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American identity crisis, 1789-1815: Foreign affairs and the formation of American national identity

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American Identity Crisis, 1789-1815
Foreign Affairs and the Formation of American National Identity

George E. Best

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

in

Partial fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

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History

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For St. Claire “Sis” D’Wolf, who I called Grandma.
May you rest in peace.

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ABSTRACT

When the Constitution was drafted in 1789, Americans did not have a sense of national identity. The process toward achieving a national identity was long and fraught with conflict. Some of the most influential events on the United States were foreign affairs. American reactions to these events reveal the gradual coalescence of national identity. The French Revolution was incredibly divisive and Americans defined their political views in relation to it. The wars spawned by it caused Great Britain and France to seize American ships believed to be carrying contraband. The American public took an active role in making its opinions known on specific foreign policy decisions, revealing a growing trend toward democracy and away from the hierarchical world of the Federalists. The election of 1800 ushered in a new era for the United States. Thomas Jefferson, the leading Republican, promoted continued democratization. Also under his administration can be found the seeds of American expansionism in the Louisiana Purchase. A strong sense of national honor reveals itself through the Barbary Wars and in the United States handling of British impressment and the aftermath of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair. British insults to American honor would eventually lead to the War of 1812. While not an official war aim, many Americans desired the permanent conquest of Canada, revealing the continued growth of American expansionism. Although many New England Federalists bitterly opposed the war, battlefield victories instilled in Americans a new sense of pride and gave them new heroes to admire. The combined news of the victory at New Orleans and the Peace Treaty at Ghent allowed them to reinvent the War of 1812 as a second American Revolution. As far as they were concerned, their national honor had been insulted, they had sought satisfaction for it, and

they had received it. That the United States finally had a sense of national identity—one defined by expansionism, a strong sense of national honor, and increasing democratization—is seen in James Monroe's visit to New England in 1817.

INTRODUCTION

On April 30, 1789, in New York City, George Washington took the oath of office, becoming the first President of the United States. Standing on a balcony of Federal Hall, the hero of the Revolution was dressed in a dark brown suit, white silk stockings, and shoes adorned with silver buckles. At his left hip hung a steel hilted sword. At six feet, two inches in height, Washington was “tall, upright, and well-made.”¹ He cut quite the figure, one that was made all the more illustrious from the laurels earned in the Revolutionary War. He had won the election unopposed. All other names submitted were understood to be for the role of Vice President.

Robert Livingston, who had helped draft the Declaration of Independence, administered the oath. He opened a Bible borrowed from the Saint John’s Masonic Lodge onto which Washington placed his hand. There, becoming the first of many, Washington spoke the oath, swearing to “preserve, defend, and protect the Constitution of the United States.” Washington recited the oath very quietly. Only those in his immediate vicinity could make out what he was saying. Later that day, when giving his inaugural address to the Senate and House of Representatives, Washington seemed to be downright nervous. “This great man,” Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania recorded in his journal, “was agitated and embarrassed more than ever he was by the leveled cannon or pointed musket. He trembled, and several times could scarce make out to read,

¹ This is taken from a description provided by Jedidiah Morse in 1789, the year of the inauguration, quoted in Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812* (New York: Harper, 1868), 111.

though it must be supposed he had often read it before.”² Unfortunately, Washington either never recorded his thoughts in the spring of 1789 or those portions of his diary are lost, making it impossible to know entirely what was going on inside of his head. Was he genuinely terrified by the job facing him or was he just nervous about public speaking? This is impossible to know, though the former is more likely.

And well he might be daunted by the job before him. There was no clear consensus among Americans for what the United States should be. That it should be a republic was not in question, but how it was to be a republic weighed heavily on their minds. Washington would not be alone in navigating this issue; his three immediate successors to the presidency all had to deal with this issue in one way or another. The Early Republic was marred by bitter partisanship. Every faction did its best to demonize the others, declaring their enemies to be “monarchists,” “democrats,” or even “anarchists.” Those who disagreed with a particular group’s views were seen as attempting to undermine the republic, to reverse or destroy the revolution, and to destroy the United States. There were several times where this nearly came to a crisis, with the two most prominent being the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Hartford Convention during the War of 1812.

Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison also had to guide their country through a world at war. Starting with the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and ending with the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, Europe plunged the world into a

² William Maclay, “30th April, Thursday” in Edgar S. Maclay, ed. *Journal of William Maclay, United States Senator from Pennsylvania 1789-1791* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890). A digital version can be found on the Constitution Society’s website: <http://www.constitution.org/ac/maclay/journal.htm?PageSpeed=noscript>. General information on the inauguration is taken from the website of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, <http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/swearing-in/event/george-washington-1789>.

massive war of ideology and power. The young United States, whether it liked it or not, was sucked into this maelstrom. Britain and France both sought to keep the Americans friendly to their cause, or at least subservient enough so as not to cause trouble. As American ships became the largest common carrier in the Atlantic Ocean, maintaining neutrality became ever more difficult. Other nations sought to control American trade to benefit their own war effort. That these issues spilled into American political should come as no surprise. Indeed, foreign policy issues during the Early Republic became some of the most debated and divisive topics for Americans. They began to identify themselves politically as either being for Britain or for France. Those that supported the other were denounced as not being true Americans and, some cases, accused of actively seeking the downfall of the American republic. Federalists, fearful of the chaos unleashed by the revolution, denounced Republican leadership as the agents of France, bent on unleashing their own Reign of Terror in the United States. Great Britain, they believed, was the rock of stability and liberty holding back the guillotines. Republicans in turn declared the Federalists to be Englishmen at heart and believed that they wished to see the monarchy restored. To them, France was the continuation of the American Revolution and was a symbol of hope for the world. “Party of France” and “Party of England” became synonymous with Republican and Federalist, respectively.

Debates over foreign affairs were more than just disagreements over policy. They very quickly became the center of discussion for what it meant to be an American. While there may not have been a clear, unified vision of American identity in 1789 when George Washington became President, one would emerge by 1815. What emerged from this period of conflict was a true sense of what the American republic was supposed to be

and what it meant to be an American. Elements of it had been around since the Revolution, or perhaps even earlier, but the twenty-seven years between the adoption of the Constitution and the end of the War of 1812 is when it really took shape. Americans developed an identity centered on a very particular idea of republicanism. It was highly democratic and accepting of a variety of backgrounds, but at the same time excluded women, blacks, and Native Americans. It was very touchy about national honor and willing to use military force to uphold that honor. It was expansionist and inward looking in nature. The North American continent was there for Americans to cultivate, civilize, republicanize, and reap the benefits. It included a strong belief that a freeborn citizen was inherently the equal, if not the better, of any European. This national identity was strongly shaped by the foreign policy events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³

Studies of American identity in the Early Republic have yet to be strongly tied to foreign affairs. Most of the works on foreign affairs remain almost entirely in the

³ This is not to say that foreign affairs were the only influence on American identity in this period. Other factors such as finances, suffrage, literature, and art have been well covered by historians. Some of the trends that will be discussed in relation to foreign affairs in this study also existed separately from them and were influenced in other ways. The most important of the trends in the Early Republic noted by historians is the push for increased democracy. Historians differ as to its origins, but the general consensus is that this democratic urge existed by 1783. While some argue that the Constitution was an attempt to curtail these impulses, most argue that it remained a powerful force in the American consciousness up to the Jacksonian Era. The details of what historians have said about this need not be of concern, only that it exists. Part of this study will be to show how foreign policy events influenced the democratic trends in American culture and politics. See Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1991); Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: "The People," The Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Robert Martin, *Government by Dissent: Protest, Resistance, and Radical Democratic Thought in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Also useful in examining this period is Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Watts argues that the War of 1812 played a pivotal role in creating liberal America, in both a political and economic sense, an event that features prominently in Chapter 3.

diplomatic realm or have their focus on the War of 1812 as a political, diplomatic, and military event. However, this study seeks to provide more than a simple synthesis of two historiographies. Rather, it seeks to add a new dimension to our understanding of how American national identity took shape in the years 1789-1815.⁴

For this purpose, public opinion serves as the best gauge of American national identity in Early Republic. As such, newspapers are used extensively as they were widely read and served as the mouthpieces of a variety of political ideals. Attempts at objectivity were rare, providing ample material for gleaning the opinions of the American public. In addition, many historical newspapers have been made available online in digital format, providing ease of access.⁵ These are also supplemented by official reports and debates in Congress as needed.

