

**THE POLITICS OF DINNER:
PRESIDENTIAL ENTERTAINING IN THE EARLY
REPUBLIC**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Chapter One: “As Many as His Table Would Hold:” The Making of a Republican Court.....	10
III.	Chapter Two: <i>Pêle-Mêle</i> Dining in the White House.....	38
IV.	Chapter Three: Republican Simplicity among the Second Generation: Presidential Dining From Monroe to Jackson, 1817-1837.....	62
V.	Conclusion.....	90
VI.	Bibliography.....	101
VII.	Vita	
VIII.	Abstract	

Introduction

J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, in his 1782 account of life in America, claimed that people living in America abandoned their “Europeanness” to become Americans. Crèvecoeur, a native Frenchman who moved to colonial New York in 1759, became famous for creating the first description of life in North America that categorized Americans as distinct from Europeans. Americans, he claimed, experienced an overwhelming sense of “property, of exclusive right, [and] of independence” that their European counterparts lacked; small wonder, then, “that so many Europeans who have never been able to say that such portion of land was theirs, cross the Atlantic to realize that happiness.” America, he noted, “is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing [sic], and of a herd of people who have nothing.” He saw, American society as “the most perfect society” existing in the world. “On it,” he said, “is founded our rank, our freedom, [and] our power as citizens.” With continued zeal, Crèvecoeur depicted the American landscape as a means to rehabilitate the poor and wretched of Europe; with “new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they become men: in Europe they were so many useless plants” who needed “transplantation,” and had now “taken root and flourished!”¹

Written for a friend in England, and published just before the peace treaty officially ended the American Revolution, Crèvecoeur’s private correspondences detailed a utopian American society. To him, the American landscape held great promise as any man could possess “the essence of future bread, milk, and meat [that] were scattered all around him.” He understood the American’s connection to the soil. “I am so habituated to draw all my food and pleasure from the surface of the earth which I till,” he pronounced, “that I cannot, nor indeed am I able to quit it.” Crèvecoeur stoically describes the necessary adaptations of European

women to frontier life. His own wife, deprived of the ingredients of her normal industry, wool and flax, learned, “like the other squaws,” to “cook for us the nasaump, the ninchickè, and other such preparations of corn as are customary among these people.” Moreover, after he detailed other native cooking practices, he casually accepted the notion that “she must cheerfully [sic] adopt the manners and customs of her neighbors, in their dress, deportment, conduct, and internal œconomy, in all respects.” By incorporating many of the simple, rustic customs of the natives, he saw the basis for an ideal democratic citizenry. Although Native Americans did not share the European concept of land ownership, Crèvecoeur’s notions of tilling the ground and national pride represented a common theme among both American and European writers of the late-eighteenth century, and thereafter, became a political trope.²

During the past two decades, interdisciplinary studies on food, material culture, and manners emerged as part of a growing field of scholarship. Historians, along with anthropologists, sociologists, archeologists, and members of various other academic fields, have moved cuisine choice beyond nutritional studies and into the realm of political and economic studies. Studies of American food culture by historians James McWilliams and Trudy Eden offer a broader understanding of regional differences from a lofty vantage point. Micro-studies of particular American regions by historians such as Barbara G. Carson and Katharine E. Harbury address gender roles and local variations and illustrate the effectiveness of cookbooks as primary documents. Monographs on American cultural history fit methodologically with similar European works. Norbert Elias’ historical sociology on the evolution of manners in Western Europe, and his pupil, Stephen Mennell’s work on English and French culinary history are both excellent examples historical inquiry into manners and food choice. Important works by Margaret Visser provide an in-depth analysis of manners and

etiquette as expressions of social standards. Likewise, anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of culture as a text provides historians with a framework for their cultural studies.³

In "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America," James A. Henretta asserts that before 1830, the diffusion of the lineal family led to the acceptance of a national identity, the loss of familial identity, and the end of localism. These developments allowed early Americans to broaden their trade and social networks. Similarly, in Richard L. Bushman's study of nineteenth-century American culture, he emphasizes the rural citizens' pursuit of "vernacular gentility," a gradual undertaking within the middle class to display material marks of their refinement. Struggling to situate the growing middle into the eighteenth-century model of social stratification between gentry and poor led Americans into a situation where "politics oscillated between rule by aristocrats and rule by the mob." Yet, Bushman claims, the resonance of parlor culture with the masses marked "one of the great democratic movements" of the century. Building from Bushman's concept, historians Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin similarly develop "vernacular liberalism," which they use to analyze nineteenth-century popular politics. Taken together, these studies depict the nineteenth century as a time of territorial expansion, social refinement, and political democratization.⁴

Specifically focused on the increased relevance of women's role in antebellum American politics and society, historians Jan Lewis and Catherine Allgor have paved the way for future scholarship on the relationship between social and political culture. Social institutions, like marriage and dinner parties, reflected important changes taking place during the early republic. Building on Barbara Welter's landmark article, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," and Linda K. Kerber's work on "Republican Motherhood," Lewis and Allgor analyze the public role of women in an era where women's roles largely remained confined to the private sphere.⁵

Lewis' notion of the "Republican Wife" stressed the importance of virtuous, Republican women in creating a lasting republic. In order to establish a stable society in the new nation, virtue needed to emanate from its individual citizens. Honest and chaste, the ideal woman used her influence over men to ensure the stability of society. By exhibiting refined manners, women promoted gentility in American men. As a growing component of Washington society, women attended the public and private amusements held by the president and others of advanced status, and theoretically, kept easily corruptible men on the path of republican virtue. In order to keep the country on the right track, as popular literature proscribed, women flocked to the capital to exert their moral influence at dinner parties.⁶

A dominant trend in the historiography of Presidential studies is to address the role of the early First Ladies as a separate, supplementary, and domestic exercise. Precious little study on Presidential dinners focuses on the men's role at these important events. Etiquette seems to remain a strictly feminine affair with only indirect effects on the masculine parties involved. In many cases, nevertheless, dinner parties and issues of etiquette affected more than just the Ladies of Washington. Building on the traditional "masculine" political and economic venues that many historians emphasize, this study focuses on how early Americans, both men and women, shaped their political environment through dinner culture. Primarily centered on prominent early Americans, this study analyzes changes in popular conceptions of national identity from the Federalist to the Jacksonian era, through an analysis of presidential entertainments, dining, and Washington society.

Colonial Americans shaped their diet around the common culinary practices of the Native Indian populations. The staples of the Native diet included maize, beans, and squash. Europeans regarded wheat, barley, and oats as noble grains, but colonists struggled to acclimatize these crops to the New World. Maize, or Indian corn, once regarded as food only

fit for animals and savages, became widely used among American colonists. It grew abundantly and worked as the steady source of grain the colonists needed. They also found that the beans and squashes used by the Native Americans could work as substitutions for their traditional English fare. For example, colonists mixed maize and beans together to make a dish called succotash that resembled European-style porridges, also known as pottages.⁷

On the other side of the Atlantic, upper class Europeans started to use the new ingredients flowing in from the New World to show their refinement. Many foods like tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, maize, squash, and vanilla first came to Europe from the Americas. Additionally, the turkey eventually replaced the chicken at meals, because it was a “big, new, festive-looking bird.”⁸ But if the transfer of foodstuffs from American to Western Europe was important, what about the transference of cultural norms from Europe to the Americas? How did they reflect status, and after the American Revolution, how did they express national identity through their culinary habits? What were, if any, the political implications of their social engagements on a local and global scale? What sort of framework would a historian use to study the relationship between material culture and behavior?

Although primarily used among anthropologists, semiotics, the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior, or the analysis of systems of communication, as language, gestures, or clothing, provides a useful framework for social historians. Historian William Pencak, for example, wrote of the use of semiotics in the White House from Jefferson to Jackson. He saw Andrew Jackson’s White House as a populist variation of Jefferson’s democratic model of entertaining.⁹ The historical study of culinary habits and the modes of behavior that correspond with them fall within this semiotic framework. Foodways also act as a system of communication. The food chosen, the presentation of the food, who sat at the

table, where they sat, what they wore, what they discussed, all of these subtleties say much about the culture of those involved.

When viewed as a form of social communication, foodways can take on greater historical significance. During the early years of the republic, for example, the development of American foodways operated as part of the social progression of American society, and in turn, greatly influenced the political atmosphere surrounding it. By analyzing the social habits of the presidents from George Washington through Martin Van Buren, one realizes that elements of social culture shaped the political culture of the early republic. The choices these presidents made in preparation for their social functions, the foods they ate, the recipes they used, the materials they chose to display their food on the table, not only highlighted the cultural ideals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but also corresponded with the nineteenth-century political trend towards democratization.

In the following chapters, this thesis will cover the evolution of American dinner culture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to illustrate how social culture influenced political culture. Chapter one focuses on the presidencies of George Washington and John Adams and identifies contentions over “republican simplicity” and etiquette during the Federal era. Central to this dilemma is the conflict between “court” and “country” that derived from the political turmoil of eighteenth-century England and informed the political process of the American Revolution.¹⁰ While Washington’s dinner parties and formal levees drew intense criticism from the Democratic-Republicans, they also began the process of creating a unique American dinner culture.

Chapter two covers the changes in formal dining that occurred during Thomas Jefferson’s presidency and that of his successor, James Madison. Rejecting the habits of their Federalist forerunners, the Democratic-Republican presidents attempted to reconfigure the

protocol around dinner engagements and other formal entertainments held by the figurehead of the new nation. Jefferson implemented a *pêle-mêle* dining model, which emphasized democracy at the table and abolished hierarchical notions of deference in American diplomacy. From the French term meaning “to mix,” *pêle-mêle* dining meant the host no longer had to escort the highest-ranking official’s wife to the table, but could choose the woman closest to him. This concept applied to all American statesmen, not just the president. Started as a means of setting the representatives of the American government on equal footing with the British, Jefferson’s *pêle-mêle* model also inadvertently laid the foundation for a more egalitarian American society in terms of gender. Thus, the changes he implemented illustrated Jefferson’s grand vision of America as a truly democratic society. The Madisons’ formal gatherings also illustrated the shift towards democratization by including an unprecedented number of women at White House functions.

In the final chapter, the end of the revolutionary generation comes into focus and new interpretations of dinner culture emerge during the second generation of American presidents. Numerous changes took place in antebellum American society following the end of the second war with Great Britain in 1815 and the inception of the Industrial Revolution in the decades afterwards. Dining during the administrations of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams reflected these changes and societal standards in relation to gender and politics. With massive change, there is also cultural backlash. Jacksonian democracy both embraced and rejected the modernization of the antebellum period. Jackson’s interpretation of “republican simplicity” reflected his western heritage and his distrust of established Washington society.

If one had to abandon one’s “Europeanness” to become American, as Crèvecoeur suggested, then the choices early Americans made concerning their food, its presentation, and their manners must reflect this change. After gaining independence from Great Britain, the

United States had to distinguish itself on the world stage as more than just a satellite of empire. With ample land and a variety of foodstuffs not native to Europe, early Americans reinforced their sense of destiny by exhibiting their unique culinary style to their European neighbors. The Washingtons, as the new nation's foremost family, took this process seriously. Following the ideal of republican simplicity, the first president carefully contemplated the course of the new nation. From the wine on his table to the shoes on his feet, Washington meticulously constructed a public image that indicated a unified and sophisticated American citizenry. His successors built on that image.

¹ J. Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer, 1782*, reprint, 1904, (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2010), 27, 49, 52-53.

² *Nasaump* is another word for hominy. *Ninchickè* is an unidentified corn dish. Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 116, 92, 316-17.

³ James E. McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Trudy Eden, *The Early American Table: Food and Society in the New World* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, DC: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990); Katharine E. Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004); Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1991); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁴ James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., vol.35, no.1 (Jan., 1978), 3-32; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 208, 237, 273; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

⁵ Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct. 1987), pp. 689-721; Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966), 151-174; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁶ Lewis, "The Republican Wife," 696-700.

⁷ Sandra L. Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, Food in American History series (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 9-10.

⁸ Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture*, 101-108, 129.

⁹ William Pencak, "A Semiotic White House – History Written in Stone," in *Semiotics 1993*, eds. Robert S. Corrington and John Deely (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 187.

¹⁰ Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13-29.

Chapter One: “As Many as His Table Would Hold”: The Making of a Republican Court¹

Senator William Maclay confided to his diary on June 11, 1789, “We were a new nation, it was true, but we were not a new people. We were composed of individuals of like manners, habits, and customs with the European nations. What, therefore, had been found useful among them came well recommended by experience to us.”² Many Americans viewed themselves through a European lens. Upon the American Republic’s inception in 1783, Americans sought various ways to establish themselves as a respectable nation on equal footing with countries on the European continent. On the other hand, these early Americans also sought to emphasize their distinctiveness from Europe in order to legitimize their own sense of destiny and progress. Moreover, in America, as in Europe, the dinner table reflected the social construction of class, and as a result, a major area of concern among elite Americans became the establishment of certain protocols for dining. Etiquette, in the United States as well as in Europe, defined societal standards and evolved in the face of new circumstances and new environments.

Contentions in Europe over the forms of culinary habits greatly influenced the choices of prominent early Americans at the table. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans saw tremendous changes occur in table manners and increasingly distinguished between the culinary habits of the upper and lower classes. In late-eighteenth-century England, for instance, families served dinner at two o’clock in the afternoon, a full three hours later than dinnertime for families in the seventeenth century, to accommodate the leisure activities of the upper classes. In France, “aristocratic gourmets...worked effectively to advance the national cuisine” and essentially became one of the first countries to export a national identity through food.³ In both cases, national cuisine developed out of the

aristocracy. Upper-class Americans followed their example and sought to create their own unique footprint in the culinary world.

The changes in Early Modern European cuisine also represented an important power play. As food historian Linda Civitello describes it, the best representation of this change came in France. At his Versailles palace, Louis XIV notoriously maintained strict control over his dinners. He frequently and gluttonously ate alone, and he refused to use a fork, even though it had gained wide acceptance throughout Europe by this time. In direct reaction to this decadence, French elites sought a direct break from the abundance and luxury that characterized the monarchy. Historian Piero Camporesi took this argument a step further by claiming the French Revolution, by “decapitating the summit of the culinary pyramid,” or the King, “laid the foundations for democratic and representative cuisine.” Drawing on Enlightenment ideals, the new generation of elites developed a distinct way of eating that shifted power from the monarch. The rise in French cuisine coincided with the decline of the monarchy in Europe, and given the American revolutionary experiment, subsequent generations of elites embraced this new brand of French cooking, which emphasized small, subtle dishes and the use of sauces to disguise the original form of the food.⁴

Indeed, archeologist Marijke van der Veen also argues that the increased availability of food for the masses led to the development of high cuisine from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards. In other words, abundance no longer represented a legitimate means of distinction for the elite when the lower classes could duplicate this behavior. Therefore, European elites developed a form of dining in which one could distinguish oneself by possessing “knowledge of how to put the food together” and not by the “quantity on the table.” To this end, the new emphasis in cuisine offered refinements in four specific areas: texture, added flavor, fat content, and stimulants. Van der Veen explicates how these subtle changes in

presentation made all the difference. “The categories of food that often feature cross-culturally as luxuries,” she explains, “are those that offer a refinement in texture, taste, fat content or other quality (such as stimulant or inebriant) and that offer distinction because of either their quantity (especially of meat and alcohol) or quality (the latter including expense, exotic origin, complexity, style, etiquette, etc.).”⁵

Continually, the Early Modern Europeans of the upper classes used the ingredients flowing in from the New World to show their refinement. The New World product, chocolate, often served as a drink in the homes of the upper classes, and other foods like tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, maize, squash, and vanilla came to Europe from the Americas. In England, like the rest of continental Europe, external influences brought about through increased trade networks “broadened the range of food supplies, changed attitudes to certain food-stuffs, and started fashions among the well-to-do that would ultimately affect everyone else.”⁶ This cultural exchange reminded the Americans of their uniqueness both in their environment and in foodstuffs.

Most historical studies of foodways and etiquette in colonial and early America focus on the development of regional differences in relation to each region’s ability to reproduce the foodways of its European predecessors. Varying environmental factors and reliance on trade with the English allowed northern, middle, and southern colonies to develop distinctly different culinary tastes. Consequently, the more self-sufficient northern colonies more closely replicated traditional English eating habits, while southern colonies, with their strong reliance on slave labor and monoculture, felt more strained in their similar desire to reproduce the Old World in the New. The middle colonies fell somewhere in between the two.⁷ Regional food differences especially persisted after colonists gained independence from England; free Americans held varying opinions about propriety in their culinary practices.

From the birth of the nation to the mid-nineteenth century, many prominent early Americans struggled to marry this aristocratic European model with the Roman model of republican dignity and simplicity. Historian Katharine E. Harbury noted that unlike European society, “where people aspired to aristocratic bearing, the [Virginian] colonial citizenry saw their ascension as part of their ‘emerging egalitarian society.’” In colonial Virginia, hospitality could “transcend class distinctions” in a society where distinguishing oneself as genteel meant everything. Early Americans aimed “to transform themselves along with their environments.” Wealthy Virginians, like George Washington, served an array of meat dishes and offered their guests wine, liquor, and “strong water,” whereas less affluent families served punch, beer, or cider. “Strong water” meant a distilled drink with high alcohol content. The last few years of his life, Washington even successfully produced his own whiskey, made from the corn and rye grown at Mount Vernon. To all accounts, he certainly furnished “the best wines, especially Madeira and claret,” and furnished a “handsome plate” to his guests, which allowed him to maintain the dignity of his office as president without straying too far from his sense of Virginia hospitality.⁸

Virginians sought new ways to express their brand of hospitality. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Virginia gentry began a marked departure from the less egalitarian manners of the English gentry. Although the American colonists acquired increasing numbers of imported goods from England before the revolution, they gradually sought more American-made products. This slow change meant domestic materials took on increased importance in defining status among Virginians. In other words, “the old way of life filled with brass kettles, frying pans, skillets, pot hooks and racks, spits, powdering tubs, worn pewter, and other hardware was no longer suitable.” Historian Giovanni Rebora stated that the transition from make-shift tables to a permanent “set and laid table encouraged the proliferation

of crockery and dinnerware made of gold and silver for the very rich, of pewter and fine pottery for the prosperous bourgeoisie, of wood and shoddy ceramics for those with less purchasing power.” Popular before the Revolution, imported pewter came from Holland and England, until Americans began creating their own. In Virginia, elite planters preferred silver in the form of cups, bowls, spoons, knives, and chafing dishes. However, as historian Kathleen Brown suggests, “monogrammed silver, fine china, and expensive silks that would have been beyond the means of many wealthy planters in the seventeenth century were by the eighteenth century, part of a highly ritualized and rich material culture that distinguished the wealthiest planters from their less prosperous neighbors.”⁹

Other areas of the new republic faced similar changes. Rich merchants in northern urban centers could afford high-end goods at abundant metropolitan markets. John Adams, a native of Massachusetts, believed New England had “the advantage [over] every other colony in America.” Rich ports like New York City and Boston saw goods from all over the Atlantic World, and “prosperous city dwellers” afforded a more varied diet than less affluent city workers or rural farmers.¹⁰ Depending on whether one lived in an urban or rural setting, in New England, the Middle colonies, or the Southern colonies, or some combination of the above, one’s culinary experience could vary considerably.

Members of the new Federal Congress in 1789 hailed from all over the young republic, bringing with them particular “provincial loyalties” and a multitude of opinions on appropriate social protocols. Of the first seven American presidents, four hailed from the south, two came from the north, and one from the newly formed western territories.¹¹ These men and their wives entertained a wide array of Congressmen from all over the republic and diplomats from around the world. Contested views of what constituted suitable social behavior for members of the new government proliferated in private correspondences and public newspapers.

Particularly from Virginia, a prominent state in the region with the weakest connection to English culinary traditions, came the primary contributors to the establishment of many precedents and formal protocols in early presidential dining.

As the first president, Washington carried the burden of precedence. Washington only had the traditions of Europe as his model, and he wanted to ensure that the United States gained a positive reputation on the world stage. Perhaps even more importantly, he wanted to instill confidence in the federal government in its citizenry. Though at heart Washington strongly supported republican ideology, he also understood the importance of his position. As the “first Magistrate,” Washington sought to embody unifying republican principles while establishing a strong federal government that would command respect from other world powers.¹²

Importantly, Washington also personified “the epitome of the Roman citizen” in a manner befitting the head of a republican government through the ideals of “*simplicitas* and *dignitas*.” The “austere simplicity of the Roman Republic,” conveyed to the Revolutionary generation through a love of Classical literature, permeated the thoughts of men like Washington. Comparisons of Washington to Roman heroes, like “Cincinnatus, Fabius, and Cato,” occurred regularly after the American Revolution. Exiled French writer and historian François-René de Chateaubriand claimed he met Washington, gave him his letter of introduction in 1791, and noted how Washington carried himself with “the simplicity of an old Roman.” Historian Gordon Wood wrote of the importance of the “‘Cincinnatus myth of Roman legend,’ which celebrated the disinterested patriot who devoted his life to his country.” Leadership in colonial America strongly emphasized the need for “public virtue” and “disinterestedness,” which meant that to be a virtuous president, Washington needed to sacrifice his private desires for the public well-being. Well aware of its importance,

Washington sought a happy medium between the ideal of Roman simplicity and the reality of European aristocratic traditions during his administration.¹³

Long before his years as the elected leader of the early American republic, George Washington transcribed 110 rules of etiquette that the President of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Colin G. Campbell, believes date back to “a set of similar conventions composed by French Jesuits in 1595.” George Washington’s *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, written when the future first president was no older than sixteen, conveyed how “the manners and standards of conduct in the 18th century were meant to focus on the small sacrifices gentlemen and ladies ought to make for the good of all.”¹⁴ These small sacrifices essentially maintained the social hierarchy that continued well into the late-eighteenth century.

