Naturalization Act may be the most interesting of all of the Alien and Sedition Acts, primarily because it provides the clearest view of the Federalist mindset as it embarked upon its quest to legislatively protect the nation. Passing after a wave of bills for the funding of the navy and the creation of the Department of the Navy, one should consider the Act as a pseudo-national security measure aligned with the previous acts. The Federalists in Congress clearly held it up as one, claiming that the act would protect the nation from internal enemies much as the larger navy would do to external threats. As a writer in the Federalist-leaning Gazette of the United States wrote following the passage of the Naturalization Act, “Among this class [Irish and Jacobins],

37 Ibid., 1776 – 1780.
and Americans who have formed their political views abroad, are to be found the most violent declaimers against our government."38 And the act went a step farther than just lengthening the residency requirement: Aliens within the United States had to register with either their local clerk at the district court or an agreed-upon administrative authority who would then provide them with a certificate of report of registry. The law demanded that emigrants maintain this certificate until their eventual naturalization, fourteen years in the future. This measure provided for the first Federal surveillance of foreigners within the United States in the nation’s history. Of important note, the Naturalization Act, unlike the Sedition Act and the Alien Friends Act, did not expire under the Jeffersonian presidencies.

The Alien Friends Act and the Alien Enemies Act, passed in quick succession after the Naturalization Act, represent a legislative departure from their predecessor. Both, while descending from the same rhetorical truths of the Federalist collective mindset, do take on the appearance of more Quasi-War directed legislation. Whereas one can trace the gradual building of the Naturalization Act throughout the 1790s with the various debates and proposals for immigration and citizenship reform, the acts that followed after it represent something new and more focused. The Alien Friends and Alien Enemies Acts took root following the announcement of the XYZ crisis and do not appear in proto-legislative form until after the news broke. Reacting to the announcement of the XYZ Affair, Samuel Sitgreaves, a Federalist from Pennsylvania, recommended consideration of potential actions to be taken towards French immigrants in the United States if Congress officially declared war against France. His move to have the issue reviewed by the same committee then reviewing the 1795 Naturalization Act received surprising

38 *Gazette of the United States*, June 28, 1798.
bipartisan support from Kentucky Republican Thomas T. Davis, who claimed that Frenchman in the borderlands represented a significant threat to the United States.\footnote{AC, 1453.} The only significant critique of the committee’s recommendation came from Otis who, again, sought to strengthen the law and dally in more unconstitutional areas. Why wait for a declaration of war, he argued, when France was already clearly an enemy?\footnote{Ibid., 1573 – 1578 contains the floor debates.}

Going forward, the Alien Enemies and Alien Friends Act followed generally parallel geneses. The Alien Enemies Act started in the House and exhibited the power of the Republican Party within that venue. Albert Gallatin and Joseph McDowell, both powerful Republicans, made no argument against the act, but instead wrote in more legislative control and clearly demarcated areas of enforcement. By the time Adams signed the law, the bill allowed for the ejection of foreigners and unnaturalized aliens from a given nation, along with the seizure of their property, following a formal declaration of war. Gallatin spoke out forcefully for the new bill, making sure to construct a unified Republican electoral block that guaranteed the bill’s passage. Evidently Gallatin saw the passage of such a bill as a \textit{fait accompli}; his intent was to control the measure and ensure that it met Republican proclivities.\footnote{Ibid., 1785 – 1796.}

Conversely, the Alien Friends Act started in the Senate and appears to have been a Federalist response to perceived shortfalls taking shape in the Enemies bill then forming in the House. In its initial stages, the bill actually took the shape of an omnibus alien and sedition law, targeting notionally treasonous citizens and immigrants, alike. The bill went through several

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waves of revisions before the Senate sent it forward to the House for consideration in early May, each time lessening the law’s stringent regulations. Now, the bill focused just on aliens, the draft act on sedition currently being discussed thought enough to manage treasonous citizens. Once in the House, the bill’s primary critique again came from those that thought the law did not go far enough. To gain its passage, Federalists, now led by Harper and Otis, debated and cajoled their peers so that this new law would gain passage along with the Alien Enemies Act. The Alien Friends Act would eventually provide the means to deport all aliens thought harmful to the United States, be it during a time of peace or war.

What can we glean from the sequence of events that spawned three significant pieces of legislation in just over two months of writing and debate? First, we see the culmination of a key Federalist rhetorical truth in the passage of the Naturalization Act. Federalists had been fighting against and seeing evidence of potential foreign agents subverting the republic’s democratic process since 1793. The Naturalization Act represented the culmination of a half-decade of work, and key Federalists worked to drown out the more extreme members of their party to ensure the bill’s passage.

Such actions appeared more uneven during the formulations of the Alien Acts that followed. The perceived newness of the need to create the bills left politicians of both stripes floundering for the means to place them within a rhetorical framework. Little public will to defend aliens appeared to exist after the XYZ Affair became public knowledge, preventing a strong response to the proposed legislation. Moves to limit both of the Alien Acts tended towards preventing overreach by the executive branch. The Republicans saw fit to do this for the Alien

Smith, 91.
Enemies Act. The Alien Friends Act, however, received most of its curtailment in the Senate, so that once it reached the House, Federalists wondered how best to place this law in a continuum of national security. As the spring wore on and increased uncertainty over the eventual formalization of the war with France grew, Federalists turned towards the Alien Friends Act as a way to address that ongoing rhetorical itch of foreign subversion that had not been scratched by the Naturalization Act (no retroactive component) and the Alien Enemies Act (no declaration of war). Thus, extremists could take the lead on this new legislation; uncertainty had led to overreach.

Alexander Hamilton appears to have worried about just such an overreaction. Writing to Timothy Pickering on June 7, 1798, Hamilton attached a postscript about the potential passage of an “alien Bill” to a sundry letter. The former secretary voiced concerns about “what policy in execution is likely to govern the Executive.” Such a concern animated Gallatin and the Republican’s reform efforts on the Alien Enemies Act. Hamilton did concede that the “mass ought to be obliged to leave the Country,” and he did want provisions put in place for merchants and those that might be “expose[d] to too much if sent away” — potentially a pseudo-asylum clause. At the end, he voiced a singular hope: “Let us not be cruel or violent.”

Pickering voiced a similar concern in his reply. Although he admitted that the feverish editing of the bills left their current state unknown to him, he could safely state that, “they [the Alien Bills] will not err on the side of severity, much less of cruelty.” He added, “I wish they may really provide for the public safety.”

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43 Alexander Hamilton to Timothy Pickering, June 7, 1798, PAH 21, 495.

“Americans! Rouse!” – Hamilton and the military, 1798 – 1800

“The enlightened friend of America never saw greater occasion of disquietude than at the present juncture,” Mr. Hamilton wrote during late-March 1798. As was his predilection during times of political crisis, the former secretary (now private lawyer) assumed a biting pseudonym and penned a series of essays during the spring of 1798. Under the guise of “Titus Manlius,” Hamilton published seven essays that sought to explain to the American people the current crisis with France while also rallying them towards national union. “My Countrymen! Can ye hesitate which to prefer?,” he asked them, “can ye consent to taste the brutalizing cup of disgrace, to wear the livery of foreign masters, to put on the hateful fetters of foreign bondage?” \(^\text{45}\)

Historians have often portrayed Hamilton as the bogeyman of Quasi-War repression. They posit the Adams Administration’s expansion of the military during the Quasi-War crisis almost completely as Hamilton’s machinations for power. Kohn, in perhaps the harshest critique of perceived Federalist militarism, argues that, “Hamilton and his adherents also succumbed to the hysteria of the 1790s, but they believed the government could rule, that they could preserve their values and their world, if necessary by force alone.” \(^\text{46}\) DeConde, while not as vitriolic, does intimate that Federalists viewed the expansion of the military establishment as a tool to suppress dissent and maintain power against a rising Republican opposition. And Elkins and McKitrick frame the proposals to form a provisional army as, “the old Hamilton all over again,” a political

\(^{45}\) “The Stand No. 1,” March 30, 1798, PAH 21, quotes 381 and 385.

\(^{46}\) Kohn, 272.
power play that brought the former secretary back into the inner-circle of power following an almost three year absence.\textsuperscript{47}

This Jeffersonian construction of Hamilton and the Federalists has dominated the historiography of the party, the era, and the expansion of the military during the crisis. Only recently has this trend turned, with many historians attempting to cast Hamilton’s role during the Quasi-War anew.\textsuperscript{48} Rather showing him as the all-mighty Oz, pulling the levers of power behind the curtain, they instead show Hamilton as knowledgeable of the politics behind the ongoing crisis, and yet still wrestling with his role as a private citizen. His correspondence shows a ready familiarity with the Federalists then in power, but also a marked concern at the local level. None of the historians that study him deny his ambition nor his self-confidence; they do reject any sort of dictatorial leanings within his nature.