Understanding how foreign policy events—the treaties, embargoes, wars—affected American identity from 1789-1815 is key to grasping what Americans thought of themselves in this time. These have effects beyond the embassy and the battlefield and are major catalysts of change. Americans in the Early Republic were especially aware of

⁴ The most commonly cited work on American diplomacy in the Early Republic is Bradford Perkins three volume study of Anglo-American relations: *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1795-1805* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955); Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961); Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams: England and the United States 1812-1823* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964). Also useful for understanding American foreign policy at this time is Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1949). For works on the War of 1812, see J. C. A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983); Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); John K. Mahon *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972); John M. Hitsman *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*, edited by Donald Graves, 2nd Edition (Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 1999); Also useful has been Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Eustace's work is useful in understanding how Americans discussed American victories and heroes during the War of 1812.

⁵ The primary database used for newspapers was "America's Historical Newspapers," operated by Newsbank via its division, Readex. Unless otherwise noted, all newspapers cited here are drawn from this database. A useful work for understanding the role played by newspapers in the Early Republic is Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

the events taking place in Europe and how those countries treated their young republic.

This exerted a major force in American politics, culture, and society that, by 1815, would produce a United States that was truly united.

CHAPTER I

On September 17, 1787, the Philadelphia convention accepted the final draft of the new United States Constitution. Its framers were mostly veterans in one form or another of the American Revolution that had given the United States independence and the ability to draft such a document. The previous government under the Articles of Confederation, they believed, had proven too weak to handle the many problems the young republic was facing. The Constitution provided a centralized government that had the ability to tax, determine foreign policy, and was sovereign over the individual states. It was ratified by the required nine states on June 21, 1788, and the first government under it came into office April of the following year.¹

Just as the ink was drying on the Constitution in Philadelphia, rumblings of a new revolution were emanating from France. Faced with a staggering debt from the Seven Years War and the Revolutionary War, as well as famine brought upon by several bad harvests, France was struggling to stabilize itself. However, stability of the kind King Louis XVI and his ministers hoped for did not come. The French Revolution turned violent on June 14, 1789, when a mob of angry Parisian peasants and artisans stormed the Bastille, long a symbol of royal authority; and now, as many believed, tyranny. It would not be long before the monarchy was completely toppled and Europe—and, by extension, a large portion of the world—would be engulfed in a massive, twenty year long war.

¹ For information on the U.S. Constitution, its drafting, and ratification, see Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*, 2011 ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011); John P. Kaminski and Richard Leffler, *Federalists and Antifederalists: The Debate over the Ratification of the Constitution*, Constitutional Heritage Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); John R. Vile, *The Writing and Ratification of the U.S. Constitution: Practical Virtue in Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012); Jack A. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1996).

Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité would evolve into *Vive l'Empereur* and the force of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte would make itself known from Lisbon to Moscow, from Copenhagen to Cairo.²

The first ten years of the French Revolution and its wars had a direct impact on the United States during a key era of its development. The 1790s was the first decade the Constitution would be in effect and would serve as a testing ground of whether it could function or not. It was also a time of great debate over how the Constitution should be interpreted. While the primary force in power, eventually termed Federalists, favored a loose interpretation and stronger federal power, there was as large faction that believed in a more strict interpretation and limited federal power. Led by Thomas Jefferson, these would have a variety of names bestowed on them, though eventually many of them would form together as the Republican Party.³ Both of these parties would quickly identify themselves with different sides in the French Revolution. It was *the* foreign policy event of the decade and Americans were keenly interested in the events taking place across the Atlantic. At first, most were supportive of the early attempts at reform, but as the Revolution grew ever more violent, this began to change. The United States became split over the French Revolution. Indeed, Americans began to define their republic in relation to the republic taking shape in France.

Initially, most American opinions of the French Revolution ranged from cautiously indifferent to highly supportive. In 1791, the *Columbian Centinel*, a strong

² For general information on the French Revolution, see William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); for general information on Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars, see J. Christopher Herold, *The Age of Napoleon*, 1st Mariner ed. (New York: Mariner Books, 2002).

³ Other terms used included Anti-Federalist (not to be confused with the Anti-Federalists of the ratification debates, though there is some overlap), Democrats, and Democratic-Republicans. “Republican” has been chosen as it is a very common term from the period. It should not be confused with the modern Republican Party, which was founded in 1854.

supporter of the government of the constitution and future denouncer of the revolution, happily published an article that was highly optimistic for France. It described the people of France as living “under the scourge of a rigorous despotism” and that their revolution had “achieved...happy effects on the present age.” Another article published a year later saw in the French struggle for liberty a common cause, citing specifically the push for expanded freedom of the press. This, the *Centinel* argued, would “produce a race of philosophers who will disseminate the knowledge of our free constitution throughout the globe.” The *Columbian Centinel* was not the lone supporter of the Revolution among the Federalist camp. The *Massachusetts Centinel*, *Connecticut Courant*, and the *Massachusetts Spy* all published articles and letters that were more or less favorable to the French Revolution. The last of these even declared that, though it had been apprehensive about the violence that seemed to be erupting, the overall effect “has eventually operated to produce good.”⁴ Even the famed John Adams showed some support for the Revolution. His *Defense of American Constitutions* (1787-1788) seems to have been written as an instructive on how the French might organize their new government. Federalists saw in the French Revolution the spread of their own revolution and encouraged its continuation.⁵

⁴ “On France” in *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, November 26, 1791), 1-2; “Foreign Intelligence, France, Oct. 12-20” in *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, August 24, 1791), 2; “European Affairs: France” in *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, November 19, 1789), 2.

⁵ The French apparently did not follow his advice as, after their first new constitution was drafted in 1790, Adams “threw up his hands in disgust” and declared that it would “involved France in great and lasting calamities.” Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick argue that Adams (and many other leading Federalists) were not opposed to the French Revolution in the way that Edmund Burke was. Whereas Burke opposed the Revolution because it overthrew the established government, Adams et al came to oppose it because the French “were going about it in all the wrong ways.” Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 312-314. See also John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960), 126-128.

Republicans were even more enthusiastic about the French Revolution than the Federalists. In the earliest days of the Revolution, Thomas Jefferson wrote William Smith from Paris that “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is it’s [sic] natural manure.” The Republican leaning newspapers, though usually not quite as radical, generally echoed Jefferson’s sentiments. The *National Gazette*, which received financial support from both Jefferson and James Madison, proudly proclaimed the French Revolution to be for the good of all humanity. The *Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle* asked “if this revolution of ours was so very great and glorious, and so very good—How can that of France be so horrible?” The American and French Revolutions were connected and all Americans owed the French people at the very least moral support. Both of these papers echo sentiments found across most Republican leaning newspapers, who as a rule published letters and articles strongly supportive of the Revolution or republished those they believed best reflected their own views.⁶

This general unity of opinion on the French Revolution collapsed when news of King Louis XVI’s beheading and the subsequent Reign of Terror reached the United States. The initial reaction of shock across all parties quickly evolved into either continued support of the Revolution or complete abhorrence of it. With partisanship

⁶ “Jefferson to William Stephen Smith, November 13, 1787” in Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), Vol. 12, [http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=TSJN-print-01-12-02&mode=TOC](http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=TSJN-print-01-12-02&mode=TOC;).; “Paris, May 11” in *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, August 4, 1792), 1; “Dublin, August 23” in *Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle* (Norfolk, November 26, 1791), 2. See also, for example, a letter entitled “Translation from the Leyden Gazette of the Latest View of the Political Situation of Several European Powers, in Respect to France” published in *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC, October 24, 1792), 2. The countries that have declared war against France are described as “despotic” and the overall tone is very supportive of the French Revolution. However, it should also be noted that this popular outpouring of support for the French Revolution did not translate to policy decisions. One would be hard pressed to find many Americans who favored direct, military support for France.

already increasing from debates on domestic issues, the sudden devolution of the French Revolution into widespread carnage bitterly divided the American public. The execution was both decried as a “dreadful mischief” carried out under the guise of “heroism and patriotism” and accepted as one of the consequences of continuing liberty. While many Republicans were troubled by the growing violence, they remained optimistic about revolution in France.⁷ Tensions between Americans continued to grow as the French Revolution continued to evolve.