Washington’s carefully recorded rules of etiquette reflected the importance of status and deferential protocols in society. For instance, one rule stated that “in speaking to men of Quality do not lean nor Look them full in the Face, nor approach too near them at lest[sic] Keep a full Pace from them.” Men of “quality” in the North American context meant the wealthy leaders of the community, not necessarily an aristocracy. Similarly, another rule declared it improper to speak out of turn when “in company of [those] of Higher Quality than yourself.” Perhaps most importantly, one of Washington’s rules of etiquette stated, “Let thy ceremonies in Courtesie be proper to the Dignity of his place with whom thou conversest for it is absurd to act the same with a Clown and a Prince.” At the table, Washington believed one should “drink not too leisurely nor yet too hastily,” and guests always followed the lead of the host. Although first “to unfold his Napkin and fall to Meat,” or begin eating, the highest-ranking individual at dinner also felt an obligation to his inferiors to begin his meal in a timely manner, because everyone else had to wait until he commenced eating before he or she could

begin. By doing so, he ensured that all had sufficient time to finish their food. The influence of these rules of conduct on Washington remained into adulthood and especially manifested itself during his years as president.¹⁵

For the first sixteen months of Washington's presidency, he resided in New York and then in Philadelphia before members of Congress agreed upon a more permanent seat for the nation's capital. For the first Presidential residence, Congress commissioned the use of a house built by Walter Franklin located at No. 3 Cherry Street, and owned by Samuel Osgood, at a rent of \$845 per year. The Executive Mansion in New York City stood at the corner of Franklin and Cherry Streets, "facing Franklin (then called St. George's) Square." The three-story building housed "a large dining-room where the formal dinners and the levees" occurred, and a "smaller dining-room at the rear, customarily used for breakfast and supper and by the children." Just prior to Washington's arrival, Congress ordered several alterations to the house, "the main one being the removal of a partition to make a larger drawing-room." According to Maclay's account of proceedings in the Senate, Samuel Osgood spent eight thousand dollars in the process. Unfortunately, despite alterations, the house still proved inadequate for Washington's need to accommodate a high influx of visitors and the growing number of people living there. Therefore, on February 23, 1790, after only ten months, he relocated to the larger, more fashionable, and more expensive Macomb House.¹⁶

While staying in New York City, the first president and his wife only dined outside of their personal lodgings one time, and after consulting with numerous friends and confidants, Washington created a schedule for receiving guests that allowed him time to attend to matters of state without constant interruption.¹⁷ Washington wondered if people would accept that as president, he would not "give *general entertainments* in the manner [of] the Presidents of Congress," and if he could manage "to draw such a line of discrimination in regard to persons,

as that Six, eight or ten official characters (including in the rotation the members of both Houses of Congress) may be invited informally or otherwise to dine...on the days fixed for receiving Company, without exciting clamours in the rest of the community?" By "*general entertainments*," Washington meant that unlike the various presidents of the two Continental Congresses, he would not join crowds of people at public taverns to celebrate and entertain. Rather, he desired to host small, private gatherings, by invitation only, in his home.¹⁸

Writing to James Madison in mid-May 1789, Washington expressed a desire to "avoid superciliousness" through "too much reserve and too great a withdraw [sic] of himself from company," but he also expressed the fear of a "reduction in respectability by too free an intercourse, and too much familiarity."¹⁹ Washington needed to find a way to satisfy his duty to the public with his reserved manner. He fully intended to conform "to the public desire and expectation with respect to the style proper for the Chief Magistrate to live in."²⁰ Nonetheless, Washington was a man approaching his sixties, and he needed formal routine to ease his workload.

After careful consideration, he assigned Tuesdays for his formal levees. Levees represented a "weekly open house" in which "the president and vice president, along with their wives, greeted elected officials, foreign dignitaries, and distinguished guests in a format that attempted to strike the proper middle note between courtly formality and republican simplicity." Thursdays he set aside for dinner with members of Congress, and, finally, less formal tea parties held by Martha Washington took place on Friday evenings. Women appeared at the First Lady's receptions, and rarely at Washington's dinners.²¹

In New York, the temporary capital of the new nation, Martha Washington hosted the weekly presidential dinner parties every Thursday at four o'clock, and less formal gatherings on Friday evenings at seven o'clock. Well-known for the hospitality of her table, Martha

Washington promoted national pride when she encouraged women to abandon foreign dishes and to use the “forgotten recipes of colonial housewives.” However, the demands of presidential entertaining strained her considerably. She complained to her sister-in-law Fanny Custis, “I have not had one half hour to myself since the day of my arrival” in New York. Had she been a younger woman, she claimed, the “the innocent gaieties” of New York social life might have appealed to her, but she simply longed “to grow old in solitude” with her husband.²²

Then, during the summer of 1789, only a few months after taking the oath of office and establishing his dinner protocols, Washington became ill from a “large carbuncle” on his left thigh and the public entertainments ceased.²³ A father and son team of doctors, the Bards, operated on his leg; many feared the worst, to the extent that Washington’s personal secretary Tobias Lear “bought fifteen pounds of rope, directing the servants to tie off Cherry Street to keep traffic from passing and to spread the sidewalks with straw to muffle the footsteps of passersby.”²⁴

Vice President John Adams, and his wife Abigail, also faced health issues during Washington’s first term. Abigail Adams suffered from rheumatoid arthritis that made her social obligations extremely difficult. In New York, they took up residence at Richmond Hill, a thirty-acre estate on the Hudson River, where they entertained frequently. In July 1789, Abigail Adams proclaimed to her sister Mary Smith Cranch, “Our house has been a Levee ever since I arrived.” The constant string of levees aggravated Adams’s ailments and caused her to cut back on the entertainments. Similar to her diplomatic duties in Europe, Adams called on “the wives of fifteen to twenty government officials or foreign ministers each week.” In 1791, she grew “weakened & debilitated” from rheumatic symptoms and had to “decline about half

the invitations” she received. She remained at their home in Quincy, Massachusetts, for the remainder of John Adams’s term as vice president.²⁵

Following Washington’s unexpected recovery and a subsequent four-month tour of New England, on February 23, 1790, the first family relocated to 3941 Broadway, where “the rear windows [of the Macomb Mansion House] commanded an extended view of the Hudson River and the Jersey shore.” This new structure, built and owned by Alexander Macomb, a moderate Federalist, was “in every way ... immensely superior to the old residence.” Known as the Mansion House, the interior boasted a “large entry hall” with a “single continuous stairway [that] led to three upper floors,” as well as “elegant and lofty-ceilinged rooms for dining and receiving visitors.” Only a week after taking up residence here, Washington wrote Gouverneur Morris, in France, informing him that he needed to add “two pieces to the number of plateau,” an elaborate mirrored centerpiece, to decorate his dinner table, because he had “removed to a larger house (the one lately occupied by the Count de Moustier), enlarged my table, and of course my Guests.” Everything about his new residence needed to reflect his status. While his previous residence, the Franklin House, sat unfashionably close “to the East docks and the shanties of German and Irish immigrants,” the Macomb Mansion resided on the west side of the island where “the majority of government officials [now] lived.”²⁶ Washington resided here from February 23rd until August 1790.

The Compromise of 1790, famously called the “dinner-table bargain” between Federalists and Republicans over the controversial Funding and Assumption Bills, started as the happenstance meeting of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson in front of the President’s House. On July 12, 1790, Washington recorded in his diary that at “about noon [he] had two bills presented to [him] by the joint Committee of Congress – The one ‘An Act for Establishing the Temporary & permanent Seat of the Government of the United States.’”

Passed on July 16, and signed by Washington on August 4, the Residency Bill fixed the temporary capital in Philadelphia, and the permanent seat of government along the Potomac. Then, after the Washingtons spent only six months in the Macomb Mansion, the nation's temporary capital changed from New York to Philadelphia, and the Washingtons relocated again.²⁷

Both of the cities that housed the temporary seats of government contained “a well-formed . . . aristocracy [that] had dominated social intercourse” since colonial times, and Federalists rarely found it necessary to challenge this old social order or their dining habits. In fact, “many members of Congress married into the prominent local families,” and this custom strategically created “a union of local and official society.” Rich merchants in New York and Philadelphia entertained lavishly, and foreign travelers like the Duke of Rochefoucauld-Liancourt remarked on “the profusion of luxury of Philadelphia...at the tables of the wealthy” and felt “the splendor of rooms...did not suffer in comparison with Europe.” Yet Martha Washington still entertained “according to Virginia usage,” and her receptions maintained a “dignified and simple” approach; even so, the Washingtons entertained with a keenness the wealthy merchant class could not surpass.²⁸

Given her conspicuous role as the First Lady of the new nation, a role with no set precedents to follow besides that of the previous, and unpopular, royal governors' wives, Martha Washington committed herself to her domestic duties with characteristic zeal. “Although [George] Washington was sometimes criticized for stiff ceremoniousness,” Martha Washington never failed to gain praise for her “easy friendliness”; in such a way, “she softened and humanized her overpowering husband.” Martha Washington, and her successor, Abigail Adams, both struggled with the demands of being the wife of a president and “both strove to

create personae that contrasted with a queenly one, using a dignified, formal style that could command respect without a crown or a throne.”²⁹

As President and First Lady, the Washingtons followed a framework for dinner similar to their practice at Mount Vernon. Dinner, almost like a play to entertain their guests, followed in three acts or courses. The first and second courses frequently contained roughly twelve different dishes brought out simultaneously. The first course generally included soup and seafood and provided a light opening to the meal. After this course, servants replaced the first tablecloth with a fresh one, and the second course arrived, during which the main course of wild game and various side dishes graced the table. According to food historian Margaret Visser, the second course was the climax of the meal. Before the third course, consisting of assorted fruits and nuts, servants removed the tablecloth entirely. This final dessert course served as a means of cleansing the palate. The term dessert derives from the French word *desservie*, or “de-served,” and reflected the fact that it came last. Washington frequently enjoyed fish and Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine at his table, including Philadelphia pepper pot, a stew of beef tripe and vegetables, which he developed a taste for during his military campaigns of the Revolutionary war.³⁰

The First Lady took great pride in her kitchen. The dinnerware Martha Washington brought to Mount Vernon after her marriage included “two cases of knives and forks, a tea chest, at least sixty glasses, and uncountable numbers of dishes – two sets of china, a tea set, a crate of earthenware, and much more.” Her cookbook, possibly passed down from her mother-in-law Mrs. John Custis, contained numerous recipes for soups, meats, desserts, and beverages. Like most cookbooks written before the nineteenth century, Martha Washington’s cookbook included recipes that reflected the eighteenth-century taste for “highly seasoned and spiced foods” with a “distinctly English flavor.” In keeping with culinary traditions, well-established

colonial women, like Martha Washington, consulted popular culinary treatises from European authors, such as Hannah Glasse and Eliza Smith, in order to meet social prescriptions for proper food preparation.³¹

The dominant courtly cookbooks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, written by men in England and in France, gave way to a new English genre of “farmhouse” cookbooks roughly after 1730. English “farmhouse” cookbooks of the eighteenth century originated from women authors, and instead of writing for a courtly audience, these authors addressed their advice to the female “domestic cooks of the gentry and middle class.” In late-eighteenth-century England, women wrote the cookbooks and “offered conservative country fare along with practical instructions for preserving foods” and lessons in etiquette. This transition in culinary writing came out of necessity. The growing numbers of middling classes lacked the resources to “eat lavishly” like members of courtly society, so they needed to “economize” in order to provide a bountiful meal under a budget. English author Eliza Smith published her cookbook, *The Compleat Housewife*, in 1727, which contained years of practical information amassed by Smith over her many years as a housekeeper. Its popularity led to a 1742 printing of the book in Williamsburg, Virginia, at a time when Americans published few books themselves. Historian Stephen Mennell notes that by the mid-eighteenth century, other English “writers like Hannah Glasse can be seen producing a style of cookery which blends elements of the French courtly style with the ‘country’ cookery of the English gentry.”³²

Upon the 1747 publication of *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy*, Hannah Glasse quickly became the standard for cookery in England. Her cookbook also received readership in British North America, but colonists primarily had to import copies from London to obtain one. Glasse wrote for the benefit of average middle-class households in England. She despised the vogue of adopting the French style of cookery, which she criticized as wasteful and spendthrift.

Glasse also wrote her cookbooks in the vernacular, so average women could understand the recipes. She claimed the male chefs who wrote “courtly” cookbooks used convoluted language that laywomen did not understand. In her section “To the Reader,” Glasse apologizes for not writing in the “high, polite stile [sic],” but justifies her decision by explaining that her intended audience is the “lower Sort,” and must “treat them in their own way.” She believed, “in Cookery, the great Cooks have such a high Way of expressing themselves, that the poor Girls are at a Loss to know what they mean.”³³ Glasse’s guide to cookery met the public’s need for skilled cooks by disseminating culinary information to a wider audience.

American colonists relied on printed works from the other side of the Atlantic until the close of the eighteenth century. While publications of cookbooks generally grew in number, “the needs of the eighteenth-century [American] housewife could not be completely met by any one of the British works.” Historian Karen Hess writes, “the only peculiarly New World produce called for in [cookbooks] were those that had long been adopted in England: turkey, ‘French’ beans, and sweet potatoes ... [and] white potatoes.” In other words, “the housewife whose receipt for syllabub was not completely to her taste could find help only in imported books.” (Syllabub is “a frothy white mixture of whipped cream and white wines” that many colonists used as a topping on drinks.) The lack of American ingredients in European-written cookbooks may be due, in part, to the slow rate of adoption of American foods in Europe during the early modern period. Items like “Jerusalem artichokes, pineapple, chocolate, tomatoes, cayenne pepper, and vanilla” gained intermittent acceptance into a few European cookbooks by the mid-eighteenth century, but in general, European cookbooks failed to meet all the needs of colonial chefs. Americans needed cookbooks that were representative of both their cultural distinctiveness and the unique goods contained in their physical reality.³⁴

During Washington's second term, Amelia Simmons published *American Cookery*, in Connecticut in 1796. Considered the first truly American cookbook, it became "in its minor sphere, another declaration of American independence." As Mary Tolford Wilson, wife of deceased Dartmouth history professor Arthur M. Wilson, observed, "the originality of Amelia Simmons's work lies in its recognition that an American could not find in a British cookbook recipes for making dishes that she as an American had known and eaten all her life." Wilson also insisted that colonial cookery underwent many changes since Amelia Simmons's ancestors had first established homes in the New World, and "British authors seemed unaware of the resulting American needs in cooking instruction." Simmons' cookbook also reflected a growing "national consciousness" and "patriotism" in the symbolic nature of food.³⁵ Simmons, like the Washingtons, felt the need to emphasize American culture's distinctiveness from that of Europe.

Washington's style of entertaining at his levees, according to historian Barry Landau, represented a "republican adaptation of [the style of] European courtiers presenting themselves to their aristocratic superiors." In Philadelphia, his "large double house" Executive Mansion "stood on Market Street near Sixth, in a fine old garden with trees." Here, his presidential entertainments competed with Anna Willing Bingham, wife of Federalist Senator William Bingham, and her illustrious formal balls in which everyone wore the "latest European fashion[s]." One contemporary account of a presidential levee described Washington's formal dress attire as "black velvet; his hair in full dress, powdered and gathered behind in a large silk band; yellow gloves on his hands.... He wore knee and shoe buckles; and a long sword, with a finely wrought and polished steel hilt." The President's guests, mostly men from the upper levels of society, came to these levees at the Philadelphia Executive Mansion in their best finery.³⁶

Once at the Executive Mansion, guests formed a circle around the room, and “at a quarter past three, the door was closed, and the circle was formed for the day.” Washington “then began on the right, and spoke to each visitor, calling him by name, and exchanging a few words with him.” After he finished “his circuit, he resumed his first position, (most likely in front of the fire-place facing the door) and the visitors approached him in succession, bowed and retired. By four o’clock this ceremony was over.” In such ceremonies, the awed spectator-guests quickly viewed the President as a detached spectacle. Washington could not spend more than a few moments with each guest, so he had little chance to develop conversations or talk at length with them on current issues or events. Senator Maclay complained of one such encounter where the President engaged him in a brief “*tête-à-tête*” about the weather.³⁷

Despite the strength of Washington’s convictions, he struggled to reconcile the republican “cult of simplicity” with the need to portray his advanced status at his public dinners. In Washington’s first term alone, his expenses “exceeded \$100,000” to keep the president’s house functional. Alcohol in particular served as a marker of status and conviviality. He purchased large quantities of alcohol, “expending 7 percent of his salary on spirits, chiefly wine.” In September 1790, Thomas Jefferson secured a hefty order of French wines on Washington’s behalf: “40 dozen of Champagne, 30 doz. of Sauterne, 20 dozen of Bordeaux de Segur, and 10 doz. of Frontignan.” Food remained an equal to wine in perpetuating the expectations placed on high-ranking officials. The Washingtons hired a chef at “\$15 per month,” and as “the official host and hostess of the nation,” George and Martha Washington availed themselves of fourteen white servants and seven slaves from Mount Vernon to staff their “frequent, large, and elaborate” dinners. The necessity of these seemingly elaborate expenditures remains difficult to determine. The Washingtons certainly felt overwhelmed by throngs of guests, and as Washington told David Stuart, “for by the time I had

done breakfast, and thence till dinner, and afterwards till bed time I could not get relieved from the ceremony of one visit before I had to attend to another.” The president took to heart his role as figurehead to an emerging nation. The utmost care with every detail mattered.³⁸

The president’s lifestyle occasionally left him subject to public scrutiny. Senator Maclay stood out as unabashedly critical of the social forms of the new government. This staunchly republican senator from Pennsylvania first mentioned in his diary on May 4, 1789, the implementation of Washington’s levees, worrying about their public reception. A month later, on June 5, he gave his full opinion dismissing them as “empty ceremony” and criticizing them as the beginnings of “court etiquette, and all the frivolities, fopperies, and expense practiced in European governments.” Indeed, he claimed, “levees may be extremely useful in old countries where men of great fortune are collected, as it may keep the idle from being much worse employed.” He complained that the weekly levees seemed too reminiscent of English royalty and therefore “certainly anti-republican.” Though perhaps extreme in his rather dramatic assessment of Washington’s levees, Maclay nonetheless portrayed a very real fear among many that the new republican government would deteriorate into a constitutional monarchy.³⁹

Senator Maclay offered a critical perspective of his experience in dining with Washington. The use of servants at the table certainly replicated the courtly procedures of Europe. Maclay’s biting criticism represented the level of scrutiny public officials, even the revered General Washington, faced during the early years of the republic. Congressmen like Maclay understood Washington’s power to create lasting precedents, and with the stability of the republic constantly in question, the impact of presidential levees drew considerable scrutiny from even his most steadfast supporters. Washington never learned of Senator Maclay’s

appraisal, but he did uncover the sentiments of his citizenry through correspondence with trusted individuals.⁴⁰

When Washington received one such letter from Dr. David Stuart about the general opinion of the public on his administration, he learned that some Virginians felt his receptions leaned too much towards monarchy. Although the primary focus of the criticism mentioned in the letter fell on the actions of John Adams, a deeply offended Washington responded that the Vice President conducted himself in a manner that preserved “a just medium between too much state and too great familiarity.” He reiterated sentiments previously expressed to James Madison in May 1789. Naturally, in Washington’s opinion, his Presidential levees should not fall into a laxity of form or else this important position might fall into disrepute among other world leaders.⁴¹

Historian Kathleen M. Brown maintains that “because the transaction of hospitality required that a guest leave his host feeling flattered as well as well provisioned, a planter had to highlight the unique and honorific nature of the food and drink.” European travelers in America frequently commented on the quality of the wine and the fare. During this time, serving wine during and after meals also became an important social marker at American dinner tables. “Over the course of the eighteenth century,” historian David Hancock wrote, “wine became a drink of ‘the opulent,’ signifying the possession of wealth and property,” and “northerners and southerners used drinks to make class distinctions.” To emphasize their prominence, “dinner customarily concluded with toasts [drunk] around the table” to the most important people in attendance or in absentia. Washington frequently served “wine, cider, and beer” at dinner, and “toasts were drunk in Madeira at the end.”⁴²

Out of his preference for a more private than public atmosphere, Washington only “invited as many as his table would hold”; he exerted great care to “take members of Congress

in order” and accepted “only the chief officials of the government and distinguished foreigners.” He desired a more personal and private setting, as opposed to the public spectacle of dinners held by the wealthy merchant class or the previous presidents of the Continental Congress. Presidential guests then took their places around the dinner table in accordance with rank. In most cases, the guests did not “necessarily know or like one another, agree on general principles, or have any idea of pleasant table conversation.” Invitations came by established hierarchical notions of precedence, rather than political commonalities or personal preference. Furthermore, according to Washington’s *Rules of Civility*, guests should “not set [themselves] at the upper [portion] of the Table but if it Be [their] Due or that the Master of the house will have it So,” and they should “Contend not [over seating], least [they] Should Trouble the Company.” In Washington’s world, everyone knew their assigned place in society and dared not step out of socially accepted norms. Without protocols to create social stability, Washington feared the Union would collapse.⁴³

Faced with similar difficulties, Washington’s successors also felt the pressure of their high office and promoted their political ideals through their dinner parties at the Executive Mansion. In contrast to Washington, John Adams held much less elaborate ceremonies, but he started his presidency by spending lavishly on a few items. As president, he “earned \$25,000 a year, on top of which came an allowance of \$14,000 to furnish the president’s mansion.” Just for his inauguration, he spend \$1,500 on a new carriage; he also “wore a new suit,” with “a sword and carried a cockaded hat,” so as not to upset his “newly dressed and powdered wig.” Yet John and Abigail Adams received no additional allowance from Congress to supplement their entertaining budget, so the Adamses served meals with fewer, more basic dishes, like Indian pudding, mutton, veal, peas, fried oysters, cabbage pudding, and gooseberry fool. Another source claims “dinner,” for Abigail Adams, “was an elaborate meal with wine and

dessert” to which “she often had thirty or forty guests.” On average, she held “dinner at three, usually with a gathering of eight to ten guests,” and weekly hosted “a much larger state banquet and twice a week hosting the more public levees.” Regardless of the demands of his table, John Adams “despised formality and ceremony.” The second president claimed he “hate[d] levees and drawing rooms” and “to speak to 1000 people to whom [he had] nothing to say.”⁴⁴

Though Abigail Adams felt equally annoyed with the need to attend public gatherings, she had another, more pressing problem. In Philadelphia, she struggled to maintain a decent cook in her kitchen, because she believed the poisonous influence of European women in the city left many American women corrupted by French ideas of democracy. She complained to her sister, saying, “These Philadelphians are a strange set of people, making pretensions to give Laws of politeness and propriety to the union.” Interestingly, historian Paul C. Nagel claims that this French “contagion” Abigail Adams complained of in Philadelphia only affected the white women; he notes that Adams hired black women as her servants after she discovered that they did not possess the same pride and sloth of the white women previously under her employ. Adams’s fears of the French influence in America largely stemmed from the radicalism of the French Revolution, during what historians refer to as the Reign of Terror, in which democracy seemed to run amok and tear apart the very fabric of society. Adams feared that Jefferson’s 1800 victory over her husband signaled the end of the republic and the start of French-style mob rule in America.⁴⁵

Both George Washington and John Adams struggled with the uncertainty of public opinion and the high social demands of their office. With the help of his First Lady, Washington knowingly established rules and protocols for etiquette in his “Republican Court,” that harkened back to his *Rules of Civility*. Likewise, John Adams relied on his wife to create the desired atmosphere of sophistication and elegance without reaching the heights of excess.