\textit{The Stand} essays substantiate this view of Hamilton, while at the same time representing the culmination of Federalist ideology on dissent and union. Starting in late-March, Hamilton painted the current crisis with France as an existential threat to the United States. Beyond a disagreement over shipping or neutrality, the problems with France threatened the independence of the republic. And Americans had more to worry about than just the demise of their nation. Hamilton saw the maneuvering of Jacobin France as a threat to civilization itself. “These implacable TYRANTS obstinately and remorselessly persist in prolonging the calamities of mankind,” his pen warned, “and seem resolved as far as they can to multiply and perpetuate

\begin{itemize}
\item DeConde, \textit{The Quasi-War}, 109 - 141; and Elkins and McKitrick, 598 – 599.
\end{itemize}
them.”\footnote{“The Stand No. 1,” March 30, 1798, \textit{PAH} 21, 383.} In his second essay, Hamilton outlined the international hypocrisy of the French regime, arranging its claims of overthrowing monarchies alongside the steps it had taken towards subverting European kings and princes.\footnote{“The Stand No. 2,” April 4, 1798, in \textit{PAH} 21, 390 – 396.} Although common cause had existed between the American and French republics early on, the anarchical elements of French radicalism had cleaved the ideals of the two nations.

Hamilton’s chief complaint centered on the Jacobin regimes’ “spirit of proselytism, or the desire to of new modeling the political institutions of the rest of the world according to her standard.”\footnote{Ibid., 396.} More so than in the decade’s previous essays, Hamilton repeatedly identified the French political ideology as an expansive and all-consuming cancer that sought to remake the world’s institutions in its own blood-soaked image. Fully studying the “disgusting spectacle of the French Revolution…betray[ed] a plan to disorganize the human mind itself, as well as to undermine the venerable pillars that support the edifice of civilized society.”\footnote{“The Stand No. 3,” April 7, 1798, in \textit{PAH} 21, 402.} Hamilton played with notions of propaganda and demagoguery in the later \textit{Stand} essays. Much as had been stated over the previous years, the United States’ system of republican government left it uniquely susceptible to such attacks. He brought up the events surrounding the Genêt crisis, claiming that the Jacobinist regime’s first emissary sought to corrupt the American public. When the Washington administration did not cave to Genêt’s demands, Hamilton wrote, “bold attempts
were made to create a schism between the people and the government and consequently to sow the seeds of civil discord insurrection and revolution.”

Jacoby radicals had found success within some sections of the republic. Hamilton readily identified a “Gallic faction” within the nation. “A few, happily a contemptible few,” he mused, “prostituted to a foreign enemy, seem willing that their country should become a province of France.” These anti-American stalwarts had, at the least, tolerated or abided radicalism, looking the other way as it subverted the national ideal. The most extreme cases advocated and conspired against the national government, hoping to recreate the French state in America. Thanks to the heightening of the Franco-American crisis, “the film indeed begins to be removed, but the vision of many of those who have been under its influence is not yet restored to the necessary energy or clearness.”

Rather than simply bemoaning the present state, Hamilton called for action. With the nation’s sovereignty at risk, Hamilton argued for expanding the army and the navy, not as an aggressive or repressive measure, but to instead prepare the nation against invasion. He stood against a declaration of war, hoping that continued negotiation might ameliorate the current situation. Expanding the military would help these negotiations: the United States currently operated from a position of weakness and increased military effectiveness would only reinforce its bargaining position in Paris. At the same time, Hamilton reached back rhetorically to the

53 “The Stand No. 5,” April 16, 1798, in PAH 21, 420.

54 “The Stand No. 1,” March 30, 1798, PAH 21, 384.

55 Ibid., 391.

56 Ibid, 386 – 387.
glory of the Revolution. Arguing that the United States had overcome the most powerful nation on the earth when it had nothing, he now wondered why, when it had the potential to develop so much more, it acted as if it had to appease the French. Americans should stand together now against French perfidy much as they had done before against the British. The nation found its’ independence threatened in both instances.57

The rhetorical truths that the Federalists had been building and adding to since 1793 had come to full fruition. Jacobin anarchy and French intrigue joined hand-in-hand to threaten the United States. An annoying minority had been duped by the radical rhetoric of “democracy” and “equality” that masked a reality of political fracture and bloodshed. The United States needed a strong military establishment to protect itself from invasion and prove to the French that it would not be bowed. The military’s growth would symbolize a renewed national unity that patched over the partisan debates of the preceding half-decade.

To this, Hamilton added a new rhetorical truth: the Jacobins’ attempt to use atheism to constrain the liberty of the American people. Federalists had danced around the notion of liberty throughout the 1790s, but had rarely voiced a clear argument for its preservation. This might stem from the assumption by Federalists that legitimacy and sovereignty automatically equated to liberty, or that the Republican characterizations of the Federalists as anti-democratic and monarchical had pushed the issue forward. In The Stand, Hamilton argues for a socially-based form of liberty very Lockean in its construction; liberty depends on a robust social contract based on order. Religion composed “the venerable pillars that support the edifice of civilized society.” He also declared that revolutionary France had taken “equal pains…to deprave the morals as to

extinguish the religion of the country, if indeed morality in a community can be separated from religion.” The church provided social cohesion and identification whereas radical atheism, by separating religion from the moral fabric of the country, unleashed the “impetuous passions of man” — here again, anarchy. Once a given society descended into chaos, Hamilton believed, the only hope to reasserting the social order lay with “the terrors of despotism” and the surrendering of all liberty to an externally created social order based on power and submission. The specter of atheism quickly became a hallowed rhetorical truth for the Federalists and, as we will see, a key element of their campaigning during 1800.

*The Stand* focused almost purely on military and diplomatic issues, staying silent on the ongoing debates over naturalization and immigration. As noted earlier, Hamilton had limited knowledge of the legislative back and forth concerning naturalization and hoped for nuance and moderation in its eventual application. His missives, and their military focus, arrived at the opportune time to impact the congressional debates concerning military expansion. Within a month after the publication of the last essay, Congress had authorized further funding for the navy; had created a Department of the Navy to manage its now-growing fleet; had agreed to fund over one million dollars of material purchases, with the focus on canons, muskets, and ammunition; and empowered the President to raise a provisional army. The arrival of the XYZ dispatches has spurned this legislation, but Hamilton’s essays laid the ideological groundwork that made the moves more than knee-jerk reactions to international slights. The Congress that had repeatedly buried military funding legislation and instead depended on a weak militia system now expanded the military more than at any point in the republic’s young history.

58 “The Stand No. 3,” April 7, 1798, *PAH* 21, 402 – 405.
Several authors have framed the founding of the provisional army as a Federalist initiative to further the repression of dissent. Kohn, while admitting that others had overblown the purported Federalist intent to use the provisional army to suppress the Republican opposition, does admit that some in the party did hold to this ideal. Further, he claimed that the Federalists main concerns in the period after 1798 involved “dissent and disunion,” not French invasion. This, in essence, puts the cart before the horse. In *The Stand*, Hamilton did identify a “Gallic faction” that would be drawn to the French cause after invasion, but does not raise the issue of internal revolt at all. He does not prescribe any actions against this faction, instead apparently relying on social and political exile to correct their mental clouding. Kohn belittles the Federalist’s argument that the nation was ripe for invasion, but relies on Republican arguments in Congress to make the point that the Federalists wanted a military establishment for internal control.

As we have seen, Adams, Knox, Hamilton, Pickering, and Washington himself expressed fear over French invasion in their personal and private correspondence. Washington had pushed for reform in the militia system in 1793 and 1795, both times following reports filed by Knox about its inefficiency and waste. The Federalists had pushed for harbor defense and naval expansion since Genêt’s perfidy, having to fall back on half-measures enforced by the treasury department’s duty collectors for most of the decade. Now, as the naval war with France heated up, Federalists viewed the nation as woefully unprepared for an invasion that they could see examples of in Ireland and the West Indies. The Congressional debates over naturalization and internal aliens sought to address the imposition of a foreign fifth column, again a Federalist

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rhetorical truth, within the republic; the provisional army represented another aspect of the same Federalist policy of national defense, this one more outward looking.

Nowhere in the debates over the authorizing of the raising of a provisional army appears any Federalist predilection towards internal application of the new force.\textsuperscript{60} The initial proposal floated by Secretary of War James McHenry sought to expand the army and lay the groundwork to raise an interim “provisional army” if a war broke out during the upcoming congressional recess. McHenry’s proposal found its way through the Senate generally unaltered before running into a buzz saw of Republican opposition in the house. Dissenters charged that such a move threatened the republic and fell back on classical republican ideological fears of a standing army. The arrival of the XYZ dispatches changed the tenor of the debate, and, much as the Alien Enemies bill, the legislation that eventually authorized the provisional army ended up as a compromise bill. The president could call up the provisional army only in the “event of a declaration of war against the United States or of actual invasion of their territory by a foreign power, or of imminent danger of such an invasion discovered, in his opinion to exist, before the next session of congress.”\textsuperscript{61} The bill also allowed Adams to form a staff for the army and begin appointing officers to it, allowing for the leadership infrastructure of the force to be put in place in case of its eventual activation.