The French Revolution soon came to the shores on the United States in physical form through Edmond-Charles Genêt. Born in Versailles to a government civil servant, Genêt grew up in the very center of the *ancien régime*. His father worked for the royal diplomatic service and his sisters grew up to work for Marie Antoinette. Genêt himself was quite gifted, especially with languages, and as a teenager received several minor appointments in various European capitals. When his father died in 1788, the younger Genêt was appointed to replace him as Chief of the Bureau of Interpretation. He was only eighteen years old. In 1787, he was sent to the French embassy in Saint Petersburg, Russia, first as a secretary but soon promoted to chargé d'affaires. Already sympathetic to republican ideas, the absolutist government of Tsarina Catherine the Great only further cemented these ideas in the young Frenchman. Catherine herself, despite a reputation as an enlightened despot, was not fond of republicanism and by 1792 she had dismissed Genêt.⁸ The Girondin government in France, though, took a liking to Genêt and began making arrangements for him to become its minister to the United States. This was

⁷“Thoughts on the Death of the King of France” in *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, December 2, 1793), 1; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 13-50.

⁸ This was also the same time Catherine received news of Louis XVI virtual imprisonment in the Tuileries palace. See Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 330.

finalized in late 1792 and by the spring of 1793, Genêt was sailing towards the United States.

Genêt's instructions for negotiations were rather ambitious and poorly thought out. First, he was supposed to arrange for the opening of American ports to French privateers and their prizes (already legal under the 1778 Treaty of Alliance). More importantly, though, Genêt was to ensure that the United States would allow the French to also sell their prizes and commission new privateers out of American ports. This would be tantamount to the United States declaring war, at the very least, on Great Britain and Spain, something the Girondin never seemed to consider. Second, the French government desired that Canada, Florida, and Louisiana be removed from their European rulers, all of whom were at war with France. To accomplish this, American expansionists—especially in Kentucky—who already had an eye for further territory, were to be armed, paid, and sent in to these territories to eliminate France's enemies from North America. Again, that this would lead to war between the United States and these nations seems to have been ignored by the French government. Finally, Genêt was to negotiate the immediate payment of the United States' debt to France from the Revolutionary War. The funds from this payment were then supposed to pay for all of his missions.⁹

Genêt set sail for Philadelphia in the spring of 1793, a revolutionary fire burning in him that he was sure the American people had as well. Adverse winds, however, forced him to land in Charleston, South Carolina. There, Governor William Moultrie and the people of Charleston gave him a massive, spirited, and warm welcome. Encouraged

⁹ For the biographical information on Genêt and the details of his mission, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 330-334.

by his reception, Genêt commissioned four French privateers, crewed mostly by American sailors, and established a prize court. He became so occupied in Charleston that he did not continue his journey to Philadelphia until April 18, ten days after he had landed. The whole trip northward, Genêt was lauded by the American people, filling him with confidence that the nation was fully behind him and France, ready to play an active role in supporting the Revolution. “In every place,” he wrote in gratitude to the “Citizens” of America, “the general voice of the people convinced me...of their real sentiments and sincere friendly dispositions towards [France.]”¹⁰

When Genêt finally arrived in Philadelphia on May 16, he received perhaps his greatest reception yet. The people of the city could hardly contain themselves in their praise to the French minister. The day after he arrived, the “citizens of Philadelphia” wrote an “ADDRESS” to Genêt congratulating him on his appointment and welcoming him to the American capital. They declared his presence in their city to be a singular honor. The officers of the Philadelphia Militia wrote Genêt a letter praising his “civic and democratic virtues” and wished for the continued success of the French Revolution. The “Republican society of Germans” in Philadelphia issued a similar letter praising Genêt’s mission. Political figures who vocally disapproved of the French ambassador’s actions were on occasion burned in effigy. Little wonder that Genêt took this widespread support as a sign that he could “promote the French Revolution in any way he could.”¹¹

¹⁰ Edmond-Charles Genêt, “The Answer.” *Massachusetts Mercury* (Boston, MA), May 27, 1793. See also Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 335-336; Miller, 132-133.

¹¹ “Minutes of the proceedings of the citizens of Philadelphia at a general meeting held at the State House.” *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington, DE), May 25, 1793, 3; “Address of the Officers of the Philadelphia Militia to Citizen Genêt.” *Edward’s Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore) January 8, 1794, 3; “To Citizen Genêt from the Ciceronian Society of Philadelphia.” *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia) May 27, 1793, 2; “German Republican Society of Philadelphia to Citizen Genêt.” *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia) May 20, 1793, 3; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 186.

Genêt assumed his formal duties as the French Minister to the United States on May 18. For the next six weeks, he maintained a cordial relationship with the federal government and a friendly correspondence with Jefferson. As Secretary of State, Jefferson did order Genêt to stop outfitting privateers in American ports as it was in violation of the 1778 treaty and international law. Genêt replied with a very angry letter countering Jefferson's arguments, but also attacked the administration's neutrality policy.¹² Slowly, the cabinet's patience with him began to wear thin. Genêt continued to arm privateers and receive French prizes in American ports, despite numerous warnings to stop. Alexander Hamilton had managed to keep the British minister, George Hammond, placated but was unsure of much longer he could do so.¹³

That changed in early July with Genêt's outfitting the *Petit Démocrate* as a French privateer. Originally named the *Little Sarah*, the ship was a British merchant vessel that had been captured in May by the French warship *Embuscade*. By July 1, it had become apparent to the cabinet (Washington was at Mount Vernon) and Pennsylvania Governor Mifflin that the *Petit Démocrate* had taken on significantly more armaments than she had been captured with. Genêt reassured Jefferson that the ship was being outfitted with only cannons already belonging to France, though Mifflin claimed that at least two of them had been bought by the citizens of Philadelphia. Even so, Jefferson received grudging reassurance, though no promise, from Genêt that the *Petit*

¹² The Proclamation of Neutrality had been issued in April prior to Genêt's arrival in Philadelphia. It declared that the United States wished to remain "impartial" and at peace with all of the belligerents in the wars being waged in Europe. While there was some disagreement as to the wording and the spirit of the document, everyone agreed that the United States needed to remain neutral.

¹³ For further details of this six week period, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 344-349. For a letter Jefferson wrote to Genêt concerning privateers, see Thomas Jefferson, "To Edmond Charles Genet" June 22, 1793 in Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. John Catanzariti, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26:399.