Although few could complain about the hospitality of the Federalist presidents, many worried that their strict formality and rigid hierarchies at table leaned too closely towards the manners of the European aristocracy. In these formative years, the outcome of the American republican experiment remained uncertain, and every action of the president took on increased significance, as did every item of food or drink they served at their table. Washington fully understood the weight of his decisions and implemented a policy of presidential dining that he believed wedded the republican simplicity he preferred with the dignity his position required. Adams, painfully aware of his limited popularity compared to the first president, followed Washington's social protocols and made only nominal adjustments to accommodate his limited budget.

One could argue that when the permanent seat of the Capital came to the Potomac, "country" mentality defeated "court." Location alone removed it from comparison to traditional urban centers where "court" mentality thrived. If republican politics best reflected the "country" mentality of early America, the center of Washington's agrarian republic should not be a traditional urban center, but one in the wilderness. Emblematic of the experience of many early American settlers, the abandonment of European-style entertaining, symbolized by the urban centers of New York and Philadelphia, for a relatively unsettled environment on the Potomac, carried great weight.

From 1789 to 1800, the Federalist presidents created a formal dining apparatus and put it into practice. Both the Washingtons and the Adamses sought to bolster the dignity of the office of president by establishing protocols that to some translated into the ideal matching of republican simplicity with advanced status. Nonetheless, to others, the Federalist presidents' dinners too closely resembled the hierarchical tendencies of Europe and not the egalitarian principles they believed created a more democratic nation. Thomas Jefferson feared for the

republican experiment in the hands of the Federalists, and with his victory in the “Revolution of 1800,” Jefferson set in motion a new plan for presidential dining in Washington society.

¹ One of the earliest references to the term “Republican Court” dates back to 1854 with Rufus Wilmot Griswold’s book entitled *Republican Court*. Also, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 415-17.

² William Maclay, June 11, 1789, Charles A. Beard, ed., *The Journal of William Maclay United States Senator from Pennsylvania 1789 to 1791* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), 70.

³ Flandrin, Jean-Louis and Massimo Montanari. Eds. *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 368-69; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 72-108; Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, 368-70. Daniel Pool mentions other times for dinner, but he is writing later in the 19th century; see Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist-The Facts of Daily Life in 19th-Century England* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 68; on dinners pp.72-77; Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, 367. Italy, and then Spain, dominated European cuisine in the sixteenth century, but these countries became overshadowed by French culinary dominance by the mid-seventeenth century. See Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, 366.

⁴ Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People*. 2nd ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 98; Piero Camporesi, *Exotic Brew: The Art of Living in the Enlightenment*. Trans. Christopher Woodall (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 99; Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture*, 167-174.

⁵ Marijke van der Veen, “When is Food a Luxury?,” *World Archeology*, vol. 34, no. 3, (Feb., 2003) 413, 420.

⁶ Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture*, 101-108; Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions 1500-1760* (London: Hambledon Continuum Books, 2007), 27.

⁷ The following are important secondary works on early American foodways: James E. McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Sandra L. Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, Food in American History series (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005); Jane Carson, *Colonial Virginia Cookery: Procedures, Equipment, and Ingredients in Colonial Cooking* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985); Trudy Eden, *The Early American Table: Food and Society in the New World* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1991); Damon Lee Fowler, Ed., *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Paul Freedman, Ed. *Food: A History of Taste* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); Adelaide Hechtlinger, *The Seasonal Hearth: The Woman at Home in Early America* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1977); Katharine E. Harbury, *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004); Karen Hess, *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Gertrude Thomas, *Foods of our Forefathers* (Philadelphia: P.A. Davis Company, 1941); James E. McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 55-200; Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, *passim*.

⁸ Harbury, *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 33; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 33; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 268; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xii; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 273; Dennis J. Pogue, *Founding Spirits: George Washington and the Beginning of the American Whiskey Industry* (Buena Vista, VA: Harbour Books, 2011), 111; John Spencer Bassett, *The Federalist System* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 154.

⁹ Harbury claims the changes occurred between 1670 and 1730. Harbury, *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynasty*, 32; Richard L. Bushman also notes cultural and material changes throughout American society, not just in Virginia, occurring after 1690, and escalating after 1720. He breaks up American’s refinement into two major sections: Gentility (1700-1790) and Respectability (1790-1850). Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xi; Harbury, *Colonial Virginia’s Cooking Dynasty*, 32; Giovanni Rebora, *Culture of the Fork: A Brief History of Food in Europe*. Trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York:

Columbia University Press, 2001), 142; Thomas, *Foods of Our Forefathers*, 37; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 272.

¹⁰ John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 29, 1775; quoted in Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republic Returns, The Suppressed History of our Nation's Beginnings and the Heroic Newspaper that Tried to Report It* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 262; Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 86.

¹¹ Paul F. Boller, Jr. *Presidential Inaugurations* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2001), 2; Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe came from Virginia, and Jackson came from Tennessee; the two Adams came from Massachusetts.

¹² Landau, *The President's Table*, 3; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press), 44-45.

¹³ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 49, 50, 48; Thomas K. Murphy, *A Land Without Castles: The Changing Image of America in Europe, 1780-1830* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), 89; François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amérique* (Paris: E. Plon, 1878), 368. Murphy mentions in his endnotes for chapter 4 that Chateaubriand may have exaggerated his account, or may never have even come to America in the first place. Likewise, he finds merit in Chateaubriand's comments as "valuable gestures:" Murphy, *A Land Without Castles*, 98; Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2007*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2008), 70; Gordon S. Wood, "The Greatness of George Washington," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 68, (Spring 1992): 196-97; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 104.

¹⁴ Colin G. Campbell, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, letter dated May 16, 2011. See George Washington, *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation: A Book of Etiquette* (Williamsburg, VA: Beaver Press, 1971).

¹⁵ The claim that Washington's childhood *Rules of Civility* influenced his presidential dining habits derives from the form of his dinners, Washington's particular use of ceremony, and his correspondence at the beginning of his presidency. He wrote letters to several trusted colleagues and asked their opinion on how best to conduct his presidential entertainments. He ultimately chose the seemingly more aristocratic option, which fit closest with Alexander Hamilton's response. The hierarchical nature of the *Rules* also lends itself to a correlation between the habits Washington employed as president. For more on Washington's letters on the conduct of the president, see George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington, Volume 30, June 20, 1788-January 21, 1790*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 360-62; and Seale, *The President's House*, 5-7; For more on status and deference, see Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); George Washington, *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011), 8, 17, 9, 58, 59. From www.history.org/Almanack/life/manners/rules2.ctm, reprinted from George Washington, *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation: A Book of Etiquette* (Williamsburg, VA: Beaver Press, 1971).

¹⁶ Stephen Decatur, Jr., "Presidential Residence" in *Private Affairs of George Washington: from the Records and Accounts of Tobias Lear, Esquire, his Secretary* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 117-18; United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, "Presidential Mansions," Section in "Homes of George Washington," Chapter in *History of the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration*, vol. I, 218-19. (Washington, DC: United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, 1932). <http://mllloyd.org/gen/macomb/text/mansion.htm>; Decatur, "Presidential Residence," 117-18; William Maclay, September 26, 1789, Charles A. Beard, ed., *The Journal of William Maclay United States Senator from Pennsylvania 1789 to 1791* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), 162; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 177-78. Brady claims that there were five men living in bedrooms on the third floor, as well as all the "live-in servants and slaves" also in shared rooms on the third floor. According to Brady, Martha Washington worried about the spread of disease in such close quarters.; United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, "Presidential Mansions," vol. I, 218-19.

¹⁷ The strain of social life in New York led Washington to ask for advice from John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. See Seale, *The President's House*, 5-7; Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, vol. VI (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 199-203; George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington, Volume 30, June 20, 1788-January 21, 1790*, John C. Fitzpatrick,

ed. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 319-21; Barry H. Landau, *The President's Table: 200 Years of Dining and Diplomacy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 3.

¹⁸ George Washington, 10 May 1789, "Queries on a Line of Conduct to be Pursued by the President," *The Writings of George Washington, Volume 30, June 20, 1788-January 21, 1790*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 319; The presidents of the Continental Congress included Peyton Randolph, Henry Middleton, John Hancock, Henry Laurens, Samuel Huntingdon, Thomas McKean, John Hanson, Elias Boudinot, Thomas Mifflin, Nathaniel Gorham, Arthur St. Clair, and Cyrus Griffin; for more on entertainments held by the presidents of the Continental Congresses, see Benjamin H. Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ Washington to James Madison, May 12, 1789, *The Writings of George Washington, Volume 30, June 20, 1788-January 21, 1790*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 323.

²⁰ Washington to James Madison, Mount Vernon, March 30, 1789, *The Writings of Washington, 1745-1799*, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), vol. 30, 255. See also William Seale, *The President's House* (Washington D.C.: White House Historical Association with the cooperation of the National Geographic Society, 1986), vol. 1, 5.

²¹ Joseph J. Ellis, *First Family: Abigail and John* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 144; Barry Landau, *The President's Table: Two-hundred Years of Dining and Diplomacy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 3.

²² Kimball, *The Martha Washington Cookbook*, 27-28; Thomas, *Foods of our Forefathers*, 225. The quotation is a direct quotation cited without footnote by Thomas. I could not locate the origin of the quotation, despite numerous efforts.; Joseph E. Fields, "Worthy Partner": *The Papers of Martha Washington* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 215-217; Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Viking, 2005), 164; John Ferling, *The First Among Men: A Life of George Washington* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 385.

²³ Brady claims the carbuncle was diagnosed as anthrax, but Ferling claims Washington suffered from pneumonia. Brady, *Martha Washington*, 165; Ferling, *The First Among Men*, 389-90, 411.

²⁴ Brady, *Martha Washington*, 165-66.

²⁵ Ellis, *First Family*, 143; Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, July 12, 1789, quoted in Ellis, *First Family*, 143; Ellis, *First Family*, 144, 156.

²⁶ United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, "Presidential Mansions," vol. I, 218-19; Decatur, "Presidential Residence," 117-18; United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, "Presidential Mansions," vol. I, 218-19; The "plateaux" mentioned is a mirrored silver centerpiece, in this case from France, for use on a dinner table. March 1, 1790, George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 31, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 15; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 178.

²⁷ For more on the "dinner-table bargain" see Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York; Vintage Books, 2000), 48-80; Funding and Assumption will be discussed more in Chapter 2 of this thesis; George Washington, *George Washington's Diaries: An Abridgement*, ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 376.

²⁸ John Spencer Bassett, *The Federalist System, 1789-1801* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1969), 150, 157-58, 154.

²⁹ The presidents of the revolutionary congresses usually did not bring their wives; Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 169; Catharine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 74.

³⁰ Stephen A. McLeod, Ed., *Dining with the Washingtons: Historic Recipes, Entertaining, and Hospitality From Mount Vernon*. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 69-70; Patricia Brady notes an account of one dinner where the wild game came with the first course, and not the second. See Brady, *Martha Washington*, 168-69; Landau, *The President's Table*, 3; Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 199-201, 205; Philadelphia pepper pot actually grew out of Caribbean slave foodways. For

more on the origins of pepper pot, see Karen Hess, *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (1992), 111-13.

³¹ Brady, *Martha Washington*, 66; Kimball, ed., *The Martha Washington Cook Book*, 41. Historian Karen Hess believes the manuscript's origin is questionable. Karen Hess, *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 447-63; see also Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 95-97; Kimball, ed., *The Martha Washington Cook Book*, 40; Martha's personal copy of Glasse's *The Art of Cookery* is currently in the library at Mt. Vernon; McLeod, Ed., *Dining with the Washingtons*, 115.

³² Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 201-2; Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 37; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 34, 324.

³³ Hannah Glasse, *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy*, The second edition (London, M.DCC.XLVII. [1747].) [Eighteenth Century Collections Online](#). Gale. Texas Christian University. 21 Mar. 2011; Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 96-7; Glasse, *The Art of Cookery*, 1.

³⁴ Karen Hess, *Historical Notes and Commentary on Mary Randolph's The Virginia House-wife in The Virginia House-wife by Mary Randolph: A Facsimile of the first edition, 1824, along with additional material from the editions of 1825 and 1828, thus presenting a complete text* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), xv; Mary Tolford Wilson, *The First American Cookbook: A Facsimile of "American Cookery," 1796 by Amelia Simmons* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1984), ix; Hess, *Historical Notes*, xv; Wilson, *The First American Cookbook*, vii; Hechtlinger, *The Seasonal Hearth*, 194; Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, eds. *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 358; Hess, *Historical Notes*, xv.

³⁵ Wilson, *The First American Cookbook*, x, xi, ix; Theophano, *Eat My Words*, 233.

³⁶ Barry Landau, *The President's Table: Two-Hundred Years of Dining and Diplomacy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 3; Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), 161; Bassett, *The Federalist System*, 156, 157; "Queries on a Line of Conduct to Be Pursued by the President," May 10, 1789, in George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, Volume 30, June 20, 1788-January 21, 1790. ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 319-21; see also Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49.

³⁷ Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press), 49-50; William Maclay, May 19, 1789, Charles A. Beard, ed., *The Journal of William Maclay United States Senator from Pennsylvania 1789 to 1791* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), 41.

³⁸ Murphy, *A Land Without Castles*, 94; Ferling, *The First of Men*, 390, 389; Thomas Jefferson to William Short, September 6, 1790, Philadelphia, Library of Congress online. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ws01119\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field(DOCID+@lit(ws01119))); John Hailman, *Thomas Jefferson on Wine* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 208; Margaret Brown Klapthor, et al, *The First Ladies Cook Book: Favorite Recipes of All the Presidents of the United States* (New York: GMG Publishing, 1982), 19, 20; George Washington to David Stuart, July 26, 1789, *The Writings of George Washington*, 30:361.

³⁹ William Maclay, December 14, 1790, Charles R. Beard, ed., *The Journal of William Maclay: United States Senator from Pennsylvania 1789 to 1791* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1927), 15, 67, 341.

⁴⁰ Washington, *Writings of George Washington*, 30:360-364. See also Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors*, 273-274.

⁴¹ Dr. David Stuart to George Washington, *Writings of George Washington*, 30:54-55. See also Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors*, 273-274; George Washington to Dr. David Stuart, *Writings of George Washington*, 31:54-55. See also Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors*, 274-275.

⁴² Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 271; Hancock, *Oceans of Wine*, 333; Hechtlinger, *The Seasonal Hearth*, 213; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 169; For more on Madeira, see David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Bassett, *The Federalist System*, 153; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 168; Washington, *Rules of Civility*, 21.

⁴⁴ Landau, *The President's Table*, 4; James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 379; Landau, *The President's Table*, 4; Margaret Brown Klapthor, et al, *The First Ladies Cook Book: Favorite Recipes of all the Presidents of the United States* (New York: GMG Publishing, 1982), 28; Ellis, *First*

Family, 182; Grant, *John Adams*, 211; John Adams to Abigail Adams, February 20, 1796, quoted in Ellis, *First Family*, 172.

⁴⁵ Paul C. Nagel, *The Adams Women: Abigail and Louisa Adams, Their Sisters and Daughters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 123; Abigail Adams to her sister [either Mary or Elizabeth], Philadelphia, February 15, 1798, Abigail Adams, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 133; Nagel, *The Adams Women*, 136.

Chapter Two: *Pêle-Mêle* Dining in the White House

In 1803, Thomas Jefferson informed David Stewart Erskine, the Earl of Buchan, “I freely admit the right of a nation to change its political principles and constitution at will.”¹ At first glance, this statement may not appear remarkable, especially for Thomas Jefferson. After all, as an Enlightenment thinker, Jefferson fully believed in the principles of democracy and the malleability of nations through the will of the people. Nevertheless, one can gain a better understanding of Jefferson’s republican ideology by comparing his practices to his words. The events at a dinner party hosted by Jefferson during the winter of 1803 clearly demonstrated the president’s iron will and determination to create a stable republic in the United States, even if that meant dismantling some formal structures of the past. Jefferson’s *pêle-mêle* dinner parties, an egalitarian standard of behavior designed to eliminate precedence, demonstrated a purposeful transference away from the old Anglophile traditions and the creation of a new distinctly American one.

The events involved a dinner party held in the early evening of December 2, 1803, which the recently appointed British diplomat Anthony Merry and his new wife Elizabeth Leathes Merry attended. The rules of protocol for Jefferson’s dinners differed greatly from those of his predecessors. The formality, elitism, and elaborate diplomatic attire of the Federalists did not fit with Jefferson’s Republican ideology or image. Though it occurred at a dinner party, Merry’s perceived insult caused an uproar in Anglo-American relations. Subsequent diplomatic dispatches sent between Britain and the United States even suggested that trade relations between these two countries might suffer. To the British government, these developments during the winter of 1803-04 appeared troubling and unprecedented. Since previous British diplomats enjoyed the deference of the Federalists, Jefferson’s sudden

assertion of a new, more democratic model in receiving foreign diplomats set the United States as equals to the British. For the administration of Thomas Jefferson, it represented a deliberate act of political posturing.