\textsuperscript{60} William Murphy’s revisionist treatment of the politics behind the Additional and Provisional armies goes far in addressing not only the maneuvering between Congress and the executive over these forces, but also the historiographical inaccuracies that have flavored the discourse on this subject. See William J. Murphy, Jr., “John Adams: The Politics of the Additional Army, 1798 – 1800,” \textit{The New England Quarterly}, vol. 52, no. 2 (June 1979): 243 – 249.

\textsuperscript{61} “An Act Authorizing the President of the United States to Raise a Provisional Army,” \textit{United States Statutes at Large}, Chapter 47, Sec 1, 558 – 561.
Following the stated legislative principles, Adams’ authority to raise the provisional army lapsed at the beginning of the third congressional session during early December 1798. Several pieces of legislation over the next year increased the size of the regular army and further provided for the militia, but never did reauthorize the provisional army. Thus, the feared standing army raised to suppress dissent never, in reality, took shape. While Adams did appoint some officer to the provisional army and the new regiments proposed to expand the regular army, recruitment never progressed at speed and desertion plagued the forces that were raised. Recent scholarship has determined that the new regiments never reached more than twenty-nine percent of their projected requirements.62

Historians viewed the provisional army’s leadership, nominally headed by Washington but, in reality, with Hamilton in change, as further evidence of a Federalist conspiracy to suppress dissent. Recent scholarship appears to weaken this claim, as well. Gough studied the officer selection process of the “triumvirate” – Washington, Hamilton, and McHenry – that took place between November 10 and December 13, 1798. The three men gathered in Trenton and reviewed the applications of men seeking to fill positions in the expanded regular armies. While the three men flatly rejected some men for radical leanings (labeled as “Jacobins”) and along some partisan lines, Gough’s research shows that partisanship played a much smaller role than initially thought. Several different elements factored into the selection process, with personal politics playing only a small role. While being recommended by a Federalist did bode well for potential applicants, a sizable portion of those selected either evinced no political leanings or

62 Murphy, 238.
were Republicans. The dependability and personal histories of the applicants’ recommenders proved to be the primary criteria for selection.63

Such a practice would seem to reinforce the notion that Hamilton saw military preparedness as a means to unite the country past partisanship. The temporary authorization of the provisional army represented an emergency war measure meant to prepare the nation for an immediate crisis; the later proposed expansion of the army sought to formalize the provisional army’s size while also preparing the nation for an anticipated invasion. By no means should we see Hamilton’s rhetoric or moves as completely selfless, though. His appointment as inspector general of the army satiated his ambition and an analysis of his correspondence clearly shows that he reveled in his new role. What never appears is a desire to use the military to suppress dissent. Nowhere did this appear in Federalist rhetoric during the 1790s, and its closest approximation, the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion, appeared as more open rebellion and a test of legitimacy than dissent. Since Genêt, leading Federalists had argued for increasing national defense and preparedness and the current situation with France only seemed to validate their arguments.

To this point, the national defense legislation passed under Adams traced clear linkages back to Federalist rhetorical truths building since 1793. Fear of external subversion and invasion had colored the Federalist response to Genêt, the Democratic Societies, and the Whiskey Rebellion. The quest for internal legitimacy that Washington had struggled for during his presidency had shifted more towards external threats for Adams, but the Federalists responded

with policies that addressed older fears. Such was not the case with their next maneuver — the Sedition Act.

“Honor is a higher interest than reputation.” - The Federalist Miscalculation

At a spring 1798 speech to the students and faculty of New Jersey College, President Adams gave voice to a new and growing facet of Federalist rhetoric. Discussing libel, Adams argued that, “Reputation is of as much importance to nations, in proportion, as to individuals… The man or the nation without attachment to reputation, or honor, is undone.” This was not the first time he had made such a claim. Responding to a similarly dated address penned by a group of Boston youths pledging their support to the nation, Adams thanked them for their loyalty while also stating that the direst enemy of the nation was “that obloquy…the worst enemy to virtue, and the best friend of vice; it strives to destroy all distinctions between right and wrong, it leads to divisions, sedition, civil war, and military despotism.”

The president, an adept lawyer with a strong foundation in common law theory, appeared to be making a case as if he were before the bar. Following the logic of his argument, little distinction existed between those that spoke or published libel against individuals or businesses and those that propagated libelous messages against institutions, primarily the government. If, in fact, these issues shared more commonalities than differences, then, legally speaking, those forwarding “libelous” dissent against the government could also be held liable for their words and actions. While Adams, himself, never fully fleshed out this argument in the public forum, he implied enough to allow observers to draw their own conclusions.

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64 Quote in Smith, 98-99.
While no means inevitable, the Sedition Act had ideological and rhetorical antecedents that reached back to 1793. Many of Washington’s second term outbursts dealt with the emergence of the partisan press, mainly the anti-administration papers that pre-dated Genêt’s arrival but particularly flourished in his wake. The anti-administration press had also shown itself to be closely linked with the democratic societies that sprouted concurrent to the first uptick in their vitriol. Throughout the states, most societies aligned themselves with a particular anti-administration organ, in many instances, going so far to as to have newspaper editors as members of the societies governing bodies (see Benjamin Bache in Philadelphia and John Bradford in Lexington). Societies worked with these local papers to ensure that minutes and updates from the societies stayed on the front page, but also served as a means to convey messages, ensure movement unity, and build intra-state party linkages. Never mind that the anti-administration press lacked a true ideological or political center of gravity; those that did exist, by aligning themselves with the more radical elements of the opposition, became more readily apparent than its neutral or pro-administration peers.65

The anti-administration press, in this Federalist light, became an agent of democratic subversion. Federalist rhetoric was replete with mentions of wily agents using the republic’s democratic principles against itself by agitating the masses with false and slanted narratives. Washington had voiced this in his reaction to the Whiskey Rebellion and Hamilton had pointed out this problem in several of his pseudonymous pieces. Neither, however, had explicitly labeled the press as collaborator to this subversion. For them, print media served as a vehicle for delivering a message, an inherent, but constitutional, weakness that provocateurs could

manipulate to enact their schemes. Thus the existence of the press represented a democratic principal being subverted by foreign agents and a bellwether to the status of international manipulation of the republic’s citizens.

Not all Federalists shared Washington and Hamilton’s sense of nuance. Adams had borne the brunt of the anti-administration’s press as Washington’s presidency wound down. During the boisterous run-up to the 1796 election, the pro-Jefferson press labelled Adams a “monarchist,” “the Duke of Braintree,” and most strikingly, “His Rotundity.” The First Lady had inveighed against the press since before Adams’ election. In a 1796 letter, she claimed that the anti-administration press to be the “offspring of faction…nursed by sedition.” As the crisis with France gained steam, Abigail voiced increasingly strident attacks against the newspapers that aligned against the Federalists. “This continued abuse, deception, and falsehood,” she wrote, “is productive of great mischief, and tends to destroy that confidence and Harmony which is the life Health and Security of a Republick [sic].”

Neither Adams publicly advocated for legislatively gagging the anti-administration press. They did not need to. By June 1798, the Federalists that had championed the Alien Acts in Congress introduced standalone sedition-specific legislation that they had cobbled together from the elements not used in the first proposed alien and sedition omnibus bill. Harper and Otis provided the rhetorical fire yet again, laying a verbal foundation by repeatedly mentioning

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66 Several works cover the Adams’ relationship with the press during the election of 1796. Pasley’s *The Election of 1796* provides the best granular treatment, while Ferling’s *Adams vs. Jefferson* provides the best look at Adams and the press during the last part of the decade (see 89-90).