Démocrate would not set sail before Washington arrived in Philadelphia and could make a decision on the matter.¹⁴

When Washington did arrive in Philadelphia and received the packet of papers left for him by Jefferson concerning the *Petit Démocrate*, he was outraged at what he read. What he found most disturbing was a threat Genêt had made to “appeal from the President to the people” to allow the ship to arm and sail. “Is the Minister of the French Republic to set the Acts of this Government at defiance—with impunity?” he asked Jefferson, “and then threaten the Executive with an appeal to the People. What must the world think of such conduct, and of the Government of the U. States for submitting to it?” In Washington’s eyes, Genêt was attempting to completely undermine the federal government and was moving dangerously close to open rebellion. Over the rest of the month, Genêt continued to act as he pleased, arming more privateers and taking in several British prizes, some of them possibly within American waters. Enough was enough, and on August 1, Washington and his cabinet agreed that Genêt would be recalled immediately.¹⁵

That Washington and Hamilton were opposed to Genêt’s actions should come as no surprise. Hamilton was a well-known Federalist and Washington, though careful to remain politically independent, tended to lean more Federalist than Republican. Genêt

¹⁴ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 350; Thomas Jefferson, “Notes of Cabinet Meeting and Conversations with Edmond Charles Genet,” July 5, 1793 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:437-439; Alexander Hamilton, “Cabinet Meeting. Opinion on the Case of the Little Sarah [July 8, 1793],” Founders Online, National Archives, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=Volume%3AHamilton-01-15&s=151131112&r=60>. These notes can also be found in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:446-447; Thomas Jefferson, “Memorandum of a Conversation with Edmond Charles Genet,” July 10, 1793 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:463-467.

¹⁵ Jefferson, “Conversation with Genet,” July 10, 1793, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:466. The editor notes that this phrase was bracketed in the original and believes it was done so by Washington; George Washington, “To Thomas Jefferson,” July 11, 1793 in George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel, et al. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 13: 211; Thomas Jefferson, “Notes of Cabinet Meeting on Edmond Charles Genet,” August 1, 1793 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:598.

represented a direct threat to the republican, albeit hierarchical world, that Hamilton and Washington desired. It is even more telling that even Jefferson came to have enough of Genêt's antics. None of the leading Americans were willing to sacrifice American sovereignty to any individual or nation, even if said nation was fighting for the cause of liberty. The United States would carve its own path.

However, this was not the end of the Genêt Affair. Hamilton saw an opportunity to not only completely discredit the French Minister with the American people, but to also strike a blow against the Jeffersonian party. First, even before it was determined that Genêt would be recalled, Hamilton began writing a series of articles for *Dunlap's Daily American Advertiser* under the pseudonym "No Jacobin." Published between July 31 and August 28, Hamilton used these essays to leak much of what Genêt had done to the American public. While most were aware that Genêt had been busy outfitting privateers and selling the cargoes of prizes, few actually knew the details of his interactions with the Washington administration, which had unanimously determined his actions to be illegal. Hamilton avoided direct quotes or references to actions taken by particular individuals within the cabinet to avoid being found out, as Washington had ordered a delay in the release of Genêt's recall and the documents relating to it. Even so, he was able to paint a picture of the French Minister blatantly thwarting American and international law. More importantly, though, he was able to show that Genêt had also personally insulted the revered General Washington. The whole affair, No Jacobin declared, "is an insult to our understandings and a glaring infraction of our rights."¹⁶ Even though he did not reveal

¹⁶ Alexander Hamilton, "No Jacobin I," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), July 31, 1793. A total of nine "No Jacobin" essays were published. The others can be found in the same newspaper on the following dates: August 5, 8, 10, 14, 16, 23, 26, 28, of 1793.

specifics of the government's interactions with Genêt, Hamilton was intent on hitting the French Minister at full force.

Concurrently to his publication of the "No Jacobin Essays," Hamilton enlisted the aid of Chief Justice John Jay and Senator Rufus King to organize a popular response against Genêt and in favor of the administration. Prior to and during the Revolutionary War, town hall meetings had proven an effective means of organizing resistance against the British. Just earlier that summer, a Boston convention passed resolutions approving Washington's neutrality proclamation, which was very quickly endorsed by other New England towns in similar meetings. The three men set about organizing similar meetings and on August 6, the New York Chamber of Commerce published the first resolution condemning Genêt and praising the administration. Throughout the rest of August and into September, several other cities and towns issued similar resolutions.¹⁷

The real victory came in the resolutions from Virginia, especially those from Richmond. There were Federalists in Virginia, especially along the coast, but the emerging Republican Party held sway. This was the home state of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison—the two most prominent Republicans of the time—and James Monroe, the rising star of the party. The meeting, mimicking the others and No Jacobin, unanimously resolved that "any interference of a foreign minister with our internal government or administration" would not be tolerated. If the people of the United States

¹⁷ Harry Ammon, "The Genêt Mission and the Development of American Political Parties," *Journal of American History* 52, no. 4 (March 1966): 730-731. For the resolutions, see *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia) from August 6 through 26, 1793; and *Columbian Centinel* (Boston) from August through September of 1793. The language used in these is not noteworthy, other than that they are all very similar. Each begins by approving Washington's neutrality proclamation and follow it with a series of other statements to the effect that the people they represent are good and loyal citizens of the United States. Each ends with "That a copy of these resolutions, under the signature of the chairman, be transmitted to the President of the United States, and that the proceeds of the present meeting be published" or something very similar. This particular version is taken from "Wilmington D." *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, August 27, 1793, 1-2.

felt that their leaders had made a wrong decision, the people were more than capable of detecting “the abuse” and correcting “the mischief” themselves. Although this meeting was organized by Federalist John Marshall, the chosen leader of the assembly was a friend of Jefferson’s, George Wythe, lending it the credibility of bipartisanship. The Richmond resolutions were some of the most widely published, appearing in newspapers from Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, and even in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The unanimity and wide publication of the Richmond resolutions was a major political victory for Hamilton and the opponents of France.¹⁸

It was a victory that took the Republicans completely unawares. Jefferson initially supported Genêt as a positive influence on the country. Fearful that the Federalists were attempting to return the United States to monarchy and into alliance with Great Britain, the popular response to the French ambassador’s American tour proved a breath of fresh air. It did not stay fresh for long. By July—only a couple months after Genêt’s arrival in Charleston—the Frenchman had overstayed his welcome. Jefferson still longed for a pro-French foreign policy, but Genêt’s blatant disrespect toward President Washington crossed a line and threatened, in Jefferson’s eyes, to destroy the Republican cause. He sent several warnings to Madison and Monroe, who both acknowledged Genêt’s behavior as problematic, but ultimately dismissed the danger. According to Monroe, the American people would forgive Genêt’s mistakes as simply being overzealous in his cause. The arrival of several newspapers, especially those detailing the Richmond convention, on August 21 provided a rather rude awakening.¹⁹

¹⁸ “Richmond, August 20,” *Maryland Journal* (Baltimore) August 27, 1793, 2; Ammon, “Genêt Mission”, 732.

¹⁹ Ammon, “Genêt Mission”, 732-733; James Monroe, “To Jefferson,” August 21, 1793 in *Founders Online*, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-26-02-0652>.

It did not take long for the Republicans to realize that these resolutions were orchestrated by Hamilton and his friends.²⁰ They also needed to take immediate steps to distance themselves from the conventions, especially since Wythe had taken such a prominent role. Monroe admitted in a letter to his friend John Breckenridge that Genêt had made several mistakes, but the “monarchy party” was using this as an opportunity to discredit the French Revolution “and pave the way for an unnatural connection with Great Britain...[P]ut the friends of republican government on guard.” Together, Madison and Monroe began drafting a counter-resolution that praised Washington’s service and patriotism, thanked the French for their assistance in the Revolutionary War, and expressed sympathy for their own struggle for liberty against the “Princes & Nobles” of Europe. The previous conventions, it continued, were clearly an attempt to discredit the French Revolution by known supporters of monarchy. They planned to create their own meetings similar to those the Federalists had organized and reveal the “real sense of the people” and use this draft resolution as a basis from which others could build.²¹

On August 28, though, they received a letter from Jefferson that shed new light on the situation. The letter detailed the extent of Genêt’s disrespect for the Federal government, his open flaunting of American laws, and his recall. Jefferson encouraged them to “approve unequivocally of a state of neutrality...to abandon [Genêt] entirely, with expressions of strong friendship and adherence to his nation and confidence that he

²⁰ Indeed, there was a widely published letter from Jay and King that made this quite obvious: “Certain late publications render it proper for us...to inform the public, that a Report having reached this City [New York] from Philadelphia, that Mr. Genêt, the French Minister, had said he would appeal to the people from certain Decisions of the President; we were asked on our return from that place whether he had made such a declaration. We answered that he had, and we also mentioned it to others, authorizing them to say that we had informed them.”