British diplomat Anthony Merry and his wife had suffered a long and arduous journey to the new capital city on the Potomac and their frustrations did not end upon arrival. The fledgling city, often described by contemporaries as a swamp in the wilderness, hardly bore the appearance of a national capital. Expectant and over-burdened with finding furnishings for their new lodgings, the British couple struggled to settle themselves in the nation's unfinished capital city. Since tradition dictated that the British minister call on the President of the United States, Merry eagerly arranged for Secretary of State James Madison to schedule their first meeting. Merry dressed in his finest diplomatic attire and nervously rehearsed his lines for his introduction to President Jefferson. Yet to his dismay, the president entered in his "usual morning-attire." Reports soon circulated that Jefferson received "him in his slippers, and altogether in an undress[ed state]!" One can see why Merry felt perplexed by Jefferson's surprisingly unkempt appearance at their first meeting. Merry came to the capital expecting to meet with another Washington or Adams; his expectations betrayed him.²

Furthermore, Merry's distress from the Jefferson's casual attire and the lack of traditional structure at Jefferson's dinner party in 1803 becomes clear when set against the backdrop of traditional formal dinner culture. After all, the difference in Washington's and Jefferson's dress attire alone does not offer the whole picture. In Washington, Jefferson's well-known reputation for receiving guests in casual attire had already created a stir. Senator William Plumer's famous 1802 account of mistaking the president for a servant upon first seeing him may help explain the shock Merry felt. Plumer recalled, in a few moments "after our arrival ... a tall, high-boned man came into the room. He was dressed, or rather undressed,

in an old brown coat, red waistcoat, old corduroy small-clothes much soiled, woolen hose, and slippers without heels. I thought him a servant, when General Joseph Varnum surprised me by announcing that it was the President.”³

Although Plumer took only minor offense at the president’s odd appearance, Merry, as the representative of his Majesty’s government, felt discombobulated by Jefferson’s behavior. Merry’s shock and frustration grew during the next month of his diplomatic sojourn in Washington. The president’s manner of receiving diplomatic agents initially unsettled Merry because he expected the rigorous formality merited by precedent in such situations. He undoubtedly felt frustration from Jefferson’s new requirement that he make the first calls to major political figures too, especially when compounded with his perception that he had inadequate provisions in housing, space, and foodstuffs. Previously, a man of his position needed only to call on the Secretary of State, not on each department head. Merry felt disoriented and mildly offended by these inconsistencies, and by their seemingly sudden and unforeseen implementation. Consequently, Jefferson’s early December dinner party further complicated the matter.⁴

Around four o’clock in the afternoon, guests began arriving at the Executive Mansion. Those who attended represented the apex of Washington society, including Mr. and Mrs. Merry, James and Dolley Madison, the Spanish minister Marquis Yrujo and his American-born wife Sally McKean, and the French chargé, Louis Andre Pichon and his wife. For Jefferson to insist on Pichon’s attendance at this particular dinner party appeared diplomatically ill advised. England and France remained at war, despite the brief peace of Amiens in 1802, and the formal declaration of the United States called for neutrality in regards to foreign entanglements. Therefore, to avoid tension and awkwardness between himself and visiting foreign diplomats, surely Jefferson should have cautiously extended his “general policy of avoiding the mingling

of Federalists and Republicans at dinner” to his foreign diplomacy. Instead, Jefferson chose to introduce the British minister and therefore the British government to his new *pêle-mêle* model of dining.⁵

Merry’s outrage escalated when a servant announced dinnertime. Had Jefferson kept with the diplomatic etiquette established by his Federalist predecessors, the president would have escorted Mrs. Merry, as the lady of honor, to the table to sit by his side. Yet at the announcement, Jefferson instead chose Dolley Madison and escorted her to the table. Deeply insulted, Merry took his wife on his own arm and made his way towards the dining room. Despite his confusion and dismay at not receiving an invitation to sit near the president, as tradition supposedly dictated, Merry tried to occupy the seat next to Madame Yrujo, but the quick maneuverings of a member of the House of Representatives thwarted his attempt.⁶

Outraged by his treatment, Merry encountered a similar problem a few days later when he attended a dinner held at Secretary of State James Madison’s residence. The Secretary also failed to escort Mrs. Merry to the table at the appropriate time, and again the Merrys left embittered by their treatment. If Merry ever felt inclined to dismiss his treatment at the president’s dinner party as a fluke or accidental mishap, this notion vanished after his being publicly embarrassed a second time. It must have seemed as if he had become the butt of a terrible joke. Perhaps under pressure from his wife, Merry refused subsequent dinner invitations and voiced his frustrations to the British government. In a May 25, 1804, letter to her sister, Dolley Madison noted, “Mrs. Merry is still the same”; in other words, “she hardly associates with any one.” Clearly, Merry wanted to wait for the formal opinion of his majesty’s government before he interacted further with Jefferson’s administration.⁷

Uncertain how to respond, James Madison contacted Rufus King for advice on British diplomatic protocol. King had served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom from

1796 to 1803, and he had attended many dinners with British diplomats. King responded to Madison's inquiry in considerable detail, remembering in particular one occasion: "Mrs. & Mr. Merry were present the last time we dined with Lord Hawkesbury, where Lady Melville wife of the late Minister Dundas, had precedence and was conducted by Lord Hawkesbury to the dining room [with] Mrs. Merry and Mrs. King following her." Contrarily, King also noted that within the upper echelons of English society, "the Ladies there all go out of the drawing room first, the highest Title taking the lead, and the Gentleman follow them." King's letter calls attention to the lack of uniformity within the British Commonwealth in adherence to a singular codified system of dining etiquette. Instead, the rules varied from one house to the next, finding similarity in only their adherence to a hierarchical order. King believed that, to the British, "etiquette as they often say is good for nothing, except as a Guard to keep off impertinence, conceit, and rudeness," and nothing more.⁸ For Jefferson and Madison, King's response confirmed their belief that dinner protocol was open to interpretation and that not even the British followed one standard form of ceremony.

Hearing that Merry lodged a complaint against his "undiplomatic" treatment, the president responded nonchalantly, saying, "They plead the practices of my predecessors. These practices were not uniform: besides I have deemed it my duty to change some of their practices, and especially those which savoured of anti-republicanism." For Jefferson, the Merry Affair represented the forerunner of a burgeoning dinner culture in the United States that reflected republican ideals and deliberately broke with the traditions of his aristocratic predecessors.⁹

Jefferson also substantiated his *pêle-mêle* model with his *Canons of Etiquette*, which he composed after the Merry Affair to address the issue of precedence. By creating a written document, which outlined the new presidential dining protocol, Jefferson codified his *pêle-mêle* model into official presidential policy. Jefferson believed that foreign ministers and their

families should receive no “precedence or privilege,” except “the provision of a convenient seat or station with any other stranger invited.” Jefferson also expressly stated that the titles given to foreign ministers “give no precedence” to them in America, because the United States did not confer titles to its citizens. Referring specifically to dinner decorum, Jefferson expressly stated that “equality” existed amongst guests at all social functions “whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office.” Furthermore, in order to enforce “the principle of equality, or *pêle-mêle*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the Executive, at their own houses, will adhere to the ancient usage of their ancestors, -- gentlemen *en masse* giving place to the ladies *en masse*.”¹⁰

In contrast to Jefferson’s unconventional approach, George Washington’s dinner parties assumed a tone of high formality. Despite the formality, Maclay offers a surprisingly similar description of both Washington’s and Jefferson’s character. Neither of the two enjoyed being in the public eye and both treated their guests well in the fashion of Virginia gentlemen. Both received harsh criticism for their habits and mannerisms at public dinners, though for different reasons. On one hand, Washington appeared too closely tied with the ceremonies of the hated English monarch. On the other hand, some felt Jefferson strayed too far.

Although he shared Jefferson’s characteristic sentiment for acting as a gracious host, Washington needed structure, and as a career military man, the general felt more comfortable with the concepts of rank and deference. One account of a dinner with Washington in 1791 highlights the military scene, insisting that every patriotic toast coincided with “the discharge of cannon.” Quite to the contrary of Jefferson, who avoided such militaristic displays as the discharging of cannons after toasts, Washington always saw himself first and foremost as a commander and general. These descriptions of Washington’s presentation of the “high life,” boisterous patriotism, and formality fit well into the model of Federalist dinner parties.

Maclay's note on Washington's coldness and formality calls attention to Washington's discomfort at public gatherings. Indeed, the first president preferred to let his wife handle these public receptions; she entertained on Fridays, and on such occasions, the president acted merely as a "private gentleman" rather than as the host.¹¹

In their preference for the private sphere over the public, Washington and Jefferson appear similar, but they differed in their contrasting interpretations of how the President of the United States should present himself to the public and the world. For the first president, the importance of his position led him to believe he needed a style of entertaining that exhibited the "dignity and respect that was due to the first Magistrate" of the Republic. Washington certainly appreciated the honor bestowed on him through his elected position, and he intended to mold a federal government that would instill pride and unity in its citizens. Cohesion in favor of the national government, instead of local or regional interests, would ensure that the republic survived.¹²

The Jeffersonian break from previous traditions went deeper than a mere difference of opinion. Many Federalists feared that the tenuous Union would collapse under Jefferson's leadership. Upon his March 4, 1801, inauguration, Jefferson seemed to verify their fears as he began dismembering Federalist policies already in place. Further, the president's democratic style of government not only differed with the formality of his predecessors at home, but also in matters of foreign policy. The pro-British stance of the Federalists contrasted sharply with Jefferson's pro-French sentiments. While the Federalists clearly aligned themselves with the monarchical traditions of the British, Jefferson drew from classic models of antiquity and French society.

In France, elite chefs were primarily men. Jefferson likely took note of the considerable number of men in the culinary profession while in France and noted the patriotic fervor with

which French chefs attempted to export their new haute cuisine. French *haute cuisine*, or “high cuisine,” emerged during the mid-seventeenth century and marked a dramatic break from the previous medieval European cuisine. *Haute cuisine* emphasized subtlety and broke from the heavy-handed use of spices that traditionally distinguished the cookery of the Middle Ages; recipes included smaller portions, more fruits and vegetables, and intricate sauces to accent or conceal the food’s natural flavor. Furthermore, French *haute cuisine* became a way to promote French nationalism in the eighteenth century. Culinary nationalism did not escape the notice of people in England and America. As a woman and a popular British culinary author, Hannah Glasse infused anti-French sentiment into her cookbooks possibly from her desire to preserve English culinary traditions against the onslaught of the French and their national cuisine. Glasse bemoaned the popularity of French chefs and the lack of consideration for “good English cook[s].”¹³

This critical view of French cookery also gained credence in the America. John Adams, commonly viewed as less sympathetic to the French than to the British, noted that the American colonists’ initial distaste for Parisian food stemmed from the British. The courtly style of the French, to the British colonists, became synonymous with effeminacy and extravagance. In fact, Jefferson received serious criticism, most notably from fellow Virginian John Randolph, upon his return to the United States for being too much of a Francophile. Unbeknownst to Randolph, Jefferson had acquired a copy of Glasse’s cookbook in 1770, and incorporated a variety of recipes from numerous sources into his culinary repertoire. Nonetheless, after the French alliance with America in 1778, French cuisine became *en vogue* among the more affluent members of American society. Jefferson was not alone in his appreciation of French cuisine; the first four presidents all shared this affinity. Yet as historian Susan McIntosh notes, the vast majority of American society never shared the same enthusiasm

for French cuisine as the wealthiest members of society. At least partially, many Americans still identified themselves as British, even after the American Revolution, but continued to develop different markers of social status, like foodways, to help define their cultural identity as Americans.¹⁴

Perhaps Jefferson perceived the patriotism inherent in the French *haute cuisine* and attempted to achieve a similar nationalist rhetoric through the promotion of his *pêle-mêle* dining method. Certainly, the French culinary technique and style of etiquette represented an “international culinary language” as early as the late seventeenth century. Historian Damon Lee Fowler expands this notion to say that French cuisine equated to French diplomacy. The rhetoric of French culinary diplomacy promoted equality. French travelers during the eighteenth century complained of rigid hierarchies at the dinner tables where they sat in both Germany and Poland. In France, more egalitarian measures became commonplace at the dinner table, and although the guests with the highest social status still received some deferential treatment, they ate and drank the same food and beverages as everyone else. Historian Margaret Visser notes that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elites increasingly ate together in more tight-knit groups and shunned the idea of hierarchical seating. Yet, put into context, she argues that these intimate suppers were not actually as egalitarian as they seemed; the hosts simply removed the “lesser” guests from the equation by only inviting their favorites. Nonetheless, in the popular French salons, it seemed that “if a person was well turned out, had good manners, and could carry on witty conversation, he could dine anywhere.” This more egalitarian approach differed greatly from the hierarchical style of the Middle Ages, in which “status was marked by the position at [the] table of each member, by the criteria of food distribution, and by the kind of food that was served.”¹⁵

In contrast to his love of French cuisine, Jefferson's distaste for the British crown evidently crystallized after 1786, when he and Adams went to England in an attempt to gain an Anglo-American treaty that would increase the U.S. trade market. Made to wait several days before receiving acknowledgement from the crown, Jefferson grew increasingly angry after experiencing the indifferent British nature towards his and Adams' presence at the royal court. Upon returning to Paris after his failed attempts at a British treaty, Jefferson informed William Stephens Smith, John Adams' son-in-law, "of all nations on earth they [the British] require to be treated with the most hauteur." He also suggested that they also "require[d] to be kicked into common good manners." Thereafter, Jefferson's distaste for cold formality at receptions took shape. The icy treatment and lack of consideration that the crown offered him on this excursion left Jefferson bitter, and he did not forget it.¹⁶

This is not to say that Jefferson based his views of the British only on one encounter. Clearly, Jefferson's disdain for the British existed long before his Presidency, but the 1786 reception that he and Adams suffered through at the court of St. James no doubt helped to solidify his enmity. His experience in France had been much better. As the American minister to France, Jefferson met with a large cross-section of French men and women, and he applied his typical astuteness to detail in absorbing French culture. The politeness and good manners of the French greatly impressed him. In a 1785 letter to Abigail Adams, Jefferson hinted at his attitude toward the growing importance of dinner culture by saying, "I suspect it is their [the British] kitchens and not in their churches that their reformation must be worked, and that missionaries of that description from hence would avail more than those who should endeavor to tame them by precepts of religion or philosophy."¹⁷

Given his experiences in Europe, it was no surprise that he disagreed with the Federalist structure of government, which he felt followed too closely along the British model, and when

given the opportunity, he chose to promote his own republican vision of the United States. Indeed, the *pêle-mêle* model he introduced did not develop overnight. It culminated from years of thought and experience. Thus, the implementation of Jefferson's *pêle-mêle* dinner parties in 1803 represented a calculated shift from past traditions and the establishment of a distinctly American form of dining.

Jefferson's first experience with the elegance of dinner culture occurred while he studied at the College of William and Mary during the early 1760s. As a member of the Virginia elite, Jefferson attended social gatherings and performed in amateur musicals at the Governor's Palace. A young and impressionable Jefferson marveled at the intellectually stimulating conversations conducted at Governor Farquier's table; he also absorbed the Virginia standards of politeness and grace for a host from these gatherings. Mature beyond his years, Jefferson took great pride in the gentlemanly manners he learned, and later refined, while in Williamsburg. During these formative years, Jefferson witnessed the power of conversation while at the Governor's Palace and he put this power into practice during his years as Secretary of State.¹⁸

As early as 1790, Jefferson used dinner parties as the medium of political change. At what came to be known as the famous "dinner table bargain," Thomas Jefferson arranged a meeting between Alexander Hamilton and James Madison to discuss the controversial Assumption Bill that seemed certain of failure in the House of Representatives. In July, these three men convened at Jefferson's temporary residence at 57 Maiden Lane in the nation's capital of New York City. Ultimately, Madison agreed not to fight against Hamilton's Assumption Bill if the Treasury Secretary would support placing the permanent seat of the federal government on the shores of the Potomac. This gesture, Madison believed, would appease disgruntled southerners who opposed the federal assumption of the states' debts.

Though shrouded in secrecy, the “dinner table bargain,” profoundly shaped the new nation’s future, and demonstrated to Jefferson that dinners could play a significant role in this process. More importantly, he found a private outlet for politics that suited his personality and allowed him to bypass heated public debates.¹⁹

Writing to his long-time friend James Monroe, Jefferson described his “hatred of ceremony,” and how he wished to avoid too much attention from the partisan press. Likewise, on the day of his inauguration, Thomas Jefferson simply walked down the street to take the oath of office, without the horse-drawn carriage or elaborate procession of his predecessors. When he took the oath of office, he spoke so quietly as to be virtually inaudible to the ears of the gathered crowd; Jefferson did not relish public speaking. Characteristically soft-spoken, Jefferson deliberately avoided public speaking when possible, and deplored verbal political debates. Frankly, the Virginian felt more comfortable in the private sphere than in the public eye. Always innovative, Jefferson knew how to play to his strengths and de-emphasize his weaknesses. His use of frequent dinner parties throughout his two consecutive terms of office, as well as before and after his presidency, exemplify Jefferson at his best.²⁰

Jefferson’s quick wit and steadfast dedication to his convictions proved important in the implementation of his changed dining model. Not everyone liked the change, and some vocalized their opposition. Jefferson’s great-granddaughter, Sarah N. Randolph, recounted several years later an amusing family anecdote of one such occasion: “Many of the ladies at Washington, indignant at being cut off from the pleasure of attending them [Presidential levees], and thinking that their discontinuance was an innovation on former customs, determined to force the President [Jefferson] to hold them.” Therefore, they journeyed *en masse* to the President’s House on the traditional levee day only to find that he had gone out on his habitual horseback ride. Upon his return, Jefferson found he had guests in his public rooms,

and hastened to receive them though still in his riding attire, “all booted and spurred” and “covered with the dust of his ride.” Randolph added, “The ladies, charmed with the ease and grace of his manners and address, forgot their indignation with him, and went away feeling that, of the two parties, they had shown most impoliteness in visiting his house when not expected. The result of their plot was for a long time a subject of mirth among them, and they never again attempted to infringe upon the rules of his household.”²¹

Although Sarah Randolph may have written this account with her family’s reputation in mind, her testimonial illustrates three things. First, it shows that opposition to Jefferson’s new style of dining existed. Not everyone wanted to sweep away the formal levees practices by Washington and Adams. After all, this weekly outing gave these women a chance to dress in their finest attire and flaunt their wealth and social status to their neighbors. No doubt, they took great pride in such social enterprises. Perhaps these women feared Jefferson’s abolishment of levees meant a loss of tradition and their own status. In an attempt to prevent this from happening, these unnamed women in Washington believed they could force the president to practice the formal levees they had previously enjoyed. Second, this account shows that presidential levees had also become an important custom to these high-society women, and they struggled with the monotony of daily life in the capital without them.²² By practicing his charm and ease with guests, Jefferson quickly defused a potentially problematic situation. Sarah Randolph takes care not to state that Jefferson talked the women out of their plan with cunningness or manipulation. Instead, he employed only his kind manners to calm their “indignation.” Third, and perhaps most important, Sarah Randolph’s story proclaims the triumph of Jefferson and his new dining model over the traditional levees of former presidents. When the women left the President’s House, they had a newfound respect for the “rules of his

household” and no longer wished to change them. Whatever fears they may have proclaimed upon entering his house, they left them at the door on their way out.