68 Abigail Adams to Mercy Warren, April 25, 1798, quoted in Smith, 97.
“domestic traitors” in the floor debates over the Alien Friends Act. By the time that Federalist Senator James Lloyd of Maryland proposed a bill to counter treason and sedition on June 23, both men had marshaled their Federalists peers behind the legislation. In a letter to George Washington, Lloyd pointed to recent actions by Republican newspapers as evidence of the need for the law’s immediate passage.\(^69\)

Federalists trimmed off the most contentious portions of the bill. Believing that the lack of a declaration of war against France would limit Congress’ ability to clearly label acts of treason, and that the requested death penalty for such acts would prove hard for the American public to accede to, Federalists senators agreed to focus the bill purely on sedition and libel against the government, be it during times of peace or war. These same senators insured that they deleted any overt references to France (that would seem too partisan!) and left the definition of sedition broad enough to cover written or spoken word against the administration and any individuals within it. Writing again to Washington, Lloyd announced the bill’s passage in the Senate and its designs against those that, “wish to subject our Country to foreign domination.” Here, again, Federalist rhetoric linked foreign subversion with anti-administration sentiment, and Lloyd’s letter specifically labelled Republicans as “Jacobins.”\(^70\)

Federalist and Republicans in the House wrangled over the laws nuances throughout early July. The House received Lloyd’s bill on July 5, a day after its passage in the Senate. John Allen, Federalist representative from Connecticut, shepherded the bill through the House, reading at length from anti-opposition editorials as a means to provide “evidence” of the


domestic perfidy found within several newspapers. He went a step farther, however, when he claimed that these newspapers signified only a symptom of a disease. The issue at hand, he believed, entailed the abuse of a “powerful party” that plotted revolution against the republic. While he declined to “say to whom the party that party is composed,” Allen left little to the imagination as he harangued against the supposedly insurrectionist Republicans. Harper agreed with him, again arguing that Republican legislators were the agents of the republic’s collapse, not the press.71

The House passed the Sedition Law on July 10 by only three votes, and President Adams signed it into law four days later. While the triumvirate of Harper, Otis, and Allen crowed with delight, they could not have foreseen that the bill’s passage would take place within a different rhetorical context than the alien and immigration laws that just preceded them. Federalist thought had warned against foreign subversion and the fragility of the republic since 1793. A close reading of the Federalist press showed a unique paranoia that fixated on foreign radicals attempting to use the very liberties guaranteed within the republic to secure its downfall. Granted, Republicans and the anti-administration press presented agents of foreign plots, but their role looked to be one of pawns, not kings. The Alien Acts confirmed this viewpoint: limit further foreign entry into the country to prevent the formation of a radical fifth column with ties to French Jacobinry.

Historians have long debated Hamilton’s views on the Sedition Act. As the leading Federalist intellectual, his views would surely help to determine the direction of the party as it promoted clearly unconstitutional legislation. The now-Inspector General of the provisional army

71 AC, 5th Congress, 2nd Session, 2101-2102; see also Smith, 119-122.
stayed publicly silent on the law; it could be that his new responsibilities weighed too heavily upon his time. His private correspondence tell a murky story. During June 1798, amidst the rancorous debates in Congress over the Sedition Act, Hamilton dashed off two quick letters to his successor at the Treasure Department, Oliver Wolcott. In these, he inveighed against the proposed law, claiming that it would “endanger civil war.” His concern as he worked to build a national defense force to array against a French chimera focused on national unity; he even proposed another “Southern Tour” for the aged General Washington. “Let us not establish a tyranny,” Hamilton stated, “energy is a very different thing from violence.”72 Although he had railed against partisanship roughly two months before in The Stand, Hamilton appeared now to voice the same concerns that apparently animated his formation of the provisional army.

The passage of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions at the end of 1798 seems to have spurred Hamilton to further action. In a letter from late 1799, Hamilton pleaded with the former Speaker of the House, and now New Jersey Senator, Jonathan Dayton, to encourage full enforcement of the legislation. For him, the issue still involved national unity, but he was now concerned with presenting a solid front to foreign perceptions. Disunity would signal weakness to France and perhaps expose the means to topple the republic from within. President Adams, according to Hamilton, needed to be “stimulated” and made to realize the necessity of action in this time of national crisis.73 Now, a mere six months after he had warned against the passage of the Sedition Law, Hamilton seemed to be its most ardent supporter.

72 Alexander Hamilton to Oliver Walcott, June 5 and 29, 1798, in PAH 21, 485 - 486 and 522 - 523

73 Alexander Hamilton to Jonathan Dayton, October - November, 1799, PAH 23, 599 - 604; see counter argument Smith 153-155.
But, a closer reading of his letters from this period show that his concern is for maintaining the republic, not punishing the opposition. In a February 1799 letter to Theodore Sedgewick, Hamilton argued for the formation of a special Congressional committee to investigate the resolutions and the conditions that led to their passage. Conditionality did not concern Hamilton. Rather, he worried that the passage of these laws “encourage[d] a hostile foreign power to decline accommodation and proceed in hostility.” Partisanship signaled division and weakness, he believed, and his letter (as well as most others from this period) fretted over a French invasion. In an attempt to mend fences, Hamilton recommended offering concessions to reform the laws from their present state. While he did explain such an action in logically political terms, his recommendation of such a concession signals his lack of ideological firmness reference the Alien and Sedition Acts.74

One struggles to place these contradictory statements within a workable and logical context. Instead, many historians spend the majority of their time explaining one or the other away. Some truth may lie in the statements, however, that the contradictions help illuminate. The transition of Hamilton’s position, along with his silence in the popular political press, show the genesis of the Federalist’s rhetorical truth in relation to sedition, partisanship, and the press. The Federalists enjoyed an embarrassment of riches: national unity behind the president in the wake of the XYZ Affair being made public; investment in military institutions; and mid-term electoral successes that signaled good things for the upcoming presidential election in 1800. The Sedition Law seems to have taken many Federalists by surprise. Granted, the initial omnibus bill that included the early manifestations of the alien acts did include provisions against sedition. Its

74 Alexander Hamilton to Theodore Sedgwick, February 2, 1799, PAH 22, 452 - 454.
fracture into several smaller acts may have signaled a desire to forego passing the sedition portions of the bill in order to salvage the alien acts, an already-existing and prominent fixture in Federalist rhetoric.  

The resuscitation of the Sedition Act seems to have been emboldened by the passage of the provisions regarding immigration. Otis, Harper, and Lloyd worked behind the scenes to quickly pass the bill, leaving little time for the actual mechanics of the law to be debated within the press it sought to curtail. By the time Adams signed the law, neither side had an adequate amount of time to fight their respective rhetorical battles within the public political space, be it in the street or in the press. It could be that the Federalist believed this to be to their advantage. Instead, they faced a rhetorical environment in flux at the very moment they need a strong position within the political public space: they were passing a law that clearly appeared to have been passed in direct contrivance to the First Amendment.

Hamilton’s 1799 writings focused almost exclusively on military and diplomatic matters. His role as inspector general of the provisional army consumed his time and left him with few opportunities to formulate the amorphous rhetorical foundation for the Alien and Sedition Acts. Lacking a strong rhetorical leader and despairing over Adams’ weak pubic image, the Federalists rallied around John Marshall, the newly minted “hero” of the XYZ Affair. He had ridden to Congress on his personal fame stemming from the negotiations in France, but also on the rising tide of pro-administration feelings that witnessed the successful election of Federalists

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75 Brown, 114 - 129; Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 570 - 577; and Smith, 334 - 358.

76 Smith, 131 - 155.

to local and national offices that Pickering relayed to Stevens. Marshall accomplished this in Virginia, no less, assumed to be a solid anti-administration political stronghold. Speaker Sedgwick wrote that, “He [Marshall] possesses great powers and has much dexterity on the application of them. He is highly & deservedly respected by the friends of Government from the South. In short, we can do nothing without him.”

Many historians, while roundly condemning the Federalist for the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, hold up John Marshall as a testament to integrity in his disagreement with them. According to Elkins and McKitrick, Marshall the Federalist “saw all these thing [the Alien and Sedition Acts] differently.” In the only public statement he made during his 1798 campaign for the Senate, Federalist-aligned Marshall said he disagreed with the Alien and Sedition Acts and would not have voted for them had he been in Congress during their passage. Even then, he was “not an advocate” for the laws. Clearly this is an example of moral leadership standing up against governmental overreach, particularly given the upsurge of pro-Federalist opinion in the nation going into the 1798 and 1799 mid-term elections.

But a closer examination of Marshall’s reasoning should leave those holding him up as a heroic defender of civil liberties desiring more. In his public statement, Marshall says his opposition to the acts has nothing to do with constitutionality; rather, he thinks the laws are “useless,” and “not…fraught with all those mischiefs which many gentlemen ascribe to them.” The passage of the laws, Marshall continued, exposed the country to further divisiveness at just the moment it needed to be most unified against the French threat. On repealing the laws,

78 Sedgwick quoted in Elkins and McKitrick, 729.
79 Ibid., 728 - 732.
Marshall did not take a firm line, but instead said he would “obey the voice of his constituents,” a means to defer taking a stand on repealing the law until after the pending election.\textsuperscript{80}

In a later letter to George Washington sent upon the receipt of a pro-Sedition Act pamphlet from the former president, Marshall placed the blame for discontent in the country firmly at the feet of the Republicans, not the unconstitutional law. While he again points out that he would not have supported the laws if he was in Congress for their passage, he does argue that further fracture would have arisen in the nation without the law’s passage. The tumult over the Sedition Act represented just a symptom of the ongoing disease of partisanship then gripping the nation. The act emboldened the Republicans and had provided them an opportunity to attack the opposition, an opportunity that they would have looked for in any other contentious legislation. Now, the newly politicized press spread lies to the masses, leaving them unable to discern truth from falsehood.\textsuperscript{81} Several weeks later, Marshall helped pen a minority dissent against the Virginia Resolution in the state legislature.\textsuperscript{82} By the time he reached the House of Representatives, he voted first for and then against proposed repeals of the Sedition Act, owing his later nay vote to purported parliamentary machinations.