²¹ “Monroe to Breckinridge, August 23, 1793” in Harry Ammon, “Genêt Mission,” 734; James Madison, “To Jefferson,” August 27, 1793 in James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*, J.C.A. Stagg ed. (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1985), 15:75.

has acted against their sense.” This, he argued, would keep the people on the side of the Republicans, especially as Genêt had only proven himself to be completely “incorrigible” and his cause “a wreck which could not but sink.” Madison and Monroe dutifully reworked their draft to indirectly condemn Genêt’s actions—he was never mentioned by name, though it was quite plain to whom they were referring—but still show support for France. Versions of this draft first made appearances in Caroline County and Staunton and quickly began popping up around the rest of Virginia.²²

The Republicans, still in the embryonic stages of forming a true political party, never expanded their attack on the Federalists outside of Virginia, and for the rest of the year this was largely where the debate remained. They simply lacked the interstate organization that the Federalists had already developed. These debates did not evolve beyond what has already been described and, indeed, were cut short by a yellow fever epidemic that struck Philadelphia in September. To avoid the disease, Washington returned to Mt. Vernon and the other government officials went home as well. There was simply no one in the capital to relay additional information to either side, and Washington continued to refuse to release any details of Genêt’s actions or recall. Once Congress and the Cabinet returned to Philadelphia in November, Republican attempts at rekindling the debate with the public failed. The whole affair had simply lost its momentum.²³

²² Thomas Jefferson, “To Madison,” August 11, 1793 in Jefferson, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:651; Ammon, “Genêt Mission”, 732-738. Ammon cites Madison and Monroe’s resolutions as being published in the *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* on September 25 and October 2, 1793, and in broadside form. None of the originals were available for this author’s perusal. See also, McKittrick and Elkins, *The Age of Federalism*, 364.

²³ Ammon, “Genêt Mission”, 738-741; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 365.

While the Federalists made more gains than the Republicans by having the initiative and a stronger interstate political network, neither side can truly be said to have won the debates surrounding the Genêt Affair. The yellow fever epidemic and Washington's continued neutrality prevented either from gaining the upper hand. That is, in the short term. In the long term, the Genêt Affair reveals a trend that would continue throughout Early Republic politics, namely the active "popular participation in party affairs." It is indeed ironic that the Federalists, who placed little trust in the masses, should resort to rather populist meetings to further their cause. Even so, Rufus King expressed his concern over sponsoring such conventions. They reminded him of the tumult currently playing out in France that he and other Federalists constantly feared might make its way across the Atlantic. The Constitution, he argued, had not created an executive so that it could "sit with folded arms, and that the government be carried on by town meetings...and render the magistracy a meer [*sic*] Pageant."²⁴ Resorting to "town meetings" was clearly worth the sacrifice of denouncing Genêt and the excesses of the French Revolution.

Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe expressed no such reservations and eagerly resorted to such meetings to defend against the perceived encroaching forces of monarchy and tyranny. Jefferson and Monroe were especially supportive of the French Revolution and understood American republicanism in the light of that country's struggle for liberty. Even though Madison's view of the French Revolution was more moderate, all three supported a more democratic version of republican government, and one that the American people clearly supported. The numerous town hall meetings that sprang up in

²⁴ Ammon, "Genêt Mission", 741; Rufus King, "To Alexander Hamilton," August 3, 1793 in Founders Online, National Archives, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-15-02-01>

response to the Genet Affair is indicative that many Americans wished to see their young country move in this direction. Yes, they were largely guided and organized by leading statesmen, but their ready involvement and rapid spread reveals American's preparedness to establish republicanism in the manner preferred by Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe.

With the Genêt Affair at an end, Washington could focus his attention on other serious matters. The most important of these had to do with Great Britain. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the British were supposed to surrender most of the territory south of the Saint Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, including several forts. As of 1794, they had yet to do this and did not seem inclined to do so. This greatly irked the Americans as it showed that the British government had little faith that the United States would survive for long and was a clear violation of American sovereignty. Additional threats to American sovereignty came shortly after France declared war on Britain in 1792. British ships began seizing American merchantmen bound for France, claiming they were carrying contraband. Desperately short of sailors, the Royal Navy also began searching American vessels for deserters or anyone they believed to be a British subject and therefore normally subject to a press gang, regardless of whether or not they had become American citizens.²⁵ With the issues escalating between Britain and the United States and Congress seriously considering retaliation, Washington on April 15, 1794, appointed Chief Justice John Jay to negotiate a new treaty to resolve the impending crisis.

²⁵ The British operated under the assumption that once someone became a British subject, they were always a British subject. The Royal Navy eagerly took advantage of this to press as many sailors into its ships as it could. For a more in depth summary of American grievances against Great Britain, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 377-381; Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 141, 145-146.

Jay set sail for Great Britain on May 12. No sooner had he left than the Republican newspapers started lambasting the administration for stooping so low as to negotiate. The mere fact of his appointment was declared “both unconstitutional and tyrannical.” The Democratic Society of Philadelphia wasted no time in issuing a resolution condemning Jay’s appointment. It placed the Justice under the patronage of the President and placed him under the authority of the Senate, which completely destroyed the purpose of a separate judicial branch. Others, less concerned with Jay’s appointment, made known their willingness to fight “rather than see their country humiliated.” The fact that Jay was a known supporter of the “English Faction” did his image no favors in the eyes of Republicans.²⁶ The general tone of the United States was not one of reconciliation. The British either needed to admit their wrongdoings and make things right or the United States needed to be prepared for war.

The treaty Jay brought back with him in 1795 was not overly favorable to the United States. While the British did abandon the forts in the western United States, there was not a word about impressment or the seizing of American ships. The Americans were allowed to trade in the West Indies, a trade that was denied them after 1783, but this was limited to ships rated seventy tons and below. Additionally, Jay had bowed to British definitions of contraband, which were broadened beyond military stores to include foodstuffs. To the Republicans, the Jay Treaty—as it became known—abandoned the principles of 1776. The liberal ideal of free ships, free goods was nowhere to be seen and

²⁶ Robert Simons, “I, Robert Simons...,” *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), July 1, 1794, 1; “Resolution of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia,” *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington, DE), May 17, 1794, 2; “Extract of a letter from Philadelphia, dated 29th April,” *American Minerva* (New York), May 1, 1794, 3; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 395; See also Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 196.

was implicitly abandoned.²⁷ Even more troubling, it violated the 1778 treaty with France. Abandonment of republican ideals could be seen in every letter of the Jay Treaty.²⁸

To the Republicans and most of the American people, John Jay became apostate. Independence Day that year was celebrated in Philadelphia “in a solemn...manner” by burning Jay and his treaty in effigy. A few days later, the people of Charleston, South Carolina, reacted in a similar fashion. The city executioner took a personal role in burning every copy of the treaty he could lay his hands on. Jay was also burned in effigy, with many “wishes for the reality [Jay himself]” to be burned being expressed. The United States flag “was hoisted...half mast [*sic*]” and “a number of citizens were alarmed with fears for the dignity of the American character.” To say that the Charlestonians were offended would be an understatement. New York, Boston, and Lexington, Kentucky, would join in burning model John Jays and copies of the treaty. “An utter abhorrence” to the treaty and the “apostates to liberty” who had written it motivated them to display their disapproval and anger in as visible a way as possible.²⁹

The most direct attack on the Jay Treaty and the administration came on July 18 in New York City. The leading Republicans had organized a rally to protest the treaty, advertising in newspapers and posting handbills across the city. Hamilton and King made a list minute effort to make sure that there was a Federalist presence at the rally as

²⁷ Free ships, free goods refers to the idea that, unless a ship is carrying weapons or ammunition or belongs to a belligerent party in war, any goods being carried in a ship are free to travel where they please.