As president, Jefferson prepared carefully for his many dinners. Each detail, from food and wine selection to guest lists and after-dinner conversation, gave him pause for serious contemplation. In an effort to make the Presidential Mansion more comfortable, and in reaction to a lack of Congressional funding, Jefferson brought a great deal of his own furniture from Monticello to enliven its empty rooms. Jefferson also transported some of his innovative contraptions for use at the President’s House. The use of dumbwaiters at dinner marked one of his most popular installations. Similar to the dumbwaiters installed at Monticello, Jefferson used a revolving service door in the immense “public” dining room of the President’s House. Instead of servants hovering over the guests, servants placed the dishes for an entire course on the revolving door dumbwaiter where the guests could retrieve them with minimal interaction with the waitstaff. Freestanding dumbwaiters also allowed guests to serve themselves. Such contrivances created an environment that isolated the guests with their host and eliminated the need for servants around the dining table. Jefferson also preferred to use a round or oval table so that no single person sat at its head and thus he avoided giving any one guest preference over another. Without the limitations of formality and precedence to worry about, Jefferson’s guests could act as peers and converse naturally with one another. Clearly, Jefferson wanted to create in his dining room a safe haven from the fiery politics of the early nineteenth century.²³

Unlike Washington’s receptions where throngs of servants remained on hand, Jefferson’s dinners had a more relaxed tone. After the second bell, guests entered the dining room to find the table set for the evening’s events. Jefferson always offered an array of choices to his guests, such as various meats, vegetables, and soups. Senator Samuel Latham Mitchell wrote of a dinner on Saturday, February 6, 1802, in which the president served “rice soup,

round of beef, turkey, mutton, ham loin of veal, cutlets of mutton or veal, fried eggs, fried beef, a pie called macaroni.” Along with ice cream and various fruits, Jefferson offered “plenty of wines” that tantalized the palate. During his eight years in office, Jefferson ordered numerous pipes of Brazil Madeira, and hundreds of bottles of claret, Sherry from London, champagne, and many other liquors and spirits. An abundance of fine wines at the dinner table created an enjoyable experience for Jefferson’s guests.²⁴

Sharply contrasted from his Federalist counterparts, Jefferson wanted to ensure that his guests felt comfortable and relaxed so that conversation could flow freely without restraint. Indeed, he cautioned his guests against engaging in political discussions at the table in order to allow a respite from the constant political confrontations of the day. Sometimes, on the other hand, political discussions became unavoidable. Jefferson described one such occasion on December 31, 1803, when “the pamphlet on the conduct of Colonel Burr [became] the subject of conversation,” and Matthew Lyon inquired of everyone present his or her position on the upcoming presidential election. Jefferson said that Lyon worried about “the insinuations against the republicans at Washington.” Thus, party politics and its effects on the stability of the republic still found their way into dinner table conversations.²⁵

In addition, avoidance of co-mingling Federalists and Republicans at these dinners also served to defuse potential conflicts. Early on, Jefferson tried mixing Federalists and Republicans at dinners, but he quickly changed to separate dinners. The lists Jefferson kept of his dinner guests reveal a painstakingly thorough analysis of the character and political affiliations of each person. For instance, throughout 1806, Jefferson entertained congressmen from specific sections of the country at different times. On February 19, 1806, Jefferson lists men from South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Then on February 24, representatives from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, and Delaware

joined him. Rarely did he mix men from northern and southern states, and on such rare occasions, the odd man out almost always hailed from Virginia. Since Virginia was his home state, he certainly felt more comfortable and at ease with most his fellow Virginians. Though Jefferson tried to invite every member of Congress to dinner at least once, many dined with the president on multiple occasions in a short amount of time.²⁶

Jefferson believed his guests would interact more freely and with greater ease of mind if surrounded by like-minded individuals. Taken within the larger political context during the formative years of the Republic, one can see why Jefferson favored a less formal dining environment. At some of Jefferson's dinners, one might find upwards of four men from one state. Since both Federalists and Republicans harnessed the power of print media to criticize their opponents, most politicians on both sides had to keep their opinions heavily guarded lest their words should turn up in the local newspapers. Indeed, sharp criticism and slanderous accusations across party lines could be terribly damaging to political careers. By creating an environment with limited political contention, his guests could speak freely and not fear that their political opponents would overhear something taken out of context and print it in the paper the next day.²⁷

Just a few years after Jefferson's presidency, contemporary American author Washington Irving described the contentious political atmosphere in the District of Columbia to a friend, saying, "You would be amused, were you to arrive here just now, to see the odd and heterogeneous circle of acquaintances I have formed." For, "One day I am dining with a knot of honest, furious Federalists, who are damning all their opponents as a set of consummate scoundrels, panders of Bonaparte," and "the next day I dine, perhaps, with some of the very best men I have heard thus anathematized, and find them equally honest, warm, and indignant." He concluded of the Republicans, "If I take their word for it, I had been dining the day before

with some of the greatest knaves in the nation, men absolutely paid and suborned by the British government.” Always conscious of his public persona, Jefferson strove to ensure that his dinners did not reflect a combative political climate, but rather reflected a way for both parties to coexist comfortably.²⁸

Unlike Washington and Adams, who both detested parties of any kind, Jefferson adapted his political philosophy to include parties out of practical necessity, and he used it to his full advantage. Jefferson often studied his guests and played the role of active listener in their conversations. Always polite and courteous, Jefferson listened while his guests, full on food and wine, talked about numerous topics. This approach allowed him to gain a more accurate picture of where certain Congressmen fell on certain issues. He effectively discerned which states supported which bills while gaining valuable insights into possible bargaining tools in the future. If members of one state stood opposed to a particular piece of legislation, like the Embargo Act, he would know their arguments before the issue ever came to a vote. Having presided over a dinner as Secretary of State during which Madison and Hamilton reached a compromise over the Assumption and Residency Bills, Jefferson used the same practice to achieve compromises during his presidency.²⁹

Furthermore, frequent informal dinners marked another innovation in Jefferson’s *pêle-mêle* model. By increasing the number of parties each week, Jefferson could accommodate various groups without unwanted tension and suspicion amongst his guests. In contrast to Washington’s weekly levees, Jefferson’s dinners grew to three per week during the months Congress remained in session. In effect, that means Jefferson entertained guests nearly every other day. Known for his hospitality, Jefferson provided welcomed entertainment for the many wifeless Congressmen who lived in Washington boardinghouses. Therefore, several times a week, the Presidential Secretary sent out printed invitations to roughly a dozen members of

Congress, and they gathered in the room of the Presidential Mansion now known as the Green Room. Here they socialized until time for dinner.³⁰

Differences in opinion over what constituted the proper form of government plagued the early republic's formative years, and Jefferson's presidency proved no exception. Jefferson feared the monarchic undertones of Federalism would bury the egalitarian principles of democracy, as he understood them. Dinner culture proved to be an important feature in the implementation of Jefferson's republican policy as president and contrasted starkly with the formal traditions of the previous presidents. Though the specific *pêle-mêle* model for dining outlined in his *Canons of Etiquette* faded into the background of national politics, Jefferson continued to practice an informal structure of receiving guests that reflected his sentiments as a Virginia gentleman. Years after his retirement from public office, he frequently received guests at his plantation home at Monticello in an ever polite and gracious manner. At times, Jefferson housed upwards of thirty guests per night who wished to visit the famous Revolutionary despite the great personal expense to himself and his overwhelming debt.³¹

Jefferson's dining model also had a lasting impact on both domestic and foreign relations. Jefferson saw great potential in the United States, and he wanted to set his country on an equal footing with Great Britain. Just as he sought to bring the British crown into line with his way of thinking through legislation such as the Embargo Act of 1807, Jefferson also used his dinners as a political tool. His experimentalist nature led him to seek new and creative ways to get the attention of Great Britain. He also understood the need to keep the United States from entering another war with England. Therefore, Jefferson developed his experimental concept of *pêle-mêle* dining as a subtle way of defying the British without open conflict. Furthermore, his deep animosity towards Great Britain and his fear of a close relationship between his majesty's government and the U.S. played a significant role in the

cultivation and implementation of his *pêle-mêle* model. This sentiment is apparent in Jefferson's interactions with Anthony Merry, but "The Merry Affair" also demonstrates the lengths to which Jefferson felt compelled to go in order to break from the trends of the past.³²

For Jefferson, dinner culture and the fate of the American nation remained indelibly linked. As President, Jefferson sought to eliminate any traces of European court society and replace them with distinctly American modes. The introduction of his *pêle-mêle* dining clearly reflected these sentiments. His shift away from the Federalists' traditions of the past demonstrated a change in both ideological and practical terms. Jefferson's innovations in American dining etiquette illustrated the third president's desire to create both a form of dinner and a political culture that were distinctly American. He strove to distinguish the United States from the European continent and to set the U.S. on an equal footing with the dominant world powers. For the third president, dinner parties became a way to exhibit individual tastes and choices. The cultivation of one's tastes, in food and beyond, served as a means to perfect democracy, because change led to criticism and analysis, which in turn, allowed for an evolution in food as in social standards. The great experiment in republican government reached all aspects of society, both political and cultural.³³

Perhaps most importantly, Jefferson sought to address what comprised national identity and what it meant to be an American in the early-nineteenth century. During the early years of the nineteenth century, many young Americans discarded British social protocols, just as the colonists had thrown off the shackles of their oppressive British overlords in the years before. Furthermore, Jefferson decided the traditionally hierarchical social model in Great Britain clashed with his republican ideology. Given the high malleability of the young nation and lack of firmly grounded social traditions in the United States, Jefferson had the freedom to experiment with social customs. For him, this shift moved away from the Federalist states of

the urban north and their firm attachment to the traditions of England, and guided the American citizenry towards the polite social customs of the Virginian gentry.³⁴

Upon reviewing the climate of cultural change that took place across Europe throughout the Early Modern period, Jefferson's implementation of his *pêle-mêle* model of dining in 1803 seems all the more important. Much like the influence of the Enlightenment in Europe, there was a direct correlation between Jefferson's republican ideals and the form his dinner parties took during the early years of the American republic. Likewise, just as Europe had adapted to the influx of new American foods and spices, Europe also sought to export elements of its various cultures to the Americas. Not impressed by the cold formality and courtly manners he found so lacking in parts of Europe, particularly England, Jefferson favored the more polite social conventions he enjoyed within the Parisian salons. He adapted their ideals of *politesse* and *honnêteté* and applied them to American modes of dining. Nonetheless, his efforts to change American society and distinguish it from the traditions of his predecessors by creating a distinctly American form of dining are a direct continuation of the evolutionary process that took place throughout Europe during the previous centuries.³⁵

By creating a distinctly American form of dining, Jefferson also promoted the establishment of an American identity. Jefferson realized that for Americans truly to break free from the shackles of Great Britain they needed to create traditions of their own. By compelling the British government to recognize the United States government as an equal, Jefferson shook the foundation of American reliance on Europe and declared her independence yet again. The United States would not only maintain a unique form of government but would also build a unique social culture. Jefferson's dining *a la pêle-mêle* reasserted the role of republican ideology as the foundation of the American nation and severed the safety line that bound the U.S. to European tradition.

Jefferson, shaped by his upbringing in Virginia and his time abroad in Europe, understood the political significance of etiquette in relation to diplomacy. Food writer Dave DeWitt noted that once back at Monticello, Jefferson “transformed the food served there [at Monticello] to reflect the French and Italian culinary techniques that he had experienced.” Clearly, important questions arose about the nature of formal dining and how entertaining interconnected with diplomacy in the new republic. Indeed, the protocol for seating, along with other aspects of the dining process, seemed to be unstable and evolving. Thomas Jefferson’s *Canons of Etiquette* (1803), Margaret Visser explains, “removed all precedence from visiting dignitaries” and promoted a more informal style of seating. Jefferson rejected the formality of his Federalist predecessors in order to cast off the court mentality of late eighteenth century Europe. Clearly ahead of his time, Jefferson’s *Canons of Etiquette* seem short lived in light of the fact that after 1815, “diplomatic protocol was redefined by the international community,” and “the American presidency restored precedence as a device for ordering ceremonial proceedings.”³⁶

Dolley Madison played the key feminine role at Jefferson’s dinners. She often served as hostess, since Jefferson’s wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson, had died in 1782. The Madisons regularly attended Jefferson’s social gatherings, and their adherence to his *Canons of Etiquette* during the Merry Affair gave his *pêle-mêle* model legitimacy through repetition. By following suit with Jefferson and disavowing the established procedure that gave precedence to foreign ministers, these canons lent credence to the notion that the British crown should view members of the U.S. government as equals, thus opening up the door for better trade relations. Arguably, her participation at Jefferson’s dinners shaped Madison’s understanding of her role as the First Lady during the Madisons’ subsequent eight years in office. Her patriotic style of entertaining created a model that influenced the democratic nature of antebellum politics.³⁷

Socio-culinary trends paralleled the evolving political inclinations of Americans during the early republic. During Jefferson's administration, in particular, these changes reflected both America's gradual shift towards democracy and the country's expanding access to distant trade networks. The more egalitarian socio-culinary practices of Americans during this shift towards democracy, also led to the increased presence of women in the realm of politics. In the years following the War of 1812, women frequently used socio-culinary outlets to express their unique form of political discourse. Moreover, American society also experienced numerous changes resulting from rapid industrialization and urbanization. Throughout the antebellum period, some Americans, impacted by these societal changes, challenged the established notions of what constituted true "republican simplicity," and they sought new ways to construct a national identity.

¹ Thomas Jefferson to the Earl of Buchan, 1803, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), ME 10:400.

² Anthony Merry to Lord Hawkesbury (Robert Banks Jenkinson), December 6, 1803, in Dumas Malone, *Jefferson & His Time, First Term, 1801-1805*, vol. IV (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 378; Rufus King to Christopher Gore, January 4, 1804, Charles R. King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, vol. IV, 1801-1806, (New York: De Capo Press, 1971), 340.

³ Henry Adams, *The History of the United States*, vol. II, (New York: Scribners, 1917), 366; William Plumer, *The Life of William Plumer*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Company, 1856), 242.

⁴ Adams, *History*, vol. II, 360-388.

⁵ Adams, *History*, vol. II, 369; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson the President, First Term, 1801-1805*, vol. IV, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 380.

⁶ Neither Adams or Malone mention the name of the representative who took Merry's seat. Adams, *History*, vol. II, 369-371; Malone, *Jefferson & His Time*, vol. IV, 379.

⁷ Both Henry Adams and Dumas Malone present arguments favoring the opinion that Mrs. Merry encouraged her husband to demand apologies for their treatment at both Jefferson's and Madison's dinner parties. There is some implication that Merry would not have taken such a heightened level of defense if it had not been for her degree of personal displeasure; Dolley Payne Madison to Anna Cutts, May 25, 1804, Dolley Madison, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, eds. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Shulman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 57.

⁸ Rufus King to James Madison, December 22, 1803, Mary A. Hackett, et al, ed., *The Papers of James Madison, Secretary of State Series, vol. IV, 1 November 1803-31 March 1804*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 198; Hackett, *The Papers of James Madison*, 199.

⁹ Jefferson to William Short, January 23, 1804, in Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson the President, First Term, 1801-1805*, 386.

¹⁰ Dolley Madison lists fourteen canons of etiquette of President Jefferson in her memoir, July 10, 1805. Dolly Madison, *Memoirs and Letters of Dolly Madison*, ed. Lucia B. Cutts, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1886), 30-32.

¹¹ Maclay, *The Journal of William Maclay, passim*; Charles W. Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors*. (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1956), 272.

¹² Washington, *Writings*, 30:360-361; Charles W. Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors*, (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1956), 272-275.

¹³ Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 173-175; Pilcher, *Food in World History*, 37.

¹⁴ Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 85; C.F. Adams, ed. *Familiar Letters of John Adams and his wife Abigail Adams*, (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1876), 359; August 21-25, 1770, Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826*. Volume I. Eds. James A. Bear, Jr. and Lucia C. Stanton. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Second Series. Ed. Charles T. Cullen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35; McIntosh, *American Food Habits*, 85, 93; Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History, passim*.

¹⁵ Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 167-172; Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, 58; Damon Lee Fowler, ed., *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3; Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, 370; Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 122; Flandrin and Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, 370, 70.

¹⁶ Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, Paris, September 28, 1787, Julian Boyd, ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 7 August 1787 to 21 March 1788*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 12:193.

¹⁷ Jefferson to Abigail Adams, September 23, 1785, LC, 2547-2550; Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson and the Rights of Man, vol. II*, 18.

¹⁸ Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson the Virginian*, 1:75-87.

¹⁹ Due to the intense secrecy around this dinner bargain, the exact date of their meeting is unknown. Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 49; Many southern states had already paid off

the bulk of their Revolutionary War debt by 1790, and felt Assumption rewarded the states, mostly in the north, who had not been, in their opinion, more financially responsible.

²⁰ Jefferson to James Monroe, March 26, 1800, *The Jefferson Papers of the University of Virginia*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 4:10; Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 67-68.

²¹ Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1871), 282-83.

²² This assertion stems from complaints mentioned in the personal letters of women like Abigail Adams, who described the new capital as a wilderness with few houses and poorly paved or unfinished roads.

²³ Stanton, "Nourishing the Congress," 13.

²⁴ See Susan R. Stein's "The Feast of Reason" in *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc., 2005), 74-76; Senator Samuel Latham Mitchell, February 6, 1802, Dolly Madison and Allen C. Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, (Washington, D.C.: Press of W. F. Roberts Company, 1914), 50. In Landau's *The President's Table*, he states that the quote came from Congressman Manasseh Cutler of Massachusetts; Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826, volume II*, eds. James A. Bear, Jr. and Lucia C. Stanton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 1115-1117.

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *The ANAS of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 223.

²⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Correspondence, 1803-1805*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2003), roll no. 4, microfilm ; Charles T. Cullen, "Jefferson's White House Dinner Guests," *White House History: Thomas Jefferson's White House, no.17*, (Washington: Journal of the White House Historical Association, 2006), 24-43.

²⁷ Jefferson, *Correspondence*, microfilm.

²⁸ Washington Irving to Brevoort, February 7, 1811, Clark, *The Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, 116.

²⁹ Cullen, "Jefferson's White House Dinner Guests." 24-43.

³⁰ Lucia Stanton, "Nourishing the Congress: Hospitality at the President's House," Damon Lee Fowler, ed. *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc., 2005), 11-17.

³¹ Wallace Ohrt, *Defiant Peacemaker: Nicholas Trist in the Mexican War*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 45. For more on Jefferson and debt, see Herbert Sloan's *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995).

³² The claim that Jefferson used his *pêle-mêle* dining model to defy the British without open conflict stems from Jefferson's previous actions in defiance of the British during the American Revolution and his stubborn refusal to back down once Merry voiced his concerns about Jefferson's behavior. The critical opinions Jefferson expressed in private letters to Abigail Adams, among others, of the receiving habits of the British also contributed to this assertion. Among Jefferson scholars, it is a widely accepted fact that Jefferson generally behaved in a thorough and calculating manner. He rarely acted impulsively. Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson the President, Second Term, 1805-1809*, 5:469-490.

³³ Frank Shuffleton, "Jefferson and the Aesthetics of Democracy" (paper presented at the Thomas Jefferson for Today Conference, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, April 21, 2006).

³⁴ The claim that Jefferson wanted to shift focus away from the urban north and towards the social customs of the Virginia gentry builds on Jefferson's notions of an agrarian republic. He distrusted the urban centers, not only because he saw them as Federalist strongholds, but also because they reminded him of the corruption and extravagance of courtly Europe. See Malone, *Jefferson & His Time: Jefferson the Virginian*, and Sloan's *Principle and Interest*.

³⁵ Geoffrey V. Sutton, *Science for a Polite Society: Gender, Culture, and the Demonstration of Enlightenment* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 143-187.

³⁶ Dave DeWitt, *The Founding Foodies: How Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2010), 123; Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner*, 122, 123.

³⁷ Jefferson's daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph also periodically played the role of hostess during Jefferson's administration. Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 31, 38; Landau, *The President's Table*, 5.

Chapter Three: Republican Simplicity among the Second Generation: Presidential Dining From Monroe to Jackson, 1817-1837

Historians focused on early America have started to include studies of dinner culture into their framework, but they limited their research predominantly to members of the revolutionary generation: Washington, Jefferson, and Madison. Anti-Federalists' concerns about Washington and Adams's aristocratic tendencies, the supposed dinner table bargain that allowed for the Compromise of 1790, and Dolley Madison's famous affinity for entertaining are concepts well known among historians. There is little debate over the important political and social effects of these early Americans' behavior. During these formative years, the future of the young Republic remained uncertain, and every action of those heads of state seemed to matter that much more.¹

The First Lady undoubtedly felt this insecurity on August 24, 1814. With the British army rapidly approaching, Dolley Madison narrowly escaped the nation's capital before the Executive Mansion went up in flames. Just before leaving, she wrote to her sister, "I sent out the silver (nearly all) – the velvet curtains and Gen. Washington's picture, the cabinet papers, a few books, and the small clock – left everything else belonging to the publick [sic], our own valuable stores of every description." These key items symbolized gentility to nineteenth-century Americans. Dolley Madison understood the importance of the Executive Mansion as the symbol of American independence. After the war, she firmly rejected the idea of moving the seat of government and believed the capital along the Potomac needed rebuilding to restore its former glory. Her steadfast patriotism served as a model to all around her.²

Dolley Madison is most famous for her role as hostess during the early republican period. As the wife of Secretary of State James Madison, Dolley Madison followed Thomas

Jefferson's model of etiquette for the newly formed Washington society and adapted her entertaining to meet his approval. According to historian Catharine Allgor, American social circumstances demanded more decorum than ever imagined by the author of any European courtesy book, and Dolley Madison embodied just such a combination of calculation and composure. At the Madisons' house on F Street, men and women, Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, came together and began to develop a political culture. Madison not only entertained foreign dignitaries, but also Native American tribal leaders. Under her careful management as First Lady, the White House attracted visitors of varying social classes and ethnicities and became a visible symbol of democracy. Madison exemplified the feminine ideals associated with "the cult of true womanhood," such as "self-effacement" and "eagerness to please," which dominated from roughly 1820 to 1860. She then used these feminine qualities to create a "Republican Queen," or as historian Catharine Allgor put it, "a charismatic figure around whom people could rally, a figure who commanded the focus of any room and who radiated calm goodness." When her husband became President in 1808, Dolley Madison's meals at the White House "underwent a corresponding rise in lavishness" to show off the status of the new nation. At her table, Madison "made her guests feel privileged and honored" and that "easily translated into political alliance[s]." For competing parties in the early Republic, these political maneuverings could mean the life or death of a politician's career.³

Although the Madisons certainly followed Jefferson's example of frequent entertainments during their time in the Presidential Mansion, subtle changes affected the form of their new administration. They too received guests nearly every night of the week, serving them "little French dishes, and exquisite wines" to encourage the free flow of conversation. Nonetheless, James Madison, more so than the widower Jefferson, relied heavily on his wife's charm and loquaciousness to distract from his own social shortcomings. Sarah Seaton, wife of

journalist William Winston Seaton, described her first experience at a drawing room held by the Madisons during the winter of 1812, “Mrs. Magruder, by priority of age, was entitled to the right hand of her Hostess; and I, in virtue of being a stranger, to the next seat, Mr. Russell to her left, Mr. Coles at the foot of the table, the President in the middle, which relieves him from the trouble of serving guests, drinking wine, etc.”⁴ Such behavior on the part of the president seemed to imply a separation between Madison and the prescribed social duties of a host. He acted more as an observer than as a facilitator of discussion.