Marshall’s lukewarm treatment of the Sedition Act seems to represent the fuller spectrum of Federalist thought. The Federalists lacked a central unifying message on the act. Some attempts were made, though. Federalist editors reprinted Judge Alexander Addison’s charge to the grand jury of western Pennsylvania in support of the Sedition Act and issued it as a pamphlet


\textsuperscript{81} John Marshall to George Washington, January 8, 1799, \textit{PJM} 4, 3 - 4.

\textsuperscript{82} Theodore Sedgwick to Alexander Hamilton, February 7, 1799, \textit{PAH} 22, 469 - 472.
titled *Liberty of Speech, and the Press*; it was this pamphlet that Washington forwarded to Marshall in early 1799. In the pamphlet, Addison argued from a uniquely democratic position. Recognizing the power that the press had over public opinion and how such opinion composed the foundation of the republic, he stated that the population should be protected from the possibility of oft-repeated falsehoods. Such a move would ultimately protect democracy, as an uncontrolled and lie-spreading press would corrupt the democratic process.\(^{83}\)

Such rhetoric tied directly into Federalists concerns first voiced during the crisis year of 1793. The very democratic principles of the nation made it a target for foreign subversion. Clearly the press, the primary medium of the new public political culture, possessed an overwhelming ability to shape the minds and opinions of the electorate. The Federalists sought to guarantee that the press presented “truth” (a loaded term, political or otherwise) to the people that then allowed them to make unvarnished judgements regarding the future course of the republic. Harper expressed these notions legalistically in his July 6, 1798, motion introducing the Sedition Act into Congress. He could state, with no intended irony, that the law would not impinge upon the freedom of the press; the press represented something far different, in the Federalist eyes, than the “falsehoods” perpetuated by the anti-administration press.\(^{84}\)

Harper, Adams, Addison, and others, saw such language as libel and thus liable for injurious outcomes. First in Harper’s July 6 motion, then in later rhetorical framings, Federalists sought to draw a clear connective link between common law libel and sedition at the national level. Addison, while making a far more ideological argument, had as his core assumption that


\(^{84}\) “Mr. Harper’s Motion,” July 6, 1798, Manuscript Collection, LCP.
one could not delineate between one form of ill-representation than the other. A House committee responding to several petitions from throughout the United States regarding the proposed unconstitutionality of the Alien and Sedition Acts argued the laws viability directly along such lines. “The act in questions,” the committee argued, “cannot be unconstitutional, because it makes nothing penal that was not penal before, and gives no new powers to the courts, but is merely declaratory of the common law, and useful for making that law more generally known, and more easily understood.” One could not simply publish whatever they so wished without repercussions if given statements proved injurious to property, prestige, or perception.85

Much as with an individual or business, so the nation.

While their argument possessed a logical framework, it proved itself less than compelling. The same investigative committee that replied in legalistic terms to protests about the Sedition Act had spent several preceding pages of their official summation arguing for the Alien Acts as a means of self-defense. While the committee did lay out a legalistic argument for the laws’ conditionality, they also felt no issue in stating the necessity of such a law in preventing French invasion. Dealing with Aliens, the committee contended, were “incident to the power of war and peace,” and thusly, a matter pertaining to the federal government.86 If such a case is true, at least rhetorically, then Adams could argue decades later that the Alien Acts were “acts of war;” the Sedition Act, less so.

Dissonance regarding the Sedition Act grew amongst the Federalists during 1799 and 1800. Addison’s “protecting democracy” argument partnered with Adams and Harpers more

85 Reports of the Committee in Congress to Whom were Referred Certain Memorials Complaining on the Acts of Congress, Concerning the Alien and Sedition Laws,” 1799, Manuscript Collection, LCP

86 Ibid.
legalist libel framework. Neither position, nor even the statement from the House investigative committee, seemed to make the Federalist’s case from a “war-measure” perspective. Hamilton, the leading Federalist intellectual, appeared cross-ways regarding the legislation, never taking up the pen like he did throughout the decade during other periods of crisis. Marshall, the party’s ascendant figure, also mouthed ambivalence to the law — against it, not because it was wrong, but because it was “useless” or provided a point of political vulnerability.

Some within the party even argued against it. During April 1799, *The Palladium of Lexington*, Kentucky voiced a severe criticism of the act. Unlike most other papers in Kentucky at time, *The Palladium* was decidedly Federalist in persuasion, having spent the preceding year and half making the case for the Alien Acts by recounting stories of United Irishmen starting insurrection in America and the “pimps of France” spreading anti-administration lies in the transAppalachian west. For these reasons, the printing of several weeks’ worth of anti-Sedition Act rhetoric on the paper’s front page seems especially shocking. On April 17, the paper printed a letter from George Nicholas, the state’s first Attorney General and then a law professor at Transylvania University. Nicholas, instrumental in Kentucky gaining its statehood, maintained close ties with Virginia politics. While not an avowed Republican, he shared many of their viewpoints, making his rejection of the Alien and Sedition Acts unlikely fodder for a Federalist-leaning newspaper. The editors of *The Palladium* doubled down on their criticism, however, for the next week, an editorial under the pseudonym Hortensius appeared on the front page also condemning the acts. The laws, the writer claimed, were “notorious as they are alarming… dangerous and inexpedient.” “In this part of the world,” Hortensius stated, “it is justly regarded as an attack on the liberty of the press.” While the author vowed their support of Adams, they
clearly rejected the current legislative actions of the Federalists, never-minding the concurrent electoral victories of the party.\textsuperscript{87}

A month later, \textit{The Palladium} went back to printing accounts of insurrectionist nightriders calling out to “Jacobites,” “United Irishmen,” and “refugees” to “rouse and kick up dust before it’s too late.”\textsuperscript{88} Such statements obviously represented a safer rhetorical foundation for the adherents of the Federalist press. But this reversal indicates something else. While fear of foreign subversion and the aliens that would enact insurrection existed within a tactically approved rhetorical spectrum west of the Appalachians, the Sedition Act apparently did not. At the national level, Federalists lacked a clear rhetorical consistency regarding the Sedition Act in the public political space. Beyond approval or ambivalence, some within the party publicly voiced opposition to the law and few drew parallels to the war-footing nature of the Alien Acts. Unbeholden to any connection to its existence as a war-time measure, the arguments for the Sedition Act seemed to provide the logic for which the law could exist in perpetuity.

The Republicans filled the vacuum within the public political space that the Federalist did not. As Pasley notes, the Sedition Act proved a shot in the arm to the laggard anti-opposition press. Already witnessing sagging subscriptions numbers due to the upsurge in popularity of the administration and the Federalists following the release of the account of the XYZ Affair, the passage of the Sedition Act served to silence the majority of the anti-administration press that existed heretofore. In the wake of the act’s passage, however, the public political space became markedly partisan. The act of printing and working as a printer now became heavy with

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{The Palladium}, April 17 and 25, 1799.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{The Palladium}, May 16, 1799.
ideological and symbolic weight. At the same time, the passage of the Sedition Act provided a unifying issue to Republicans and anti-administration groups that had fumbled to build partisan connective tissue during the dark days following the announcement of the XYZ Affair. One can see the evidence of this in the proliferation of grassroots Republican organizations and anti-administration newspapers during 1799 and 1800, something that, as Broussard points out, proved integral in the Republican Party’s erasure of their 1798 and 1799 electoral defeats in 1800 and their overall victory at the national level.

No better rhetorical example of this reversal may exist than a 1798 pamphlet, published in Charlestown, Massachusetts, but distributed widely throughout the nation. Entitled “A Patriot,” the pamphlet took the form of a long poem. Written by a self-described “Mechanic of Charlestown,” the poem opens by explaining the author’s perspective. No “lover of France” or “disorganizer,” the “Mechanic” argues that he is, instead, a true “friend of his country” that bemoans how “that the noble spirit of independence and patriotism, which was once the pride and boast of almost every American, is at the present day very unfashionable.” For twenty pages, the poem outlines the current and anticipated attacks upon individual liberties by the Federalists while arguing against the war-mongering of the Adams administration. The pamphlet closes with a prayer: “But peace and joy, which Liberty shall bring, Shall bloom like one unbounded spring.”

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89 Pasley, *The Tyranny of the Printers*, 131.