²⁸ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 196-197 The full text of the Jay Treaty can be found here: "The Jay Treaty; November 19, 1794," Avalon Project, last modified 2008, accessed March 28, 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jay.asp.

²⁹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 197; “Jay’s Treaty in Flames,” *Oracle of the Day* (Portsmouth, NH), July 14, 1795, 3; “The Arrival of the Treaty,” *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), August 5, 1795, 2. Other articles relating these incidents include “Philadelphia, Authentic,” *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), August 31, 1795, 3; Old Delaware Man, “For the Aurora,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 22, 1795, 3; “The birth day of American liberty...” *Richmond Chronicle* (Richmond, VA), July 18, 1795, 3; “From the American Register, Charleston, SC,” *Albany Register* (Albany, NY) August 17, 1795, 3.

well. At noon on the 18th, Hamilton addressed the crowd, “but as soon as the People understood the drift” of his speech, “they drowned his voice in hisses.” Hamilton tried twice more for the Federalist view to be heard, but each time the crowd drowned him out. At one point, “two stones [were] thrown at him,” one of which apparently hit Hamilton on the head. Completely humiliated, Hamilton and his Federalist friends stormed away. Meanwhile, several of the Republicans marched on the governor’s house, carrying with them an American and a French flag. There, they burned several copies of the treaty in front of the house.³⁰

As Hamilton’s actions in New York that Saturday afternoon would indicate, most Federalists were not opposed to the treaty. Arguing that they were fully in favor of it takes their support to far. As Hamilton summed it up, “the greatest interest of this Country in its external relations is that of peace. The more or less of commercial advantages which we may acquire by particular treaties are of far less moment. With peace, the force of circumstances will enable us to make our way sufficiently fast in Trade.” In other words, so long as the United States could maintain peace, it would prosper commercially regardless of particular treaty stipulations. The core of the Federalist Party was the New England merchant class who needed the British commerce to maintain their livelihood. Maintain trade and all would be well, they argued. Indeed,

³⁰ This description of the incident is taken from the following: “Extract of a letter from New-York, dated July 20th, 1795,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), July 22, 1795, 3; “The Meeting,” *Argus & Greenleaf’s New Daily Advertiser* (New York), July 20, 1795, 3; “Town-Meeting,” *New York Gazette* (New York), July 20, 1795, 3. This last last claims that three stones, not two (as claimed in the *Aurora*), were thrown at Hamilton. Regardless of the number, it is clear that some stones were thrown and at least one hit its target. See also, Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the Early Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii.

American control of the shipping between the United States and Great Britain reached ninety-three percent in 1796.³¹

Additionally, Federalists generally favored stronger ties with Great Britain as they believed that country was a bastion of stability amidst the chaos spread by the French Revolution. The Federalists were also mystified to the claims made by some Republicans that Jay and large portions of the Senate were “influenced by British gold.” The burnings in effigy were “disgraceful to a free and an enlightened people” and needed to stop.³² While they acknowledged the right of people to express their disgust at the treaty, the active, violent anger exhibited by so many had to cause alarm to many Federalists. The rocks thrown at Hamilton were the most physical example of this. Here was the sort of chaos they feared the French Revolution was bringing to American shores.

Washington signed the Jay Treaty into law in August 1795. A combination of factors over the next several months served to halt mass protests against the treaty and the administration. First, the success of Anthony Wayne against the Indians at Fallen Timbers in 1794 paved the way for further western settlement, especially now that, under the Jay Treaty, the forts in the area were being turned over to American forces. This was a major, popular victory for the Washington administration and Federalist policies. Second, and perhaps more importantly, was the publication of Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason*. This book, which was widely read in the United States, presented a direct attack against Christianity as the enemy of reason and liberty. This lost the French Revolution in America, and in turn the Republicans, the support of many Protestant ministers who

³¹ Alexander Hamilton, “Remarks on the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation Lately Made between the United States and Great Britain,” July 9-11, 1793 in Founders Online, National Archives, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0281>; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 414; Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 167.

³² “Portland, July 27,” *Andrew’s Western Star* (Stockbridge, MA), August 11, 1795, 2-3.

changed sides in response to Paine's inflammatory work. Arch-Federalist Fisher Ames was downright grateful for the *Age of Reason*. He wrote his friend and fellow Federalist, Christopher Gore, that "Tom Paine has kindly cured our clergy of their prejudices."³³ As with the Genêt Affair, the Republicans were able to rally massive amounts of popular support to their cause, only to see it fizzle and the Federalists remain ascendant.

The pendulum of attention would once again swing away from Great Britain and back toward France. The British had not been alone in their practice of seizing American ships and cargoes. The French were just as guilty of the same, they simply had fewer ships with which to do it. Fuming over the Jay Treaty, France had ordered its navy to step up depredations against American shipping. They also refused to receive the new American minister. While neither the Federalists nor the Republicans were happy with the situation, they advocated very different strategies over how to handle it. Republicans pushed for repairing relations with France, even if it meant damaging those recently gained with Britain. Federalists, though, prepared for a much firmer response to these issues. Being as they were the ones in power, the Federalists were free to see their plans through.

Always fearful of the French Revolution spreading to American shores, the Federalists had some of their worst fears confirmed by reports received from John Quincy Adams, the American Minister to the Netherlands. Writing directly to his father, Vice President John Adams, he relayed that the French were much more than upset about the Jay Treaty. The French believed "that this Treaty will finally throw the United States...into the arms of Great Britain; and that...France must consider us henceforth as

³³ Fisher Ames, "To Christopher Gore," February 24, 1795 in Fisher Ames, *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Seth Ames (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1854), 1:168.

an infallible ally of Britain against her.” Minister Adams had also heard rumors that the French, working through the Republican Party, would attempt to replace the office of president with a directory. There was also a general hope expressed by the French leaders that the British would renege on their half of the treaty obligations and keep the forts on the western frontier of the United States for themselves. This, Adams wrote, “[t]hey take for granted” and there will be “a consequent triumph of the french party, french principles, and french influence in the United States [*sic*].”³⁴ Now the Federalists believed that they had the influence of the French Revolution to fear, but also the direct intervention of the French government. French armies had accomplished this (and were continuing to do so) throughout Western Europe. What would stop them from trying the same thing in North America? Something had to be done.