It appeared too that the standard of excellence for Washington dinners, along with the number of the city’s inhabitants, continued to grow from the end of Jefferson’s presidency and the start of Madison’s administration. Sarah Seaton declared, “The dinner was certainly fine; but still I was rather surprised, as it did not surpass some I have eaten in Carolina.” Yet what the Madisons lacked in terms of food preparation and presentation, they made up for in conversation and charm. Dolley Madison garnered a reputation for her ability to put anyone at ease with a few words and a warm smile. More women frequented their presidential dinners than had been the norm during Jefferson’s day, and increased political tension during Madison’s years in office, both nationally and internationally, made the role of the First Lady in politics and diplomacy all the more pressing. Dolley Madison met this challenge with characteristic poise. For example, when a nervous guest accidentally spilled his coffee, and in panic shoved the empty coffee cup into his pocket, at one of her drawing rooms, Madison pretended not to notice and put him at ease by discussing her previous acquaintance with his mother. Once the young man felt more comfortable, she casually ordered him another cup of coffee.⁵

Dolley Madison informed her sister Anna Cutts of the continual flow of guests at the White House, saying, “We had a dinner yesterday all the Heads of departments and their wives,

Tayloes and Mrs. Ogle, Mr. and Mrs. Halsey from Providence, some officers, &c.” Receiving fifteen to twenty guests every other night surely took its toll on the Madisons. Even her longtime friend Anna Maria Thornton wrote apologetically for sending her a letter, because she knew that Dolley Madison was “frequently overwhelmed with Company.” During the spring of 1809, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the architect hired to improve the White House, informed the First Lady of his purchase of “2 dozen very elegant white [ivory] handled knives & forks 2 dozen desert ditto, 2 steels, 2 carving knives & forks & a cheese knife being a compleat set” for use in the White House. He unfortunately could not secure “any double or treble Wine Coasters,” which she requested. Evidently, her orders proved difficult to obtain because of the large quantities of china and silverware needed to supply her White House functions. In numerous correspondences, he apologies for not being able to acquire exactly what she wants.⁶

During the years after the end of the War of 1812, Americans experienced many changes taking place, ushering in a new era of American culture. Americans *en masse* breathed a collective sigh of relief and felt a renewed sense of national solidarity and confidence. Nonetheless, at this time, the country entered into an era of weak presidents. Presidents Madison, Monroe, and Adams all suffered from limited popularity and a decline in presidential influence, as a more dominant Congress emerged. After his victory at the Battle of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson surfaced as a strong leader who seemed to embody the democratic notions of antebellum America. Each of Jackson’s immediate predecessors employed presidential dinner parties to gain public favor, but what left the lasting impression on their guests was the manner in which these parties either seemed exclusive, and therefore aristocratic, or open, and therefore, democratic. In fact, political rivalries drove these perceptions and no doubt colored the descriptions contemporaries gave of dinner parties and levees.⁷

In 1815, Dolley Madison held a well-attended ball in celebration of General Jackson. At the Octagon House, the temporary Executive Mansion on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Nineteenth Street, “the society reporter” noticed that Jackson appeared “awkward in [his] stiff masculine dress.” Dolley Madison meanwhile appeared graceful and completely at home in her entertaining role. A child of the American frontier, Jackson often seemed rough around the edges to urbane Washington socialites. A simple country existence suited his tastes.⁸

Jackson wanted to return to the yeoman-farmer ideal of his predecessors, especially Jefferson, but historians, up until the last ten years or so, continued to focus only on the political and economic impact of Jackson’s presidential policies. Some Jacksonian scholars, like Robert Remini, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Richard E. Ellis, and Charles Sellers, provided excellent analysis, but they have limited their focus to the political and economic implications of Jackson’s presidential policies. Remini saw Old Hickory as the type of man who radically altered “the structure and appearance” of nearly everything he touched. Such a statement suggests broad social and cultural implications for Jacksonian studies. Yet, few have addressed Jacksonian dinner culture. How did Jackson’s entertaining at the White House affect his views on popular representation? A close analysis of the process of presidential dining after the War of 1812, beginning with James Monroe, can shed some light on the socio-culinary atmosphere of the early nineteenth century and its implications for “Jacksonian democracy.”⁹

By 1817, the slow progress of White House repairs meant it fell on James and Elizabeth Monroe to refurnish the Executive Mansion. Congress appropriated \$23,000 for refurnishing the Executive Mansion, and it was not without conflict that the Monroes used “almost half of that amount to purchase for the government the furnishings” he bought in Paris years before when he was the American minister. Such lavish spending reflected poorly on the fifth

president in the minds of many of his contemporaries. Although cries of presidential extravagance date back to Washington's presidency, it became a recurring complaint in presidential political campaigns in the antebellum years of the republic.¹⁰

The Executive Mansion also required silverware for formal presidential dinners. Both Monroe in 1818, and later Andrew Jackson in 1833, purchased "French empire" silver made between 1800 and 1820 for the White House, which reflected the contemporary "interest in the antiquities of Rome, Greece, and Egypt" fashionable in both Europe and America. Included among the silverware purchased by Monroe were flatware and serving dishes, and "four wine coolers" made by French craftsman Jean-Baptiste-Claude Odier. Monroe also purchased soup tureens made by Jacques-Henri Fauconnier, a pupil of Odier.¹¹ Such expensive purchases reflected the president's desire to keep up with European standards of elegance.

Despite the questions of extravagance that accompanied the various purchases by Monroe and others, his revision of Washington's rules of etiquette drew criticism for exhibiting aristocratic tendencies. Monroe decided to discard the informal receiving habits that dominated the administrations of Jefferson and Madison. Diplomats could now only call on the president on official occasions instead of making informal calls "to take tea and converse with the President as with a friend." John Quincy Adams described Monroe, saying, "it was his desire to place the foreign Ministers here much upon the same footing as the American Ministers were placed at European Courts, upon a footing of form and ceremony."¹²

Upon becoming First Lady in 1817, Elizabeth Monroe abandoned Dolley Madison's practice of calling on the wives of diplomats and Congressmen when they first arrived in Washington, and she ended Dolley's ceaseless open houses at the White House. Washington women felt snubbed by Elizabeth Monroe's behavior, and let her know that they expected more from their First Lady. They complained to their husbands in Congress and purposefully

avoided her social functions. In response, Elizabeth Monroe summoned Louisa Catharine Adams, wife of the Secretary of State, on January 22, 1818, because some wives of European diplomats complained that Monroe and Adams did not call on new arrivals after their entrance into Washington. Mrs. Monroe rejected the idea of making social calls, possibly out of legitimate health reasons, and cited Martha Washington's refusal to call as precedent. Mrs. Adams, unlike the First Lady, made and returned social calls frequently. She simply refused to make them to new arrivals. Worried about how to respond, Louisa Catharine Adams wrote to her mother-in-law, Abigail Adams, for advice. With typical candor, Abigail Adams told her daughter-in-law, "What would have been said in her day if so much style, pomp, and etiquette had been assumed ... The cry of 'Monarchy, monarchy' would have resounded from Georgia to Maine." Nonetheless, Abigail Adams believed "there was no other way than the Monroes' to bring order out of confusion after Jefferson's and Madison's 'medley of equality.'" Abigail firmly believed in a hierarchical society where some people were simply better than others, and she feared democracy as a form of mob rule.¹³

President Monroe also met with his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, to discuss the important problem of the "etiquette of the visits." Notably, Monroe decided not to call on visitors, just like his predecessors dating back to George Washington. When Monroe consulted his wife about her duties, she decidedly proclaimed that "she did not think it proper for her to go to any place where it was not proper for her husband to go." Apparently, the unwillingness of their wives to pay these visits reflected poorly on the Cabinet members' ability to handle their own "social responsibilities," since the uproar among congressional wives limited the social engagements of the affected congressmen. After much discussion and an uneventful Cabinet meeting, they settled the issue by declaring, "Wives of Cabinet members would not be

expected to act as the Welcome Wagon to every legislator's family who moved to Washington, and the president's wife would similarly be relieved of the responsibility to call."¹⁴

Neither Louisa Catharine Adams nor the president's wife "met with much approval," until the women of Washington came to terms with these changes in etiquette. Elizabeth Monroe often claimed ill health as her reason for not meeting the entertainment demands of Washington society, and she may have suffered from bouts of epilepsy. Monroe did establish a pattern of "weekly drawing rooms, open to the public, and fortnightly formal receptions" hosted by the First Lady and her daughter, Eliza Hay. Monroe's "reserved and formal manner" and Eliza Hay's perceived snobbish attitude, quickly drew disdain from many members of Washington society. After Dolley Madison's frequent and lively entertainments, Elizabeth Monroe appeared cold and formal. A drawing room held by Monroe in December 1819 "opened last night to a 'beggarly row of empty chairs,'" according to contemporary William Winston Seaton. Of the mere five women present, Seaton recalled that three "were foreigners." Louisa Catharine Adams met with similar difficulties the week before with only three women showing up to a "large party" she held. Washington society women contented themselves by attending parties held by women like Madame de Neuville, wife of the Minister Plenipotentiary of France, who "enlist[ed] all varieties of character under her banner," and Madame Van Greuhm, wife of the Minister Resident from Prussia, who intended to entertain all citizens who had "sufficient leisure to honor her invitations." Yet this seemingly more democratic entertaining on the part of wealthy diplomats still required the people invited to possess a fair amount of leisure time; in other words, only wealthy, upper-class people received invitations to these grand events.¹⁵ The less affluent, namely small farmers or artisans, had to work on their farms or in their shops, and did not possess the wealth to travel far or frequently. Additionally,

the social season in Washington occurred during the fall and spring, when small farmers were busy harvesting or planting their crops.

When the Monroes held dinner parties, guests customarily assembled in the Oval Room and conversed until all members of the guest list arrived at the Executive Mansion. The President escorted the woman nearest to him to the dining room, while the First Lady entered on the arm of the Vice President, the Secretary of State, or a member of the Cabinet. “Except at diplomatic dinners, no rigid rules of seating were followed” at the Monroe’s table, “although the senators did expect places at the head of the table.” At dinner, the guests received their dishes in “the French manner” with servants passing the food to them. James Monroe frequently served imported French wines, but he also occasionally presented native wines like “Scuppernong” from North Carolina. When asked by President Monroe what he thought of “the expensive system of entertainment” required by the president, former Pennsylvania delegate Charles J. Ingersoll opined that “a dinner a month would do instead of 3 a week,” but he also saw the need to continue in the tradition of the preceding presidents. Though debate over the necessity of lavish spending on the part of the president for entertaining started during George Washington’s first term of office (and continues well into modern times), the discussions of presidential extravagance became particularly poignant during the post-War of 1812 period.¹⁶

From Martha Washington to Dolley Madison, first ladies assumed a central role in Washington society. Even the widower Jefferson recognized the need of women on certain occasions, and drafted women like Dolley Madison and his daughters to serve as hostesses. Unlike her predecessors, however, Elizabeth Monroe frequently absented herself from the White House, and Monroe still held dinners without her. Guests at Monroe’s “stag dinners,” according to one account, suffered “long silences and [reacted with] early departures.”

Evidently, the fifth president was not a great conversationalist, and without a hostess, women guests would not go to the White House. Thus, the dinners lacked the charming conversation required among early-nineteenth century elite women. As symbols of the republican ideal, proper women used conversation to promote moral rectitude and, theoretically, kept the republic on the right path by reinforcing republican ideology in both public and private. Monroe's presidential dinners simply lacked the enthusiasm and meticulousness of his fellow Virginian James Madison and his socialite wife Dolley Madison.¹⁷

Clearly, women influenced more than just the domestic atmosphere. Most of the first presidential wives adapted themselves into the "contemporary model of womanliness." This model, or what historians refer to as the "cult of true womanhood," became prominent in early-nineteenth century. In essence, this ideology divided the larger society into complementary but mutually exclusive public and private spheres, work and home life, politics and family. Although individual experiences varied, the ideal remained the same – women did not belong in politics. Nonetheless, they held an important place in republican ideology. Historian Jan Lewis argues that the whole of society rested on the foundation of a harmonious marriage. The constant fear that America's new union would dissolve led Revolutionary era writers to develop a rhetoric targeting women and marriage to promote Republican virtues in men. Deplorable traits in a mate included inconsistency, superficiality, or anything that represented the corruption and vice of tyrannical governments. To this end, women needed to embody republican ideals to ensure their husbands remained virtuous. By playing such a role, their contribution to politics in early America often took the subtle form of both public and private entertainments.¹⁸

During the early years of the Capital City, social events, or the lack thereof, could make or break a politician's career. Louisa Catharine Adams, as the wife of a politician, played

an instrumental role in her husband's election to the Presidency. John Quincy Adams refused to campaign for the coveted office, believing that it should come as a reward for his years of service to his country. Yet Louisa Catharine Adams worked nothing short of social magic to promote her husband at dinners, balls, drawing rooms, and by calling on the wives of numerous Congressmen. Effectively, not a day passed "from 1818 until early 1825 when Louisa Catharine Adams did not campaign for her husband." She rode to Maryland, because, as she claimed, her "connections in this state are of the most respectable and distinguished," and she solicited them in her husband's interest. "Maryland," she claimed, "will be his." By 1824, the Adams family boasted of "having sixty-eight Congressmen as steady guests." The coup-de-grace came on January 8, 1824, at the ball given by the Adams family in honor of General Andrew Jackson on the ninth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. Various accounts declare this affair as the event of the decade. Despite Louisa Catharine Adams's careful preparation of the dinner table, the great number of guests in attendance required the company to eat standing up. Not that charming a person in appearance or personality, the Secretary of State benefitted his presidential campaign by hosting this important social event.¹⁹

The second generation of American leadership began in 1824 with John Quincy Adams, a son of the revolutionary generation. Adams shared a love of alcohol that seemed to permeate both the first and second generations of presidents. He typically "took two or three glasses of Madeira wine after dinner," even though his doctor told him to cut back on his drinking. One account of his vast knowledge of wines recounts that Adams correctly identified eleven out of fourteen varieties of Madeira presented to him at a party given by "New York socialite" Roswell Colt.²⁰ Clearly, Adams had developed a sensitive palate for fine wine.

During Adams's four years as president, Jacksonian opponents cast a critical eye on his household expenses. John Quincy and Louisa Catharine Adams "lived with great elegance,

more or less in the tradition of Monroe,” but unlike Monroe, their “flair for gaiety” in entertaining, not the purchase of extravagant European furnishings, led to scrutiny of their social practices. The purchase of both a billiard table and chess table with federal funds became a focus of criticism. The Jacksonians’ calls of monarchical excess fit into Adams’s already unpopular and “unappealing public image” as “abrupt, stuffy, and cool.” First Lady Adams also developed a negative reputation as a proud daughter of a rich merchant educated in Europe. The Adamses’s unhappy marriage and home-life undoubtedly affected their entertaining as well. Their numerous absences from the White House to attend to personal matters at home, much like the seeming inaccessibility of Elizabeth Monroe, seemed suspect in the public perception and limited the effectiveness of their official entertainments.²¹

The Adamses’s European steward may have also contributed to their haughty reputation, even though numerous other previous presidents maintained French chefs or stewards. The Monroes, for instance, after spending years on diplomatic missions in Europe, actually spoke French among themselves within the White House. John Quincy Adams had a long relationship with his steward, Antoine Michel Giusta, whom he met in Belgium in 1814 after the Italian defected from Napoleon’s army. Referred to simply as “Antoine,” he married the Adams’s maid in London, and the now steward and housekeeper couple returned to America with their employers.²²

They served the Adamses until 1829 when, upon a letter of recommendation by Adams, they became steward and housekeeper for Andrew Jackson. Despite their new employment, the Giustas often walked the short distance to Meridian Hill to visit the Adams family on Sundays. When Jackson learned of this, he got angry; when he discovered that “Madame Giusta sometimes carried gifts of breads and tarts,” he became livid.²³ Initially, Jackson allowed them to visit their former employers on an infrequent basis, but eventually, he forbade

this practice altogether. Always watchful for possible political plots against him and extremely demanding of loyalty from those around him, Jackson felt the Giustas should be loyal to only him while in his service and that socializing with his political opponent was inappropriate.²⁴

The Giustas handled most of the affairs for the Jackson household much in the manner they had under the Adamses; therefore, “there seems to have been little difference between Jackson’s entertaining and that of his predecessor, except that neither the general nor his family ever seemed particularly comfortable with the sophisticated social productions.” The Giustas served in this capacity through his first term of office, but by 1833, Jackson could not afford to keep them. Always broke from his lavish spending habits, he increasingly relied on the labor of slaves brought from the Hermitage to the White House to cut his expenditures.²⁵

After a decade of lackadaisical entertaining in Washington, according to one contemporary account, the White House became lively again in March 1829. If Rachel Jackson had lived to become the First Lady, Jackson and his wife would have performed their entertaining roles separately. Gendered segregation dominated social intercourse at formal functions. This gendered separation contradicted the entertaining styles of both the Madisons and the Monroes, who followed the model, set forth by the Washingtons, in which the male and female roles visibly overlapped. For instance, at a ball given on General Jackson’s behalf in Baltimore, “Mrs. Jackson received a crowd of ladies in her parlor,” while “the General [had] a thronging multitude of gentlemen in his.” At home, Andrew Jackson acted as “a busy entertainer,” talking to his guests with customary vigor while Rachel Jackson handled the needs of other guests. Of course, by the time of Jackson’s presidency, he had become a widower and had to rely on others to assist him in entertaining. Emily Donelson, his niece by marriage to his nephew A. J. Donelson, served as his hostess on numerous occasions.²⁶

When Jackson assumed the presidency, the United States had evolved into a much stronger federal government than under previous administrations. This change does not mean that the actions of important high-ranking political officials no longer carried any significance. The social behavior of the President and other key political figures mattered, as is evident in the public reaction to the Eaton Affair and the slanderous attacks on personal character in pamphlets and newspapers during presidential campaigns, but the pressure of internal governmental collapse had taken on a new tone. Surely, the dramatic economic and political changes during the Jacksonian era were very important, but a historical analysis of Jackson's entertaining would shed light on a more personal aspect of his life and career. How did he structure his dinner parties? Did his private behavior reflect his political rhetoric? Whose style did he emulate?

Though often compared to Washington as a great military leader, Jackson instead saw similarities between himself and Jefferson. As widowers, both had unofficial first ladies who helped shoulder the burden of entertaining. One could even argue that Jackson's 1829 inauguration party at the White House represented Jefferson's *pêle-mêle* model run amok. Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith, describing the unruliness of the scene, recalled that "the President, after having been *literally* nearly pressed to death and almost suffocated and torn to pieces by the people in their eagerness to shake hands with Old Hickory, had retreated through the back way or south front and had escaped to his lodgings." In fact, Jackson could not move into the White House until March 10, when the repairs from damages during his inaugural festivities were finally complete.²⁷

Like Jefferson, Jackson refused an elaborate inaugural ceremony. Margaret Bayard Smith praised his "true greatness," in declining to have a military parade. Second, she added, "I think I will like him vastly, when I know him – I have heard a number of things about him

which indicate a kind, warm, feeling and affectionate heart.” Smith’s accounts of early Washington society provide an invaluable contribution to the study of early presidential history. Along with other contemporaneous accounts of the Jacksonian era, Smith reveals a more subdued side of Old Hickory that contrasts greatly with his famous military exploits, or his explosive temper.²⁸

By the 1810s, the elites of Washington followed a distinct pattern for formal entertainments. The president gave the first dinner of the season “for his cabinet and their wives,” and then, “by order of precedence,” each member of the cabinet held his own gathering in turn. Invitation to one these events displayed a person’s social position and allowed wealthy women a chance to flaunt their finery. The wives of foreign ministers and officers of state typically represented the “female society” present at these functions, because only the most affluent members of society could afford to bring their families with them. English traveler Frances Trollope, after her visit during the early 1830s, described Washington by saying, “The residence of the foreign legations and their families gives a tone to the society of this city which distinguishes it greatly from all others.” Because Washington was the residence of congressmen, “who must be presumed to be the *élite* of the entire body of citizens, both in respect to talent and education,” she concluded that “this cannot fail to make Washington a more agreeable abode than any other city in the Union.” Gathered together at formal dinners, presidential levees, and balls throughout the congressional season, this tight-knit group did not take kindly to tavern maids like Peggy Eaton rising above her appropriate social designation.²⁹

Jackson, on the other hand, did not fit into this model of Washington society, and he proved to be less discriminating about the “quality” of his guests at the table. As early as 1804, one of Jackson’s neighbors described him as “the prince of hospitality” at his newly established home, the Hermitage. The neighbor gave him this label/nickname not “because he entertained

a great many people; but because the poor, belated peddler, was as welcome as the President of the United States, and made so much at his ease that he felt as though he had got home.”