91 “A Patriot,” 1798, Manuscript Collection, LCP
“A Patriot” expresses, almost perfectly, the growing anti-administration sentiment of the late 1790s. Published nearly simultaneous to the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts and amidst the growing war fervor against France, the poem harnessed the symbolic energy of the vision of the Patriot, so powerful particularly in Massachusetts, and extends it to a love of country and liberty beyond the mouthing of nationalistic platitudes. Patriotism, here, denounces the machinations of an expansive federal government and argues for “noble patriots” to defend the assaults upon their liberty. Rather than be treated as a pawn in the wars in Europe, the United States should stand alone and independent and not allow itself to be pulled into the ever expanding conflagration.

The Republicans stated and restated this rhetoric more and more loudly in the year running up to the 1800 national election. In a letter written by Virginia Congressmen John Dawson following the recess of Congress in 1798, Dawson argued that, “every citizen should endeavor” for the repeal of the law. Much as the “Mechanic,” Dawson linked civic action with opposition to the bill and agitation for its repeal.92 Educator and well-connected Virginian James Ogilvie voiced similar notions in a speech in Essex County delivered following the passage of the acts. He stated that the citizens’ role in the republic was to guard against government corruption. This could not be done without a free press, Ogilvie claimed, thus making it incumbent upon the same citizens to fight for the repeal of the law and guarantee the purity of the republican experiment.93

92 John Dawson, “Dear Sir: After a Session of Congress…,” 1798, Broadside, Manuscript Collection, LCP

93 James Ogilvie, “A Speech Delivered in Essex County,” 1798, Manuscript Collection, LCP
The Federalist could marshal no unified response to such accusation within the public political space. As noted above, the comments of the congressional committee investigating the numerous petitions filed against the sedition act pointed to common law as the legislation’s foundation; others to war-time necessity; and even others claimed it unnecessary. At no point did any of these notions possess the ability to mobilize a segment of the population and push them into the literal and figurative “street” to fight for the laws retention. Nor did such a step ignite the electorate at the grassroots. As the election of 1800 neared, the Federalists could claim a series of ostensible foreign policy initiatives and naval victories, but little else legislatively. In opposition, the Republicans pointed to an undeclared war, rising government expenses, and attacks upon civil liberties — and appealed to the citizens of the republic to become politically active and fight to uphold or regain their individual freedoms. This mobilization of the electorate proved the Federalist’s downfall in 1800.

“A crisis of no common magnitude awaits our country.” - The Election of 1800

“I dread the election of Mr. Jefferson,” one New England pamphleteers wrote, “because I believe him to be a confirmed infidel.” Writing in the months preceding the 1800 election, the author voiced some enduring Federalist rhetoric that linked to the previous decade, adding a markedly religious twist. Jefferson represented the anti-religious “other,” an extension of the image of the heretical Jacobin first formed amidst the tumult created by Genêt’s arrival. Jefferson’s election would prove “a crisis of no common magnitude,” for electing someone that believed in “polytheism or atheism” would break the bounds of civil society and lead to
anarchy. Jefferson and his party would utilize the vulnerabilities of the republic to put himself in power, then turn the nation into a lecherous hotbed of satanic sensibilities.

The Federalists found far less intellectual traction among the American electorate for their enduring rhetorical tools in 1800 that they had in years past. The Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson and the political upstart Aaron Burr, won a resounding electoral victory. One must not forget that this victory followed the pronouncement of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the anti-federal government manifestos penned by Jefferson and Madison that modern observers oftentimes forget proved surprisingly divisive in the run-up to the presidential election. Republican presidential success mirrored other electoral victories in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and at the local level. If we consider the 1800 presidential contest the first “modern” election in Untied States’ history, the results proved the first electoral landslide.

Much of this had to do with the high-level of grassroots organization and internal messaging that the Republicans achieved in the wake of the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Their rhetoric continued to argue for civic action among the electorate to oppose the machinations of the Adams administration. A broadside posted in Albany shortly after the death of Washington asked members of the Federalist Party to consider their potential candidates alongside the departed hero and ponder the relationship that the administration had built with England. The United States appeared the former mother country’s pawn, and had now incurred

94 “The Voice of Warning to Christians on the ensuing election of a president of the united states,” Printed Americana, Harlan - Crow Library, Calls, TX.

the debt to prove it. A pamphleteer named Brutus struck a similar chord, reminding readers of how “Britain sought to enslave them” and digging up memories of Revolutionary War slaughter. Brutus also sought to commemorate a set of new heroes: the printers jailed for publishing anti-administration newspapers. If Harper, Otis, and the other Federalists had sought to silence such anti-administration rhetoric, they clearly had failed.

Much of the Federalist’s disarray lay in the fact that their unifying element dissolved almost overnight. On February 18, 1799, Adams announced to Congress his intention to send a commission to France to rectify the differences between the two nations. The move almost immediately fractured the Federalist Party. Having built a legislative record on the necessity of protecting the nation from the conflict, the Federalists had every right to fear that they stood to lose the foundation for their previous and future actions. Such a move appeared to defy military logic; naval victories off the Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean had exhibited American military strength. The move also seemed designed to counter a rising pro-Hamilton faction within the party that Adams wanted to check. All other issues within the party paled in comparison to the prospects of Adams’ peace commission.

Significant political infighting defined the party all the way through the election. Marshall, having been chosen to deliver the House’s reply to Adam’s annual message during December 1799, attempted to stay above the internecine fray. While lauding Adams for the sacrifices made for the nation and his unbesmirched character, he ironically hoped for the same

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96 “Thoughts on the Subject of the Ensuing Election,” April 1, 1800, Manuscript collection, LCP.

97 “To the Freemen of the Northern Liberties,” Manuscript Collection, LCP.
from France. Many Federalists grumbled after they left the proceedings, and grumbled further once they learned that Marshall, the hoped for Federalist hero, joined the Adams administration as Secretary of State barely eight months later. In that role, he oversaw the conclusion of the commission’s work and the eventual announcement of an agreement with France.

These grumblings grew to gasps on October 24, 1800. On that date, Alexander Hamilton published two hundred copies of *Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States*. Reacting to a written account of a conversation between the President and the Secretary of War, James McHenry, in which Adams railed against the designs of Hamilton, “the greatest intriguer in the world — a Bastard, and...a foreigner,” Hamilton lashed out in the best way he knew how. Taking up his acerbic pen, Hamilton attacked the president personally and professionally. “He is man of an imagination sublimated and eccentric,” he wrote, “propitious neither to the regular display of sound judgment, nor to steady perseverance in a systematic plan of conduct.” Adams was vain, snobbish, and a bore, Hamilton added for good measure, and maintained a “jealousy capable of discoloring every object.”

Hamilton gave particular attention to Adams’ recent mission to France. It made no sense to Hamilton. France, the author of all indignities to the United States, and now having suffered a string of naval reverses at the hands of American ships, should have pursued negotiations first. The United States now appeared weak and in internal disarray to the European nations. Such


signaling would only compound the notion that the United States lay vulnerable to foreign subversion and open again to manipulation. All these facts appeared so self-evident, Hamilton claimed, that either Adams willfully ignored them or did not possess the faculties to truly execute the responsibilities of his office.\(^{100}\)

The letter destroyed any chance Adams had of being reelected. The Federalist, adrift for over a year and lacking a rhetorical message that would have mobilized their electorate, floundered by nominating three candidates for president, including Adams and Pickering, whose letter from two years earlier had signaled the apogee of the Federalist cause. The irony of Hamilton, the intellectual voice of the Federalists, serving as the author of Adams’ and the party’s downfall, should be lost on no one; neither should the fact that his letter met all the qualifications for arrest under the Sedition Act.

“French Spies then Swarmed in our Cities and in the Country:” Political Framing and the Transfer of Power

A little before midday on March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson walked from his temporary residence at Conrad and McMunn’s Boarding House to the under-construction Capitol Building and, once inside, he swore the Oath of Office. Be it irony or destiny, Chief Justice (and still Secretary of State) John Marshall swore in the nation’s third president. While admittedly a Federalist, Marshall’s desire to nuance his position on the Sedition Act had helped to fracture his party and disturbed its rhetorical consistency going into the crucial election of 1800. Over the next several decades, Marshall would torment Jefferson and his partisan colleagues from the Supreme Court’s bench. After issuing the oath, Marshall returned to his seat, joining already sworn-in Aaron Burr behind the president.

Several hundred onlookers craned their necks to ensure they caught a glimpse of the new president. Jefferson wore a plain suit of clothing that, as a future commentator would claim, marked him “indistinguishable by garb or manner from the multitude.” John and Abigail Adams had already begun heading north to Quincy; they left the city before sunrise, leaving jaws to wag. Theodore Sedgwick, the previous Speaker of the House who had worked hard in support of Federalist legislation during the Adams administration, had also left the capital city, leading many observers to wonder if the nation should prepare for several years of unbridled opposition.