Federalist John Adams won the 1796 election for the presidency and assumed office in March of 1797. Learning of this, the French gave up on subtly interfering in American politics—if they were at all—and launched a far more aggressive campaign against the United States. Any American ships found carrying British goods were subject to seizure and any Americans found on British Navy vessels, regardless of whether they were there voluntarily or had been impressed, were to be treated as pirates. In response, Adams called a special session of Congress and requested two things. First, that the United States be placed in a position of military readiness should the situation with France worsen, and second, that a special mission be formed to negotiate a new treaty with France similar to the Jay Treaty. War, he hoped, would be avoided and normal relations with France could be resumed. Congress quickly approved both measures, and

³⁴ John Quincy Adams, “To John Adams,” April 4, 1796 in Founders Online, National Archives, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-1749>.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry were appointed as special envoys to France.³⁵

The diplomatic attempt to resolve Franco-American issues ended in colossal failure. In what became known as the XYZ Affair, the American diplomats were approached by agents of the French Directory (listed as W, X, Y, and Z in American newspapers) demanded not only a large loan for the French government and that the United States government assume all private American debts to France, but also large personal bribes for the three agents. Once these terms were met, then negotiations could begin. Disgusted, Pinckney and Marshall returned home.³⁶

News of the XYZ Affair reached the American press not long after the two diplomats returned. When the official documents were released, the furor against France was instant and great. “Twelve millions of dollars!!!” the *Albany Centinel* declared incredulously. The United States would never pay such a sum just to open negotiations. While such practices were not unheard of in Europe—especially when one country was clearly “superior” to another—most Americans were disgusted with the idea. Rather than pay a bribe, they would “dare to resist, at the hazard of a little powder and shot[.]” France, many argued, seemed bent on either making the United States a “tributary” to the “most corrupt government under the sun” or waging war. The XYZ Affair had been “conceived in iniquity, and brought for in duplicity and unblushing falsehood.” Even the people of Charleston, South Carolina, who had angrily burned the Jay Treaty in protest

³⁵ John Adams, “To the United States Senate,” May 24, 1797, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-1985>; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 538, 544.

³⁶ Gerry stayed on in the hopes that some sort of negotiations could be opened. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 241. For details on the negotiations themselves, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 549-550, 562-579; Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 210-212.

only a few years before, issued a resolution stating that they “view with *marked* indignation the conduct of the French Republic, towards those distinguished citizens who had been sent” to negotiate a treaty of friendship. They went even further to reinvent the Genêt’s mission to the United States as the first example of French attempts to undermine American sovereignty and honor. This from the city that had given Genêt such a warm welcome!³⁷

Throughout the late spring and summer of 1798, there was actually something resembling national unity. To be sure, Jefferson, Madison, and a few other leading Republicans remained vocal in their opposition to the administration, but by and large they had lost popular support. Many members of the Republican coalition in Congress joined what Jefferson termed the “war party.” The Federalists made significant gains in state legislatures and Congress throughout the year and into 1799, even in the South. In the summer of 1798, Adams confidently wrote that “all Americans” were united in support of the administration. “All America appears to declare a manly vindication of its” national honor and independence. This popular support allowed Adams to feel confident enough to send the Navy to the Caribbean to wage what became known as the Quasi-War. There, the infant United States Navy won several one-on-one battles with French ships, captured several others, and earn its first laurels. Congress also went so far as to annul the 1778 alliance with France that had helped achieve American

³⁷ “Twelve millions of dollars...” *The Albany Centinel* (Albany, NY), April 17, 1798, 3; “To his Excellency John Adams, President of the United States,” *New York Gazette and General Advertiser* (New York), September 12, 1798, 2; “Meeting of the Young Men of Charleston,” *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), June 15, 1798, 1. There were a few attempts by leading Republicans to dissuade the American public from anti-French feeling, stating that the “Englishman that governs [the] administration” was tricking them into war with France and an alliance with Britain. See “Remarks Upon the Dispatches from France” *Herald of Liberty* (Washington, PA), April 30, 1798, 2.

independence.³⁸ While war, even a very limited and undeclared one, was not ideal, the Federalists finally saw their vision for the United States coming into being.

Even with their popular ascendancy in 1798, the Federalists remained incredibly paranoid regarding any influence from the French Revolution. Some of the worst offenders—outside of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison—were believed to be recently nationalized Irishmen. Most Irish immigrants to the United States tended to vote for Republicans and were responsible for building much of the urban support for the party. Additionally, the memory of the Genêt Affair and the widespread support he had initially received was still fresh in the minds of many. Motivated by these fears, the Federalist controlled Congress passed a series of laws known collectively as the Alien and Sedition Acts.³⁹ One of these, the Naturalization Act, dramatically increased the amount of time it took to become a naturalized citizen from five to fourteen years in order to limit the influence of un-Americanized foreigners from polluting American politics. The Alien Act also gave the President power to imprison or deport foreign nationals whom the government believed posed a threat to the United States. The most controversial, though, was the Sedition Act which severely limited public criticism of the federal government. Under its auspices, the Federalists went on a witch-hunt for French spies and supporters, especially among Republican newspaper editors who served as the

³⁸ John Adams, “To the Inhabitants of Dedham” and “To the Inhabitants of Providence” in *A Selection of the Patriotic Addresses to the President of the United States, Together with the President's Answers* (Boston: John W. Fulsom, 1798), 70, 118. For a history of the Quasi-War, see Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Scribner, 1966).

³⁹ For a good summary of the role played by Irish immigrants in American politics, see Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 83-88.

main launching pads of attack against the Federalists.⁴⁰ With these few instigators of the Revolution finally shut up, the unity that Adams so happily proclaimed could become permanent.

Unfortunately for Adams, national unity was fleeting.⁴¹ Bitter partisanship returned and, in some cases, became violent. Federalists starting sporting black cockades to show their support of the administration. Republicans and supporters of the French Revolution began wearing tricolor cockades. Literally wearing their politics on their chest, supporters of these two parties often came into conflict. In a May 10 letter to Madison, Jefferson described one altercation where several young men who had come to Philadelphia to meet with President Adams put on their “Black (or English) cockade[s].” A group of men wearing the “tricoloured (or French) cockade” met them and “a fray ensued” and only broke up when the militia was called out. Even then, Jefferson wrote that “From about 6. to 10. oclock [*sic*] last night...it was dangerous to go out.” Some women at the doors of a church, seeing they were wearing different cockades, attempted to tear the offending cockades off their opponents’ dresses. The Alien and Sedition Acts passed that summer only served to exacerbate the situation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 246-250; Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 228-235; For the full text of the Alien and Sedition Acts, see “Alien and Sedition Acts,” Primary Documents in American History, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Alien.html>.

⁴¹ Douglas Bradborn asserts that it was “wishful thinking.” However, it does seem that given the popular outbreak against France and the Federalist sweep in elections that year, especially across the Republican stronghold in the South, that some sort of unified vision, however fleeting and resting on uncertain foundations, did hold sway for a time. True, as Bradborn notes, opposition to the governments gearing toward war emerged as early as the spring of 1798, but they did not gain national attention until the summer. Bradborn’s article on the opposition to the acts is probably the best secondary description of those events available. Douglas Bradborn, “A Clamor in the Public Mind: Opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 565.

⁴² This was not the only issue under debate. The increased size of the military and to what degree the United States should continue its conflict with France were also major issues of contention. However, the Alien and Sedition Acts, were the primary topics of debate. Jefferson, “To James Madison,” May 10, 1798 in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 30: 343-345; Rosemarie Zagarrri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 86.