General Jackson preferred a simple, yet dignified, agrarian existence, much like Washington and Jefferson.³⁰

Jackson also shared with Jefferson his distrust of “society women and their protocol.” During his first administration, Jackson suffered from the infamous Peggy Eaton scandal, or the Petticoat Affair, that forced him to dissolve his entire Cabinet. When Jackson proposed including longtime friend John Eaton in his Cabinet, Washington society women balked, because with the President and his vice president, Martin Van Buren, both as widowers, this meant Peggy Eaton, as wife of a Cabinet member, would rise to the forefront of Washington society. Thereafter, society women rejected Peggy Eaton at every possible social function. Jackson, still suffering the loss of his beloved wife Rachel and believing that the vicious political attacks on her character during his campaign for the presidency had killed her, empathized with Peggy Eaton. Purportedly, upon learning of the sentiments of Washington’s women, Jackson declared, “Do you suppose that I have been sent here by the people to consult the ladies of Washington as to the proper persons to compose my Cabinet? In the selection of its members I shall consult my own judgment, looking to the great and paramount interests of the whole country, and not to the accommodations of the society and drawing-rooms of this or any other city.” His powerful rhetoric illustrated his unwillingness to let women tell him what to do and reaffirmed the nineteenth-century notion that women held no place in politics. The social climate of Washington, however, felt the impact of the Washington women even if Jackson chose to ignore their influence.³¹

Familial relations grew tenuous between President Jackson and the Donelsons during 1830-31, because of the political intrigue caused by the Petticoat Affair. Not only did this

scandal eventually dismantle Jackson's Cabinet, but it also affected his ability to entertain at the White House by leaving him without a hostess. Emily Donelson, his usual hostess, absented herself from Washington during the scandal. Jackson's trusted associate Alfred Balch cautioned the President, saying, "I perceived the want of a presiding lady in the establishment," but "the presence of ladies will prevent intrusions, to which I perceive that you are exceedingly liable." While "it is true Mr. Jefferson had no females with him" on numerous occasions at the White House, "it must be recollected that Washington was a small place when he was in office and that for every *politician* then we have 20 now." Balch seems to be stressing Jackson's need for a presiding lady to handle the throngs of visitors, or "intrusions," that could keep the president from accomplishing his duties. To compensate for Donelson's absence, Jackson allowed the wife of William Berkeley Lewis, his trusted manager and old military compatriot, to assume temporarily the duties of the White House hostess.³²

Despite his reputation as an uncouth frontiersman, Jackson surprised many Americans with his polite manners. Years before Old Hickory's presidency, Edward Livingston, the new aide-de-camp in New Orleans in 1814, invited General Jackson to dine with him one evening; Livingston's wife feared that "this wild General from Tennessee" would be "most distressingly out of place at a fashionable dinner party in the first drawing-room of the most polite city in America." Instead, Jackson proved to be quite the opposite. Similar to General Washington in his quiet dignity and military garb, Jackson struck a dashing figure. After they dined and conversed politely with him for some time, he took his leave, whereupon the women questioned their hostess, "Is *this* your back woods-man? Why, madam, he is a prince!" Similarly, years later, Fanny Kemble upon first meeting President Jackson described him as "a good specimen ... his manners perfectly simple and quiet, and therefore, very good."³³

Perhaps the most surprising representation of Jackson's character came from Thomas Jefferson. Though the apocryphal account derives mainly from hearsay, it bears noting. As told by Nicholas Trist, Jackson's manners greatly impressed Jefferson when he met with him during a celebration in Lynchburg. Although they likely had met before in the 1790s when Jackson was a senator, this meeting greatly impressed Jefferson. Widely known for the excellence of his own manners, Jefferson gained acceptance as a good judge of them in others. Yet he could not understand how Jackson had acquired the ease and dignity of manners of one who frequented the courts in Europe. Once again, Jackson does not appear to fit the oft-repeated view that he was an uncivilized backwoodsman. Nonetheless, Jefferson still had mixed feelings about Jackson at the time of his death in 1826.³⁴

Despite the dramatic change from his rural solitude to the bustling social center of Washington, Jackson "maintained the same easy and profuse hospitality to which he had been accustomed at the Hermitage." In contrast to the English response to Jefferson's manners in 1803, an English traveler had this to say of President Jackson: "His manners are dignified, and have been called high-bred and aristocratic by travelers; but, to my mind, are the model of republican simplicity and straightforwardness. He is quite a man one would be proud to show as the exponent of the manners of his country."³⁵ Old Hickory, while polite in his engagements, saw himself as a representative of the average working man.

Jackson's dining habits reflected this image of him as a representative of the "common man." He defied the conventions of Washington society by maintaining his standards of eating from back home in Tennessee. Even after he became President, Jackson still ate in the elite standard of country cooking. He frequently consumed "beef, fish, wild turkey, partridge, canvasback duck, chicken, tongue, and that ubiquitous standard of later Presidential menus, sweetbreads." The only non-American foods purchased for Jackson from August 21-31, 1829,

were English cheese and turtle soup. For his protein, he most frequently ate ham or chicken, sometimes both, and nearly every day, he enjoyed milk, bread, and eggs. Veal also frequented his table. Not a fan of eating large quantities of fruits and vegetables, Jackson ordered only limited amounts of lemons, sweet potatoes, cabbage, melons, potatoes, and cucumbers. Not surprisingly, since this bill came from the end of August, the most common item ordered was ice. Overall, Jackson spent \$60.64 on sundries for half the month of August alone.³⁶ While most of these items were common foods for most Americans, Jackson's access to large quantities of milk, sugar, butter, and even ice reflected his increased wealth and status.

The quantities of food and drink purchased by Jackson stood out as well above the means of average citizens. American novelist James Fenimore Cooper described the average diet of Americans in 1838: "The Americans are the grossest feeders of any civilized nation known. As a nation, their food is heavy, course, and indigestible." Captain Frederick Marryat, a British traveler, disagreed. He wrote, "The cookery in the United States is exactly what it is and must be everywhere else – in a ratio with the degree of refinement of the population." He found refinement more in the urban centers than in the rural parts of America. "In the principal cities," he added, "you will meet with as good cookery in private houses as you will in London, or even Paris," but "as you advance into the country, and population recedes, you run through all the scale of cookery until you come to the 'corn bread and common doings' ... in the far west." In his estimation, the cookery in American urban areas more closely resembled that which he was most familiar, European cuisine, and therefore, proved more pleasing to his palate.³⁷

The basic foods in the early-nineteenth-century American diet, especially along the western frontier, consisted mainly of corn and salted pork, with a limited variety of vegetables. Frontiersmen like Jackson appeared rough and uncivilized in their culinary habits compared to

the more established areas along the east coast. Socialites in the eastern urban centers, much like their European counterparts, came to expect a variety of foods served with elegance and fashion. The notion of abundance still reflected advanced wealth and status for Americans, but Jackson's interpretation of abundance as only relative to meat and drink seemed old fashioned and archaic to people more attuned to the changes in culinary habits back in Europe.³⁸

The most illustrative account of Jackson's presidential household grocery expenses came from a bill dated May 21-31, 1834. The sheer amount of meat ordered by the President is staggering. During the span of eleven days, Jackson required 261 pounds of beef (varying grades), 71.5 pounds of veal, 12 pounds of sardines, 46 pounds of bacon, a whole pig, plus another 7.5 pounds of pork, and 13.5 pounds of ham, as well as 33 pounds of mutton. In addition to these, he ordered lamb, hogs feet, livers, sweetbreads, and two sheep's heads. Given the high cost of beef in the early-nineteenth century, Jackson certainly spent lavishly. This fact did not escape the notice of Jackson. In a letter to A. J. Donelson dated August 22, 1829, Jackson complained "the beef account ... has been too high, and more than the market." Jackson knew the importance of "always knowing your means, and living within them," despite the fact that he purchased profligately.³⁹ Jackson, as a farmer, knew the value of a dollar.

The absence of vegetables from Jackson's grocery bills, nevertheless, may be misleading. During his first term of office, approximately November or December 1817, President Monroe commissioned Charles Bizet to act as the gardener for the White House grounds. In this capacity, Bizet "seems to have maintained a vegetable garden within the White House fence and supervised a drawn-out process of grading and tree planting on the north, across Pennsylvania Avenue." In 1825, Adams replaced Bizet with John Ousley, who "remained at the White House as head gardener for many years." Much like the founding fathers, Adams fashioned his White House garden into an expression "as nationalistic as the

government program he was laboring to implement.” During the summer of 1827, Adams described his “small garden of not less than two acres” as abundant with “forest and fruit-trees, shrubs, hedges, esculent vegetables, kitchen and medicinal herbs, hot-house plants, flowers and weeds to the amount ... of at least one thousand.”⁴⁰ This plentiful garden most likely still flourished during Jackson’s administration, providing for his table.

Although Jackson likely saved money with his White House garden, he still spent considerably on alcohol. From the same grocery bill for August 1829, Jackson purchased one dozen bottles London porter and one gallon of whiskey at a cost of \$7 total. A more startling example comes from a bill for his stay at the Hygeia Hotel in Fort Monroe, Virginia. During his nearly four-week stay, he and his entourage (four other adults, three children, and five servants) ordered twelve bottles of champagne, twelve bottles of claret, twelve bottles of Madeira, eighteen bottles of Port Wine, three bottles of Fountinac, six bottles of French brandy, two bottles “Old H Gin” [probably old Holland gin], three gallons of Whiskey, and six bottles of olives. The cost for this bounty amounted to about one-third of Jackson’s total bill.

Although expensive, Jackson’s bill apparently received a break since Marshall Parks informed him that “no charge is made for company entertaind [sic] while at the Rip Raps.”⁴¹

Historian John Spencer Bassett systematically noted the “large amount of liquor” consumed by Jackson during his presidency. While Congress was in session he ordered “two hogsheads of claret, one barrel of brandy, twenty baskets of champagne, one half pipe of sherry, and one barrel of gin --- \$662.” He also bought eight barrels of ale, four dozen bottles of London porter, one dozen bottles of old port wine, and two gallons of whiskey. With the growing number of Congressmen in Washington during the early nineteenth century, Jackson felt obliged to entertain them well and his bill for alcohol certainly reflects this occurrence. During the summer, members of Congress returned to their homes in various states across the

union, and Jackson's diminished alcohol bill reflected their departure. After Jackson returned to Washington for the Congressional season, his alcohol orders increased exponentially. From October through November, 1834, Jackson ordered eleven gallons of Holland gin, three of Jamaica spirits, three bottles each of Chateau Margaux and Chateau Lafitte, one dozen bottles of London porter, two barrels of ale, and one half barrel of lager beer. The total cost amounted to \$511.11. For December, "the orders included one dozen [bottles of] old port, one dozen [bottles of] Chateau Margaux, one dozen [bottles of] Sauterne, and two dozen [bottles of] London porter." Jackson's embodiment of stereotypical American antebellum drinking habits did not single him out. Many shared his love for spirited drinks. Whiskey garnered such high popularity in the late-eighteenth century that even George Washington produced it in the last years of his life, and by the mid-nineteenth century, "whiskey and beer together were cemented as America's alcoholic beverages of choice."⁴²

During 1837-38, British Naval Captain Frederick Marryat traveled to America with the purpose of analyzing its government and institutions, but he also commented on his American culinary experience. The reader, however, must take his critical views of American society with a grain of salt since his background as a staunch Tory-sympathizer lent a strong bias to his perception of anything American. His remarks on the presidency are particularly telling. He praised Martin Van Buren, then President of the United States, for "striking at the very roots of their boasted equality, and one which General Jackson did not venture --- i.e., he has prevented the mobocracy from intruding themselves at his levees" and preventing "the intrusion of any improper person." He criticized Jackson for just "a few years ago" allowing anyone to "walk into the saloon in all his dirt" and "disgust the ladies." Mr. Van Buren "deserves great credit for this step," he said, "for it was a bold one; but I must not praise him too much, or he may lose his next election."⁴³

In reality, Jackson's rhetorical use of the ideal of republican simplicity did not fit the practice during his presidency. Although Jackson participated in stereotypical early-nineteenth-century American culinary habits, like eating large quantities of meat and drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, he nonetheless lived far beyond the means of the yeoman farmers with whom he identified. His hefty grocery bills alone singled him out from small farmers. If Jefferson sought to impress Europeans with the bounty and variety of his table, Jackson only replicated this notion in part. He provided a variety of meats and an array of drinks for his guests, but largely ignored vegetables of any kind, foreign or domestic, at a time when vegetables became more common at the table. Such a spread did little to assuage the criticism of European travelers. Furthermore, despite the rowdiness of Jackson's democratic inaugural ceremony in 1829, the remainder of his presidential entertainments appear quite similar in form to those of his predecessors. The idea of representing the "common man" became merely the rhetorical device of candidates for years to come.

During the years following Jackson's presidency and leading into the Victorian era, the rhetoric of democracy took on increased significance. William Henry Harrison's "Log-Cabin campaign" during the election of 1840 reflects this phenomenon most clearly. Whig Congressman Charles Ogle criticized Van Buren's dining habits at the White House during his three-day diatribe known as "The Regal Splendor of the Presidential Palace." From April 14-16, 1840, Ogle decried the presidential spending habits of "Sweet Sandy Whiskers," as Ogle's acquaintance Thurlow Weed liked to call Van Buren, in the House of Representatives. After traversing the topics of the landscaping and interior of the White House, Ogle continued his demagogic assault by condemning the President's table. Instead of traditional American dishes like "hog and hominy," "fried meat and gravy," or a mug of "hard cider," Van Buren ate French food and stocked his presidential table with a "massive gold plate and French sterling

silver services.” Such accusations spoke to the divisions between East and West. Ogle exaggerated when he claimed that, “the period usually required by Kings and democratic Presidents to masticate a state dinner” amounted to “five consecutive hours.”⁴⁴ Such criticisms contributed greatly to Van Buren’s loss in the 1840 campaign.

Ironically, Andrew Jackson, the self-proclaimed representative of the “common man” and exponent of democracy, also purchased expensive silver. Sixteen years after Monroe obtained his profligate foreign silver for the White House, Jackson purchased Fauconnier silver, including “ten round plates and a coffee pot.” The death of the Russian minister Major General Ban Feodor Vasil’evich Teil’-fan-Seroskerken led to the sale of his effects, from which Jackson bought silver which weighed “a total of 2,693 ounces” and “cost \$4,308.82.” The remaining silver, made by Napoleon’s personal silversmith Martin-Guillaume Biennais, included “two soup tureens, four vegetable dishes,” and numerous supplemental pieces, such as “two cruet stands, two mustard stands, and a number of double salt dips;” the collection also included “a number of small bottle stands and two sauceboats and their accompanying stands.” Jackson purchased silver from Philadelphia, porcelain from France, and Pittsburgh-made glassware at the Hermitage, and in 1833, he acquired “eight Sheffield-plate entrée dishes from Susan Decatur, the impoverished widow of Commodore Stephen Decatur.”⁴⁵

If Democrats focused on the importance of the “self-made man,” and Whigs emphasized the importance of “character,” Jackson’s entertaining style put him somewhere in between the two. Although he contested the notions of character put forth by the women of Washington in respect to Peggy Eaton, he held his own strong opinions about the function of one’s character in society. He set himself apart from the average citizen with his lavish spending habits, but rejected many of the Europeanized tastes of Americans living in the urban

east. He sought to bring the interests of the western populations into the fold of the national government, and his culinary choices reflect his country tastes.

Jackson redefined republican simplicity to fit the changes in American society taking place in the early-nineteenth century. The American Industrial Revolution pushed the country forward so quickly that many people in it felt growing pains. Yet many others felt that the changes taking place reinforced their sense of destiny and progress. Republican simplicity in the nineteenth century, to Jackson, meant looking back to an arcadian past to determine what values American society should hold onto for their idyllic future. Despite the fact that he saw himself as the spokesman for a generation of “common” men, his dining habits represented a continuation of the behaviors of his predecessors, whom he had criticized so openly.

¹ A few examples of this historical literature include: For presidential entertaining in early Washington society, see Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); See also, Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); For the “dinner-table bargain,” see Chapter 2 of Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002); For Washington’s presidential dining practices, see John Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); For Dolley Madison’s entertaining practices as First Lady, see Chapters 10-12 of Catharine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

² Allen C. Clark, *The Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, D.C.: Press of W.F. Roberts Company, 1970), 166; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 208.

³ Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 74-75, 73; Catharine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 63; Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 253, 183, 185-86.

⁴ Mrs. Sarah Seaton’s Diary entry for November 12, 1812, Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the National Intelligencer: A Biographical Sketch*. 1871 Reprint (New York: Arno Press Inc., 1970), 84-85; this account also appears in: Allen C. Clark, *The Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, D.C.: Press of W. F. Roberts Company, 1914), 137-39.

⁵ Seaton, *William Winston Seaton*, 84-85; Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 244-45.

⁶ DPM to Anna Cutts, May 1812, Madison, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 165; Anna Maria Thornton to DPM, August 21, 1809, Madison, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 122; Benjamin Henry Latrobe to DPM, March 22, 1809, Madison, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 112.

⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 181-518; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, 190.

⁹ Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 183.

¹⁰ Lucius Wilmerding, Jr., “James Monroe and the Furniture Fund,” *The New York Historical Society Quarterly*, XLIV (April 1960), 133-49; in Joseph D. Carr, “History in White House Silver,” in *White House History in Journal of the White House Historical Association*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1983), 31-33 ; “Extravagance” became a common complaint among political opponents in Washington. The “Log-Cabin campaigns” against Martin Van Buren by William Henry Harrison and Charles Ogle are emblematic of this recurring issue.

¹¹ Carr, “History of the White House Silver,” 29, 30, 33. Jean-Baptiste-Claude Odier (1763-1850).

¹² Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 396-97; November 7, 1817, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary From 1795 to 1848*, vol. IV, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), 16-17.

¹³ Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Wives: An Anecdotal History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 49; January 22, 1818, Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. IV, 45-48; William Seale, *The President’s House: A History*, vol. 1, (Washington, D.C: White House Historical Association with the cooperation of the National Geographic Society, 1986), 157; Abigail Adams to Louisa Catharine Adams, January 24, 1818, Reel 442, Adams Papers; quoted in Phyllis Lee Levin, *Abigail Adams: a biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, A Thomas Dunne Book, 1987), 484-85.

¹⁴ December 11-12, 1818, Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. IV, 188-92; Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Laura Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20. Carl Sferrazza Anthony cited Monroe’s Cabinet meeting over diplomatic receiving as taking place on December 29, 1817.

¹⁵ Ammon, *James Monroe*, 399; Boller, Jr., *Presidential Wives*, 50, 51; Ammon, *James Monroe*, 399; Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the National Intelligencer*, 1871 reprint (New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1970), 144, 145.

¹⁶ Ammon, *James Monroe*, 402, 403; C.J. Ingersoll to Richard Rush, February 8, 1823, in William M. Meigs, *Life of Charles Jared Ingersoll* (Philadelphia, 1897), 118-19, http://books.google.com/books?id=YlgcAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+life+of+charles+jared+ingersoll&hl=en&ei=MXPFTvujGaHIsQKq58SABQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed November 17, 2011); Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, April 8, 1817, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022811> (accessed November 17, 2011); James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, April 23, 1817, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022827> (accessed November 17, 2011); C.J. Ingersoll to Richard Rush, February 8, 1823, in William Montgomery Meigs, *Life of Charles Jared Ingersoll* (Philadelphia, 1897), 118, http://books.google.com/books?id=YlgcAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+life+of+charles+jared+ingersoll&hl=en&ei=MXPFTvujGaHIsQKq58SABQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed November 17, 2011).

¹⁷ Congressmen did not always bring their wives with them to Washington, so it was not uncommon for White House dinners to contain mostly males. When some of the guests were women, "Mrs. Monroe or her daughter presided." Ammon, *James Monroe*, 402; Caroli, *First Ladies*, 18-19.

¹⁸ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966), 151-174; Caroli, *First Ladies*, 25; Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, vol. 44, no. 4 (Oct. 1987), 689-721; Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History, with documents*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 187.

¹⁹ Jack Shepherd, *Cannibals of the Heart: A Personal Biography of Louisa Catherine and John Quincy Adams* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 207, 239, 209, 241; Caroli, *First Ladies*, 21; Carl Sferrazza Anthony, *First Ladies: The Saga of the Presidents' Wives and Their Power, 1789-1961* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1990), 106-07; Shepherd, *Cannibals of the Heart*, 241.

²⁰ Shepherd, *Cannibals of the Heart*, 345n.

²¹ Seale, *The President's House*, vol. 1, 170, 165.

²² Seale, *The President's House*, vol. 1, 166.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Seale, *The President's House*, vol. 1, 180-81.

²⁵ Seale, *The President's House*, vol. 1, 177, 181.

²⁶ Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years in Washington*, 1923 Reproduction (Laverne, TN: Nabu Press, 2000), 171; Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 3, 80; Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 121; Rachel Jackson died of a heart attack on December 22, 1828, and Jackson buried her at the Hermitage on December 24. Harold D. Moser, J. Clint Clifft, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. VI, 1825-1828 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 547; For more on Emily Donelson see, Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

²⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005) 321-22, 865; In the famous episode of Andrew Jackson's 1828 inauguration, many of Jackson's White House guests grew drunk and rowdy, damaging furniture. See Andrew Burstein's *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Random House, 2003), 173; Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*. 1923 Reproduction (LaVergne, TN: Nabu Press, 2010), 295.

²⁸ Smith, *The First Forty Years*, 284-5.

²⁹ John F. Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 107; Mrs. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832), 177.

³⁰ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1:308-309; Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 2:657. For the whole episode, see 2:657-660.