The following day, a prominent Massachusetts Federalist newspaper printed a pseudo-obituary for “The Federal Administration,” which, having lived for twelve years, had “yesterday expired” upon the inauguration of Jefferson and the ascension of his party to power.¹

¹ Peterson, 652 - 658; *Columbian Centinel*, March 4, 1801.
The marked change in tone and tenor from Washington’s second inauguration just eight years prior remains striking centuries later. Jefferson clearly sought to buttress the notion of civic virtue in his walk to the presidency. Foregoing the coaches and horses favored by both Washington and Adams at their respective inaugurations, Jefferson used his “little parade” to cultivate a sense of political conciliation and republican responsibility. Led by a company of local militia, Jefferson and several friends and colleagues walked up Pennsylvania Avenue. The coterie that followed included several prominent Republican Congressmen, federal marshals from the city, and, with a nod toward continuity and rapprochement, two members of the outgoing Adams cabinet. Beyond the firing of a battery of militia cannons as Jefferson entered the Capitol, little other fanfare met the party; to an outsider, it might have appeared little more than a leisurely stroll.²

If the means of conveyance differed from Washington’s prior precedent, so did the address. Whereas Washington’s taciturn and spare message had exposed a reluctant sense of duty, Jefferson carried on the message of his walk to the inauguration and appealed to the better angels of the men in the room. Jefferson began by beseeching his “Friends and Fellow-Citizens” for both patience and guidance, imagining that he would inevitably stumble during the course of his presidency. By the second paragraph, however, he struck a more self-assured tone. Recognizing the electoral crisis that had preceded his eventual victory, and going further back, the nation’s first stridently partisan presidential election, Jefferson stated,

But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans, we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change

² For a contemporary account of Jefferson’s walk to the Capitol Building, see the National Intelligencer, March 6, 1801.
its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. The truths of the Constitution had survived the raucousness of electoral politics and lived in the passage of power from one partisan group to its avowed ideological opposition.\textsuperscript{3}

Contemporary commentators focussed on the line “We are all republicans, we are all federalists.” Most saw it as public \textit{mea culpa}; acknowledging the bitter aspect of the election of 1800, Jefferson reached across the party divide and sought to heal the nation’s ideological rift. These observers, when reprinting the address, assumed that the new president intended to name the parties, specifically, and had the line printed as “We are all Republicans, We are all Federalists,” capitalizing the nouns as proper nouns. Such an assumption of noun type created a long legacy. Many current historians see Jefferson’s First Inauguration address as the first in a long line of prototypical inaugural addresses that, while recognizing the existing partisan divide, acknowledge inherent American principles of republicanism and democracy running throughout ongoing political debates. The problems of American politics are ones of degrees, they argue, not contesting world views. And Jefferson represented this continuity. By formalizing the existence of political parties and the elements of both within each citizen, Jefferson embodied what historian Gordon Wood would call a “revolutionary transformation:” a transition from a political ideology dominated by the idea of republican virtue to one of civic engagement and expanded democratic prerogatives.\textsuperscript{4}


Other historians have demurred. The original text of the address written by Jefferson forwent the capitalization of republican and federalist, ostensibly recognizing them as principles and not parties. While Jefferson might acknowledge the existence of a Federalist prerogative, little evidence exists in his belief in a party system. In his private correspondence, he belied a thinker who believed that his view on government and the republic were inherently correct and that those who opposed him had merely not benefitted from a proper level of education and enlightenment. His role as president entailed effecting this change and working to bring the misguided over to his, and his party’s, way of thinking, not to build bridges of compromise and understanding between two concrete ideological positions. At his weaker moments, the president even dabbled in conspiracy theories. Parts of his “campaign” in 1800 had rested on notions of monarchism and English interference, a dark inverse of Federalist accusations. He would later claim, “I know there are monarchists among us.” As Hofstadter argued over a century and a half later, “The Federalists would have been deceived if they had imagined…that Jefferson would put the principles of the two parties, and hence the parties themselves, on nearly equal footing of legitimacy.”

The perseverance of an ideological opposition to party, and the conspiratorial messages that often paired with it, is striking as one considers it alongside the notion of change that the election of 1800 is supposed to represent. And this is not the only thematic continuity we see that

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overlaps the election and transition of authority. In terms of policy and the use of presidential power, many historians argue that, once in power, Jefferson and the Republicans found themselves forced to tack their policies towards many of the positions held by the Federalists of the 1790s. For instance, within the first month of his presidency, Jefferson laid the groundwork to formally establish a military academy at West Point. The president had argued vigorously against expanding the military and founding an academy while he and his party sat in opposition. Now, however, with little explanation, Jefferson changed course. He never explaining why he now thought it beneficial to the nation’s existence to have an academy, nor why he ascribed to the idea of a permanent military establishment. Historians have conjectured why for years, but the fact remains: Of all the founding fathers assumed to support the opening of a military academy, few would have believed that Jefferson would be the one to do so.

The decision to pursue the Louisiana Purchase conjures up a similar sense of ideological irony. Having spent the better part of a decade working to stymie an over-expansion of federal

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and executive power, Jefferson sided with his advisers when they recommended not to formalize the purchase with an amendment in Congress and, instead, simply enacted the purchase as an executive action. Whereas a decade before the then-Secretary of State had argued against Hamilton’s myriad economic plans, the president now used his position to double the size of the nation by negotiating with a European emperor, and tapped the Federal budget to finalize the deal. The size of the Purchase required an expansion of the government’s bureaucratic functions, something that, ideologically, the Republicans would appear to align against. The Purchase - be in its relationship to slavery, confrontations with Native Americans, contests with foreign powers, or reframing of the notion of citizenship — defined the nation for the next century.8

During 1802, Jefferson ordered the American Navy to blockade the ports of the Barbary Pirates in response to the capture of U.S. merchant ships. While ostensibly a series of raids and bombardments, the First Barbary War ideologically represented something larger to the Untied States. As historian Frank Lambett insists, the war must be viewed as occurring within an Atlantic World whose main creators - England and France - still viewed the United States as a pawn to be used against the other. Stephen Decatur’s rousing victory before Tripoli symbolized the United States’ new role as a player in the mercantile realm, even if still only a junior partner.9 Less than a decade earlier during the Quasi-War, U.S. Marines landed at Caribbean port cities for similar reasons: to ensure stability and prove American legitimacy to the contesting European powers.


This need for external legitimacy, coupled with a desire to prevent the fragmenting of the western border, created a political and social anxiety within the nation during successive Republican presidencies. Jefferson’s most overt attempt to prove the mercantile power of the United States, the 1807 Embargo, instead provided the Federalists due cause to challenge the administration. Later, concerns with impressment, depredations of merchant shipping, and Native American raids combined with this pervasive need for legitimacy to lead the nation into the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{10} The Federalists sought to find the means to address these same concerns during the 1790s.

How can current observers order these seemingly apparent contradictions between ideology and policy? Republican policies of the early Nineteenth Century — a desire to expand military institutions, to solidify the nation’s western border, and to gain respect within the global arena — exhibit intellectual linkages to many of the ideas voiced by the Federalists during the waning years of the Eighteenth Century. And yet, we often cling to a picture of partisan bipolarity to explain the nature of the nation’s first political generation. Lacking nuance, this picture of American politics obscures the reality of an era defined by rhetorical flourishes, ideological division, and, ironically, unmentioned policy consensus.

Stepping back and viewing the nation’s history at a wider scale allows one to see a unifying theme that spans the election of 1800: a desire for internal and external legitimacy for the American experiment. Federalists and Republicans alike contended with these issues in

varying degrees. The dissension of the Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Rebellion, if transposed a decade or two later, appear similar to Burr’s Conspiracy and the Hartford Convention. While this broad sweep obviously generalizes the specifics of each of these instances, what is clear is that each party, although divided by ideology and years, viewed these incidents as forms of near (if not outright) treachery. As the historian Terri Diane Halperin notes in her study of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the quintessential question of the 1790s dealt with interpreting the Constitution. Both parties claimed to support the Constitution and built political frames that explained the actions of the other side as in opposition to them. In a political environment not accustomed to partisan politics, this frame appeared to be a zero-sum game. The key, then, to understanding the first generation of American politics is to understand the metaphor the parties used to understand and contextualize the events transpiring around them.11

Beginning in 1793, the thinkers, editors, and politicians that coalesced into the Federalist Party began to view events occurring within and without the republic as an interrelated whole. The uncertainty created by the end of the Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution merged with the chaos of the French Revolution and the European response to it, and Federalists saw their lives and their nation’s destiny intermingled within it all. To those unused to partisan division, the raucous politics of the street and increasingly vociferous opposition appeared as a puppet, each string pulled by a finger of radicalism, subversion, and anarchy. Their experiences informed their view of this reality, and the metaphor, or frame, that they used to explain it left

11 Terri Diane Halperin, The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798: Testing the Constitution (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 2016), 1-27. For the logic in taking a long vision of American political history, see Julian E. Zelnik, Governing America: The Revival of Political History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). In describing “new political history,” Zelnik argues that historians need to examine how they organize political time. His views relies heavily on institutions, however, and his examples in this book skew towards the postbellum era, a time when institutions were and are more prominent. Part of the focus of this study is to open the door for a reexamination of political time in a period where institutions were lacking or still being formed.
little room for notions of acceptable partisanship. They could point to numerous examples of just such events transpiring: two successive Secretaries of State had resigned after being tainted by French designs; foreign agents connived to split the nation’s frontier from the eastern seaboard; and a populist impulse seemed ready to tear apart a public political space that had proven integral in first uniting the colonies, then building the case for ratification. The fate of the American experiment was at stake!

As the century began to close, the Federalists matched these events and ideas with policies — suppressing popular uprisings, expanding the military, preventing the perpetuation of “fake news,” and stopping the formation of a fifth column within the nation’s borders. Explanations for these events — a tax strike, a free press, an open border and welcoming nation — provided little solace. No, the Federalists could not shake their world view. By 1800, it had reached a millennial pitch that left some Federalists viewing Jefferson as the Anti-Christ bringing darkness upon the land. They thus were struck dumb by an election that that seemed unable to lose, especially when only years before they had won significant mid-term victories.

What had happened? They lost the public political space. Jefferson and his adherents built a frame in which the citizenry had to actively guard against government overreach. And here the Federalists played their role, for they mobilized the Army against the people, pursued an undeclared war, arrested newspaper editors, and tested the new nation’s concept of citizenship. This mobilization matched a burgeoning socio-economic reality within the nation. The encroachment of market forces remade the citizen-government dynamic and recast a new vision of partisanship and party, citizen and liberty. Andrew Jackson would mobilize this world-view in 1828, building a rhetorical foundation of populist feeling to tear down a supposed aristocratic
and corrupt one-party regime. Much as the Federalist before them, the Republicans proved unable to recast a metaphor that encompassed their world-view and the current changes.12

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“We have the mortification at last to know that the good old man [Adams] has lost the election,” Isaac Craig wrote to Samuel Hodgson on January 2, 1801. Craig, the deputy quartermaster and military storekeeper at Fort Lafayette, Pennsylvania, despaired what the change of power would entail. Winter in western Pennsylvania can be a trying time of year, and his mood seems to have matched the icy cold of the weather. “Pray may not we very naturally conclude,” he drearily wondered, “that we must make way for some of the friends of the new administration?” Craig was not made to make way, however; later that year, he was promoted to paymaster for the fort and remained in service for many more years.13

Undoubtedly, many other people found the transfer of power to Jefferson and his adherents as anticlimactic as Craig. While the administration obviously bestowed favor upon those that supported them, none of the anticipated mass reordering of society took place. In fact, as noted in the introduction, the Federalist Party grew in cultural and ideological depth during the Republican presidencies. In opposition, they increasingly espoused an anti-Jeffersonian world view that voiced an ideological favor for mercantilist culture, American nationalism, and a strong federal government. While the party became increasingly geographically segregated to New

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13 Isaac Craig to Samuel Hodgson, January 2, 1801, Isaac Craig Letter Book, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.
England after 1800, Federalist partisans existed in every state, enjoying a strong showing in the very southern South Carolina.¹⁴

Emboldened by Republican reverses and American defeats during the War of 1812, selected Federalists met in Hartford to draft a series of constitutional amendments that would have effectively minimized the role of the federal government. With secession in the air, the Federalists believed they had the ability to reclaim the government and pursue a power-sharing policy that decentralized rule and compensated for their geographic isolation. Arriving at the still-smoldering capital, however, the once haughty Federalists were shocked by the latest news: General Andrew Jackson had defeated the British at New Orleans. Never-mind that the battle took place after the war’s official end, the Americans now found themselves victors of a sordid and unpopular war and legitimated within and without their borders. The Republicans surgically wielded the news of the victory to cut out the heart of the Federalist Party. Devoid of a political frame to contextualize the new state of the nation, the Federalists withered away. Thus ended the first generation of American politics. Ironically, Jackson played a role in the demise of both of the United States’ first political parties.¹⁵

John Adams lived longer than the Federalist Party. After years of rancor, he took up his pen and began corresponding with his formerly closest of friends, Thomas Jefferson. A decade and a half after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, Adams still clung to the worldview that he held when he passed the laws. “We were then at war with France,” he chided his former


Vice President, “French spies then swarmed in our Cities and in the country. Some of them were, intolerably, turbulent, impudent, and seditious.” Writing in 1804, Abigail Adams still evinced the wounds of the campaign four years prior: “In no country has calumny falshood [sic], and reviling stalked abroad more licentiously, than in this. No political Character has been saved from its attacks, no reputation so fair, as not to be wounded by it, until truth and falsehood lie in one undistinguished heap.” Both the former president and the former first lady clung to their beliefs. The years had not waned them; as we see from Abigail, she continued to view criticisms of the Republicans through a frame of media manipulations and disinformation.

But the rancor did lessen, and as Adams and Jefferson neared the end of their life, the stubborn man from Massachusetts wished for a peaceful future. “I look back with rapture to those golden days when Virginia and Massachusetts lived and acted together like a band of brothers,” Adams wished, “and I hope it will not be long before they may say redolent saturnia regina [The Golden Age is Returning], when I hope the world will hear no more of Hartford Conventions or Virginia Armories.” The passage of years had clouded Adams’ memory; the partisan divide rent the 1790s and threatened the very core of the nation’s existence, little resembling a Golden Age. Both men had represented their parties, and both had also risked their political futures during the last two years of the decade. Adams had lost, retreating to Quincy in the early-morning dark of Jefferson’s inauguration day. Jefferson’s hard won presidency appears to have afforded him few pleasures, though. On his tombstone at Monticello, Jefferson recognized the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, and the

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17 Abigail Adams to Thomas Jefferson, August 18, 1804, AJL, 276 - 277.
founding of the University of Virginia. No mention of any of his accomplishments from his time in the cabinet, the vice-presidency, or the White House can be found. In death, Jefferson apparently sought to scrub his name from the partisan conflict that defined the nation’s first political generation.

Feeling death close by, Adams wished the same.

I wish your health may continue to the last much better than mine. The little strength of mind and the considerable strength of body that I once possessed appear to be all gone, but while I breathe I shall be your friend. We shall meet again, so wishes and so believes your friend, but if we are disappointed we shall never know it.18

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18 John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, February 25, 1826, AJL, 610.
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Andrew Jackson Forney was born June 19, 1980, at Fort Hood, Texas. A 1998 graduate of Meade High School, Fort Meade, Maryland, he received his Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in Philosophy from Western Maryland College (now McDaniel College), Westminster, Maryland, in 2002.

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In September, 2010, Andrew enrolled in graduate study at Texas Christian University, where he received his Master of Arts Degree in History in December, 2011. By August, 2012, he began teaching in the Department of History at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. While there, Andrew was promoted to assistant professor and his peers elected him a voting member of the faculty council. He is a member of the Society for Military Historians, the Society for Historians of the Early Republic, the Society for U.S. Intellectual History, and the U.S. Military Strategist Association.

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ABSTRACT

THE FEDERALIST EMPIRE: INSECURITY AND EXPANSION IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC, 1793-1800

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During the 1790s, the Federalist Party pursued an increasingly aggressive series of domestic and foreign policies borne from a paranoid political worldview in which they believed the republic was at risk of falling to foreign subversion. This belief situated events (rightly or wrongly) into their worldview as reinforcing evidence. In the process, the Federalist Party enacted legislative policies and military actions that sought to curtail this perceived subversion. Foreign policy and domestic issues were not separate, but rather existed as an intermingled whole.

This idea challenges much of the extant historiography on the 1790s, particularly the portion involving the Federalist Party. Traditionally, historians have viewed the Federalists as either pre-modern or anti-democratic, making them a perfect foil for the Republicans’ ascension and the Election of 1800. The Federalist Empire argues against these notions, making a case for political contingency rather than democratic inevitability. Most importantly, the work charts the growth of a mindset that viewed dissent and opposition as French, and at times English, attempts to co-opt the American experiment. Struggling to comprehend the still-developing party system, the Federalists turned to the military for solutions, from the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion, through the execution of the Quasi-War, to the proposed formation of a provisional
army for home defense. By 1800, however, the Federalists found themselves unable to build a coherent rhetorical message behind the Sedition Act and that, along with internal party divisions, set the conditions for the party’s electoral defeat.