³¹ Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 4; For a full treatment of the Eaton Affair, see Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 190-246; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 200; Parton notes that after the President and Vice President, the highest ranking Cabinet member was the Secretary of State, below him came the Secretary of the Treasury, and then the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Attorney General. See Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3:173-74; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 109; "Narrative by Major William

B. Lewis," October 25, 1859, cited in Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3:329. Quoted in Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 201. Allgor's note #23(p.268) incorrectly cites the quotation from the "Narrative" in Parton as being on 3:160-61. The entire "Narrative" is on Parton, *Life*, 3:310-30.

³² Alfred Balch to Andrew Jackson, July 21, 1831, in Andrew Jackson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, ed. John Spencer Bassett (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1929), 4:315; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. The Oxford History of the United States series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 340.

³³ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 2:30, 31; 3:599.

³⁴ The story came to Mr. Trist, years after Jefferson's death, by an "old friend" of Jefferson's from Paris. Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3:603.

³⁵ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3:597, 598. The 1803 English response to Jefferson I referred to is "The Merry Affair." See Dumas Malone, *Jefferson & His Time, First Term, 1801-1809*, vol. IV (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 367-92.

³⁶ Barry H. Landau, *The President's Table* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 11; From a bill for "Amount of Sundries furnished The President of the U. States by Marshall Parks" between August 21-31, 1829, in Jackson, *Correspondence*, 4:64-65.

³⁷ James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat: Hints on the Social and Civic Relations of the United States of America* (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1838), 164-65; Captain Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America: With Remarks on Its Institutions*, ed. Sydney W. Jackson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 378, 380.

³⁸ The notion that Jackson's culinary habits appeared rough and unrefined to urban easterners derives from the sharp contrasts drawn between the simple culinary habits of westerners and the extravagances of urbanites during the political campaigns that immediately followed Jackson's presidency. A clear example of this is the "Log Cabin Campaign" between Martin Van Buren and William Henry Harrison. Reginald Horsman, *Feast or Famine: Food and Drink in American Westward Expansion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 18; I discuss European culinary habits in more detail in chapter one of this thesis.

³⁹ Jackson's total cost from May 21-31, 1834, equaled \$47.15. Nearly half of that cost comes from the beef supply he ordered. Jackson, *Correspondence*, 5:267; Jackson, *Correspondence*, 4:65; Memorandum to Andrew Jackson, Jr., April 12, 1832, Jackson, *Correspondence*, 4:433.

⁴⁰ Seale, *The President's House, vol. 1*, 167, 168; For more on gardening and the Founding Fathers, see Andrea Wulf, *Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); John Quincy Adams, *The Diary of John Quincy Adams*, June 12, 1827; cited in Seale, *The President's House, vol. 1*, 169.

⁴¹ Jackson, *Correspondence*, 4:64; "Jackson's Bill at Hygeia Hotel" from Marshall Parks and "Pr Wm H Parks," Andrew Jackson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 5:168-69; The total bill was \$395.75; lodging for his party cost \$267.75, and the alcohol bill amounted to \$128; Jackson, *Correspondence*, 5:169. The "Rip Raps" is an outdoor area in Virginia along the Potomac River.

⁴² Jackson, *Correspondence*, 4:381n1; Dennis Pogue, *Founding Spirits: George Washington and the Beginnings of the American Whiskey Industry* (Buena Vista, VA: Harbour Books, 2011), 139.

⁴³ Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 156-57.

⁴⁴ Robert Gray Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 101; Charles Ogle, "The Regal Splendor of the President's Palace," quoted in Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign*, 103, 104.

⁴⁵ Carr, "History of the White House Silver," 33-34; Charles Phillips, *The Hermitage: Home of Andrew Jackson* (Hermitage: Ladies' Hermitage Association, 1997), 17.

Conclusion

Formal occasions held by members of Congress, and more importantly, by the president shaped the political climate in early America. More succinctly, social culture during the early republic subtly influenced political culture. The prevalence of regionalism during the early years of the fledgling republic made the push to create a sense of national unity by the Federalist presidents all the more difficult. Federalists wanted to create order out of chaos through a system of strictly adhered to formal engagements with the public. Both Washington and Adams strove for cohesion at home and respect abroad, and both of them drew criticism for perceived monarchical tendencies and high formality. Nonetheless, the bulk of this burden fell on the Washingtons. From the beginning of the republican experiment until the decades leading to the Civil War, every president suffered criticism from his political opponents for his choices in entertaining diplomats and members of the Congress.

During the Federalist era, urban centers dictated the social atmosphere surrounding Washington's and Adams's presidencies. With the capital residing in either New York or Philadelphia for all of Washington's and virtually all of Adams's presidencies, wealthy merchants living in these metropolitan areas became the dominant group to shape sociopolitical intercourse during the Federalist era. Washington struggled to uphold his cherished ideal of republican simplicity when faced with the lavish dinners, expensive dishware, and fashionable attire of the merchant class. As a military man, Washington always dressed his best for these formal public performances, and he maintained the traditional European standard of deference practiced during the colonial era. His expensive carriages, fine furniture, imported dishes, and numerous servants demonstrated his advanced status, and therefore, lent credence to his new station as the head of a national government. Nevertheless, after the revolution and during the

fledgling years of the early republic, the Washingtons increasingly abandoned the practice of importing goods from England in favor of goods produced in American markets. They also shifted their material mode of expression from the more ornate Rococo type of furniture to the more simplistic and straight-edged design of the Federal Style.¹

Martha Washington played a key role in this process, even though most of the documentation for decorations actually came from George Washington's letters. The handling of home decorations fell well within the domain of gentlemanly behavior during Washington's time, but Martha Washington undoubtedly offered suggestions as well. Coinciding with her husband's wishes, she replaced the older-style furniture with the new style. As the feminine figurehead of the nation, she served as a means of measuring shifting ideals of American womanhood. Public performances of normally private activities, like dining, allowed her to promote her husband's efforts to standardize social functions in early American society to a receptive, young generation of Congressmen, and their wives, hailing from all over the republic.² The Washingtons tried to conform more to the cherished republican simplicity, and although they came from wealthy backgrounds, their standard of social entertainments more closely adhered to the yeoman farming tradition.

While northern merchants visited urban markets and found greater access to various European goods and foodstuffs, most Americans still produced most of their own goods on small farms. The Washingtons, themselves farmers, knew the importance of American produce and American markets in the creation of a stable, productive union. Pride in one's land, both literally and figuratively, meant a great deal to men and women of the revolutionary generation. Using historian T. H. Breen's analysis of prerevolutionary Virginia Tidewater planters as an example, the connections between identity and livelihood possessed serious political implications. When faced with debt to the British creditors who purchased their tobacco crops,

colonial planters joined the revolutionary cause, not only to regain their threatened livelihoods, but also to rescue their pride as independent planters and capable businessmen. Yet members of the urban North generally felt less tied to the earth. Some urban merchants owned rural farmland, but increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, urbanites relied heavily on market produce brought from the surrounding countryside. The Washingtons operated under the standards of the Virginia elite, not those of the urban North.³

The Adamses followed the Washingtons' example yet faced new challenges once they relocated to the new permanent capital in Washington. Hailing from Massachusetts and possessing a modest Congregational-Unitarian background, the Adamses did not share the material standards of the northern urban merchants. The unfinished capital city along the Potomac still appeared as a wilderness to most who viewed it in 1800. Already lacking the popularity of his predecessor, Adams also struggled to establish an image and culture in the hastily constructed President's Mansion. He tried to make the best of an unpleasant situation. Adams, not particularly comfortable in either party, became isolated as members of his own Federalist party abandoned him and proponents of the opposing Democratic-Republican party rallied to defeat him in the election of 1800.⁴

During his first administration, Thomas Jefferson implemented changes in the social protocols that had far-reaching implications in the political realm. Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith asserted that Washington society emerged during Jefferson's tenure as president. His *pêle-mêle* dining model reflected changing notions of deference, democracy, and nationalism. By casting aside the social precedents of the Federalists, Jefferson restructured the political landscape in a manner better suited to his republican ideology. No longer did he group men together at dinner by rank and status alone, as had Washington.

Instead, men with like-minded political views and regional commonalities gathered on the same evenings to converse more freely about life in the capital.⁵

Jefferson redefined the physical atmosphere of presidential dinner parties by eliminating the constant need for servants and replacing them with dumbwaiters. He also provided ample supplies of food and wine at the table, which replicated the European standards of abundance and yet satisfied the Americans' need to exhibit their refinement to the Europeans. Party strife became an increasingly problematic political issue and Anglo-American relations teetered on the brink of war, but Jefferson still made a bold statement to the world. He forged greater unity at home by restructuring his method of entertaining, basing his guest lists on politics and geography, and as such, limiting the divisive party rhetoric at the White House. Yet he also redefined diplomatic protocol and demanded equal treatment for United States on an international stage by creating a diplomatic debate over etiquette with the Merry Affair. Jefferson's *pêle-mêle* dining model garnered criticism from the both the British diplomat Anthony Merry and the waning Federalist opposition, but Jefferson's democratic rules for social engagements set the precedent for dining in the new capital on the Potomac.

James and Dolley Madison followed Jefferson's standard of dining and modified it to meet their own standards of presidential entertaining. Unlike Jefferson's predominantly stag dinner parties, the Madisons freely opened their public engagements to women in large numbers. They held well-attended dinners and presidential balls, losing public approval during the War of 1812. With the onset of this unpopular war, the security of the union fell into doubt and many questioned Madison's leadership. Afterwards, the Madisons briefly suffered empty seats at their reinstated soirees following the burning of the capital in August 1814.⁶

Although the Madisons modeled their social events after those during Jefferson's administration, they abandoned the *pêle-mêle* model in 1815.⁷ Why did this happen? After the

British burned the capital in August 1814, the White House desperately needed rebuilding. Madison's popularity plummeted during the last two years of his administration, as many Americans criticized the fourth president's actions, calling him weak and cowardly. Madison often relied on his wife's charm and popular entertainments to bolster his political support. The nation craved the strong leadership it had enjoyed during the revolutionary generation; they needed another Washington to lead them through the thick fog still lingering after Americans, once again, successfully defended their independence.

After the close of the war in 1815, Washington society expected a certain level of formal entertainment from the president and first lady. When presidents and first ladies failed to meet the standards set by the Washington public, they suffered political and social rebuff and flippant criticism in the newspapers. Both the Monroes and the Adamses received public approval by hosting numerous events and dinners while campaigning. Conversely, they both ultimately lost favor during their presidencies after letting their social duties slack. Frequent absences likely stemmed from health problems on the part of the Monroes, or personal problems in the case of the Adamses, but even so, their political popularity suffered because of their lackadaisical adherence to societal obligations.⁸

Presidents, from Monroe to Jackson, often took trips but traveling also became a major preoccupation of the middle classes. A greater number of Americans than ever before experienced various regional and ethnic cultures outside of their customary neighborhood locales. Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of the popular magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, explained that to be in fashion in 1835, "we should be acquainted with our own country and people," and therefore, "we must travel." Family and friends of Congressmen flocked to the symbolic center of their nation for acculturation and sophistication. With greater numbers of Americans visiting the capital every day, the pressure to keep a "revolving door" policy for

White House guests grew exponentially. Washington socialites, therefore, only complained of presidential traveling when it interfered with the congressional social season.⁹

With the virtual death of the Federalist Party by 1817, party politics seemed less menacing in what historians refer to as “The Era of Good Feelings.” Yet as with most monikers of this nature, the name can be deceiving. Under the surface, great changes occurred. A new generation of leaders began eclipsing the old leadership of the revolutionary era. With this new generation of citizens came a new view of politics and society.

The 1820s also marked the beginning of an American Industrial Revolution. Society experienced multiple changes in relation to the average citizen’s access to food products and other material products used in cookery and entertaining. Regionalism, as early as the 1830s, gave way to economic maturation and consequently the expanded material possessions of the growing Victorian middle class. This group closely observed the rules of etiquette, and thus, the rituals of dining, how and when they ate, whom they ate with, how they dressed, how they served the food, and the food itself became elements of a strategic system of etiquette by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

By Jackson’s administration, party strife and the patronage system collided with the so-called “Era of the Common Man.” As a widower and westerner, Jackson never fully acclimated to the standards of Washington society. When society women rejected Peggy Eaton, he adamantly fought against their pretensions. In some ways, Jackson’s presidency represented a political backlash against the changes taking place in society during the nineteenth century. With this transformation, Jackson and many others called for a return to the “good old days” of Washington and Jefferson.¹¹

The economic, technological, and social changes that helped strengthen the emergent Victorian middle class resembled a double-edged sword of modernization. These

developments allowed many American citizens the prospect of greater financial acumen and, theoretically, increased social and political power, but they also led to the eventual dissolution of the agrarian ideal long-revered by the revolutionary generation. People gradually moved from their country farms to sprawling metropolises and transformed their standards for acquiring food from the country garden to urban markets.¹²

Despite modernization and the homogenization of American goods, factional struggles and regionalism continued into the nineteenth century, and members of different states sought to promote their sense of national identity above competing notions. American authors, largely women, published cookbooks to reflect their cultivation and prove to the world that Americans were members of a sophisticated nation. Since the male-dominated political culture let no direct role for women, except as moral models of ideal citizenry, women used cookbooks as a vehicle to promote their political beliefs. As cookbooks became more and more adaptable to the specific needs of Americans, some women took great pride in their regional cooking traditions and aimed to showcase their talents. Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-wife* (1824) marked the first such book, and others such as *The Carolina Housewife* (1847) and *Philadelphia Housewife* (1855) soon followed.¹³ No longer did Americans need to rely on English authors like Hannah Glasse.

Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-wife* became an extremely popular cookbook during the early nineteenth century. Randolph actively participated in the "public sphere" through established feminine channels of "cookery and entertainment," even though the public sphere remained largely off limits for women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Denied the right to vote, or to speak at public assemblies, women principally presided over the home. Like Amelia Simmons, whose second edition of *American Cookery* included recipes for "Election Cake," "Independence Cake," and "Federal Pan Cake," Mary Randolph also

politicized her recipes; her treatise contained recipes for “Plebeian Ginger Bread,” and “Doughnuts—A Yankee Cake.”¹⁴ The plebian gingerbread recipe called for three times the amount of ginger as another recipe simply titled “Ginger Bread,” and called for the use of pearl ash, where the other one recommended cloves. The limited availability of cloves and the frequent use of pearl ash in early America made this “plebeian” recipe more accessible to the average citizen. In such a way, she used her recipes to promote democratic culinary habits that served as a subtle form of political expression.

Certainly, Randolph used her boardinghouse as a means to express her political views. In 1807, Harman Blennerhassett, a guest at her boardinghouse, wrote that “she uttered more treason than my wife ever dreamed of ... she ridiculed the experiment of a Republic in this country...talked much of Thomas Moore, [sic] with whom she was highly pleased.” Mary Randolph and her husband David Meade Randolph considered themselves Federalists. When Jefferson ascended to the presidency, David Randolph lost his government job as a Virginia’s federal excise collector, and Mary Randolph clearly never forgot it. Thus, Randolph expressed political opinions through her boardinghouse, despite the widespread assumption that women held no place in politics.¹⁵

Mary Randolph’s 1824 cookbook is also significant because it emanated from an urban setting, not a plantation. With people migrating from the fields to the cities, the dynamic of American society began to change. In a city such as Randolph’s Richmond, men and women had greater access to goods than did their counterparts living in more rural places. She also encountered a greater portion of the population, including travelers, than most plantation wives, and her recipes reflected this variety. In her own right, Mary Randolph promoted a more cosmopolitan American cookery not limited to isolated plantations or small communities. Randolph included a variety of foreign recipes from places like Spain, Italy, France, and

possibly India.¹⁶ Geographic location often determined one's access to food. The expansiveness of the American landscape allowed for a variety of climate, topography, and food choices. Yet by the mid-nineteenth century, the systemization of American trade and high levels of immigration made for a greater ethnic variety of goods available at urban markets.

Through a variety of channels, American dinner culture gradually evolved into a distinct creature. Upon recognition of the characteristic nature of American foodways, women, and clearly some men, began promoting post-revolutionary American dining and entertaining as sources of national pride and patriotism. Women actively sought to establish protocols for the new nation to create a model for others to follow. These protocols had deep roots and evolved during more than a century. Historian Karen Hess noted that Randolph achieved greatness in part because she worked within a highly sophisticated system of culinary adaptation. By the mid-nineteenth century, American cuisine represented a culmination of Indian, African black, and Creole strands of cookery mixed with that of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. In short, America no longer simply replicated the culinary habits of England, but now had its own cuisine.¹⁷ With distinct national cuisine and standards of etiquette, the United States could represent itself respectfully as a refined nation that deserved equal treatment on a global stage.

While styles and interpretations of appropriate behavior have changed in the American culinary experience since the presidential levees of Washington and Adams, the relationship between political and social culture remains inextricably linked. During the nineteenth century, dining became increasingly democratic. Confirming the European stereotype of American crudeness, Jackson consumed large quantities of meat and alcohol with seemingly reckless abandon. Yet, in doing so, he unconsciously rejected the eighteenth-century elite standard of dining for the emergent "vernacular gentility" of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ As a product of

humble beginnings, Jackson embodied the rise of the Victorian middle class and their need to prove of their gentility through material displays. Although clothing remained an important indicator of status, furniture, curtains, dishes, and food became equally indicative of wealth and refinement.

After Jackson's administration, the debate over what constituted the correct ideas of refinement did not end. Future political battles, such as Harrison's "Log-Cabin campaign" of 1840 against Van Buren pitted the "common man" directly against the so-called Washington establishment, and Harrison won.¹⁹ Controversy over America's westward expansion along with the increasingly volatile slavery question led to a series of presidents who strove for compromise to preserve the union between north and south, east and west. Yet American cuisine and socio-culinary engagement did not suffer compromise.

Cultural studies of America's social rituals hold an important place in the historical record. Many valuable macro-studies of American food culture already exist, but future studies need to include more micro-studies of particular areas and specific periods. In many cases, historians overlook the Federal period in favor of studies centered on the colonial or Victorian eras.²⁰ Continued studies of not only American foodways, but also the ceremonious behavior surrounding the private and public presentation of food, will provide a greater historical understanding of the cultural norms that shaped the formation of modern American society.

¹ Susan P. Schoelwer, "Martha Washington and the Decorative Arts" (Lecture, Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, Fort Worth, TX, November 10, 2011); Schoelwer does not give a specific date for the change from the Rococo to the Federal style, but the change coincided with Washington's presidency, i.e. the 1790s.

² Ibid; Lisa M. Burns, *First Ladies and the Fourth Estate: Press Framing of Presidential Wives* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 17.

³ T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 12, 203; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 164-65, 167-70.

⁴ Landau, *The President's Table*, 4; Seale, *The President's House*, vol. I, 76-88.

⁵ Malone, *Jefferson & His Time*, vol. IV, 385.

⁶ The Madisons held parties at the Octagon House during renovations to the President's Mansion. Landau, *The President's Table*, 8; Elizabeth Lippincott Dean, *Dolly Madison: The Nation's Hostess* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1928), 1522-53.

⁷ Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1991), 123.

⁸ Landau, *The President's Table*, 10; Doranne Jacobson, *Presidents & First Ladies of the United States* (New York: Smithmark Publishers Inc., 1995), 27; Caroli, *First Ladies*, 18; Seaton, *William Winston Seaton*, 144; Ammon, *James Monroe*, 398, 399.

⁹ Sarah Josepha Hale, "The Romance of Travelling," from *Traits of American Life* (1835), in *A Tourist's New England: Travel Fiction, 1820-1920*, ed. Dona Brown (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 41; Susan Williams, *Food in the United States, 1820s-1890* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁰ Historian James McWilliams argues that regionalism became less important into the late-eighteenth century. Over the course of the nineteenth century, industrialization further "homogenized" the food supply. This homogenization is evident in many ways in modern American foodways. However, historians Susan Williams and Elaine N. McIntosh show how regionalism never fully disappeared and continued to serve as a means of preserving culinary diversity. James McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Williams, *Food in the United States*, 6; Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 93; Susan Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 5-6.

¹¹ Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair, passim*; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 125-31.

¹² Williams, *Food in the United States*, 6-7.

¹³ Hechtlinger, *The Seasonal Hearth*, 33.

¹⁴ Mary Randolph, *The Virginia House-wife*. With introduction by Karen Hess. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), xii; Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 24, 23; Randolph, *The Virginia House-wife*, 159-160.

¹⁵ William H. Safford, *The Blennerhassett Papers* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin), 457-58. Quoted in Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, 24; Cynthia A. Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson's America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 116-17.

¹⁶ Harbury, *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, 29; Hess, *Historical Notes*, xxxi-xxxiii .

¹⁷ Hess, *Historical Notes*, xxxi.

¹⁸ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 208.

¹⁹ Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign*, 101.

²⁰ Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, DC: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), ix.

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Letters:

Colin G. Campbell, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, letter dated May 16, 2011.

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF DINNER: PRESIDENTIAL ENTERTAINING IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

by Amanda Michelle Milian, B.A., 2006
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Presidential dining in the early republic influenced the political climate and shaped diplomatic policy. The materials used, the food chosen, and the manner of accepting guests by each president adapted to changing social norms. After the establishment of presidential dining protocols set forth by the Federalists, and the decidedly more democratic changes implemented by the Democratic-Republicans, the second generation of American presidents reinterpreted the ever-important ideal of “republican simplicity” in the early-nineteenth century.