The reaction to the acts, especially the Sedition Act, was vehement. In every state of the union, resolutions were passed by local citizens declaring the “Alien and Sedition acts as contrary to the true letter and spirit of the Constitution of the United States.” The first occurred in Clarke County, Kentucky, where the citizens passed a resolution on July 24 declaring the acts “*unconstitutional, impolitic, unjust, and disgraceful* to the American character.” Arguing specifically against the Sedition Act, they asserted their right to “*speaking and publishing* our sentiments” without infringement from the federal government. Other locales began following suit. In Pennsylvania, several counties demonstrated against the acts and sent petitions to Congress for their immediate repeal. The *Aurora General Advertiser* declared that doing so would “promote peace, concord, and happiness in the United States.” From New York to Georgia, from the Atlantic Ocean to the frontier of Kentucky and Tennessee, Americans gathered to defend their right to freedom of speech and to protest what they saw as a dangerous expansion of federal power. Some of these meetings, especially in Kentucky, sometimes gathered crowds numbering in the thousands. Of the acts, the citizens of Poughkeepsie, New York, asked, “What stronger, what more precise definition of slavery can be given than this?”⁴³ The tone of the opposition was that regardless of whether the United States was

⁴³ “Philadelphia, January 12,” *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette* (Carlisle, PA), January 23, 1799, 3; “Lexington, August 1,” *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), October 23, 1798, 2. Bradborn, “A Clamor in the Public Mind,” 568, 571; “To the Senate and Representatives of the United States, in Congress Assembled,” *Creating the United States*, accessed October 18, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj15>. For other examples of resistance to the Alien and Sedition Acts, see the following: “A Meeting of the Inhabitants of the County of Essex, New Jersey,” *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), January 22, 1799, 3; “Newton, New York,” *Greenfield Gazette* (Greenfield, MA), 3; “A Meeting of the Citizens of Kentucky...” *Journal of the Times* (Stonington, CT), October 17, 1798, 2; “Lexington, Kentucky,” *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), September 28, 1798, 1 (also mentions a meeting that took place in Knoxville, TN); “Citizens of Louisa County,” *The Saratoga Register or Farmer’s Journal* (Ballston Spa, NY), November 21, 1798, 2.

at war, the liberty and rights of the people could not be sacrificed for the security of the government.

The most organized, and arguably most famous, opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts came in the form of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, authored by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, respectively. Believing that the power Adams and the federal government were legislating themselves endangered the republic, Jefferson and Madison set about to find a means of saving the United States. Working through the Virginia and Kentucky legislatures, they were able to produce the only two official declarations from any of the state governments that the Alien and Sedition Acts were unconstitutional. Arguing that the Constitution served as a union of the states, delegating some limited powers to the federal government and reserving the rest for the state governments, it became the duty of the states to deliberate between the federal government and the people. Here were the first arguments for state nullification of federal law. While none of the other states adopted or officially approved of the resolutions, preferring such decisions to be left to the Supreme Court, the Resolutions would become highly influential in American thinking.⁴⁴

While most of the country was in an uproar of one form or another against the Alien and Sedition Acts and other actions the government was taking regarding the Quasi War, the Federalists also made sure that their voices were heard. Numerous articles appeared in Federalist leaning newspapers defending the constitutionality and necessity

⁴⁴ For the full text of the Kentucky Resolution, see “Kentucky Resolution – Alien and Sedition Acts,” Avalon Project, accessed March 29, 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/kenres.asp. For the Virginia Resolution, see “Virginia Resolution – Alien and Sedition Acts,” Avalon Project, accessed March 29, 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/kenres.asp. See also: Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 238-241; Harry Ammon and Adrienne Koch, “The Genêt Mission and the Development of American Political Parties,” *Journal of American History* 52, no. 4 (March 1966): 145-176.

of the acts. Luther Martin, who had attended the Philadelphia Convention in 1787, declared as much “Without the least hesitation.” The town of Flushing, New York, hearing of a resolution passed by the town of Newton condemning the acts, wrote their own supporting them, stating that the “unprincipled conduct of many citizens and foreigners made them necessary.” One newspaper went so far as to declare anyone who opposed the laws “must be either mad or foolish.”⁴⁵ Clearly there were some major differences of opinion between the Republicans and the Federalists over what posed a threat to the American republic and what did not.

The most extreme reaction to Republican protests came from Alexander Hamilton, at that time serving as *de facto* commander of the United States Army. Hamilton found the protests disturbing and dangerous, a potential sign that the excesses of the French Revolution were indeed making their way across the Atlantic. The Virginia Resolutions in particular caused him a great deal of worry. As one of the most populous states, the Old Dominion carried a strong influence in the rest of the union. Fearful that the state might try to rebel, Hamilton offered a solution in a letter to Federalist Senator Theodore Sedgwick. The United States was already arming in preparation for a possible invasion from France, giving it a much larger army than was usually available. Once enough troops had been raised, Hamilton suggested, “let them be drawn towards Virginia for which there is an obvious pretext—& then let measures be taken to act upon the laws & put Virginia to the Test of resistance.” With presence of a large military force under federal control, Virginia would think twice about its opposition to the government. This would allow “the Government to triumph with ease.” At first glance, this seems a rather

⁴⁵ Luther Martin, “For the Federal Gazette,” *Maryland Herald* (Easton, MD), March 12, 1799, 4; “Newton, New York,” *Greenfield Gazette* (Greenfield, MA), 3; “From the New Jersey Gazette: Sedition and Alien Bills,” *The Albany Centinel* (Albany, NY), February 26, 1799, 3.

harsh response to the Virginia Resolutions and the other protests taking place at town meetings and published in newspapers. However, around the same time Virginia was moving to build a state armory in Richmond and arm their militia. Legislative acts for an armory in Richmond were passed before the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the arming of the militia was claimed to be in preparation of a possible French invasion. Regardless of whether the preparations were actually made in readiness to fight off the French or the federal government, the militant posture adopted by Virginia cannot be denied. The Virginia Resolutions, combined with the military preparations and Federalist fears of a French Revolution brewing in the United States, allows for a better understanding of Hamilton's position. His letter reveals just how bitterly partisan the United States had become, that Americans were willing to believe some might go so far as to openly rebel.⁴⁶

Often referred to as the "Federalist Era," the 1790s were only truly Federalist in that the Federalist Party happened to have a slim dominance in the federal government. To argue that the American public had a unified vision that was Federalist in nature would be absurd. To argue the same for a Republican vision would be equally so.⁴⁷ Americans were bitterly divided over the nature of their government, their politics, and their national identity. Washington had managed to establish several important precedents and was able to use his fame to keep the dissent to government policies from getting out of control. Even so, the French Revolution (including Genêt's mission) and

⁴⁶ One cannot help but wonder to what degree memories of the American Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the rock that hit him in the head affected Hamilton's opinion of the resistance to the Alien and Sedition Acts and his willingness to resort to military force. Alexander Hamilton, "To Theodore Sedgwick," February 2, 1799, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0267>; Miller, *The Federalist Era*, 241-242. Miller also notes that Jefferson discouraged his followers from violence

⁴⁷ To be fair, no historians have claimed as much.

the Jay Treaty had divided the American public. The Americans had defined their politics and national identity around two belligerent powers: France and Great Britain. Disagreement over whether the tricolor cockade or the black cockade should be the symbol of American identity shaped the decade.

That the situation became more desperate during Adams's presidency should not be surprising. While a famed leader of the American Revolution, he lacked the force of personality had served Washington so well. A brief glimmer of national unity after the XYZ Affair and the early days of the Quasi-War had given Adams hope that perhaps, finally, the United States had found its way. It did not last. The political divide deepened. Americans had diverse ideas of what it meant to be American and these ideas clashed with each other, to the point that Hamilton was willing to use military force to quiet opposition to the government.

However, some aspects of a national identity were starting to take shape. The most important of these was the active role the American people took in expressing their ideas. Newspaper articles, town hall meetings, rallies, letters and petitions to the government, and the wearing of cockades show the role that the American people intended to take in their government. They were not, as the Federalists hoped, going to take up the passive role of merely casting votes for their preferred members of the natural aristocracy and then going about their business. The American people took an active role in shaping American policy and they were not willing to relinquish that role. The election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1800 served as an endorsement of a more democratic vision for the United States and a rejection of the Federalist ideal that

had attempted to hold sway over the previous decade. A “democratic tidal wave” was unleashed that would wash away the old social and political power structure.⁴⁸

Even so, to argue that Jeffersonian Republicanism had become the dominant representation of American identity would be overselling the point. The Federalist Party, while permanently weakened, still existed and many debates over what it meant to be an American still existed. That identity, though, was beginning to take shape.

⁴⁸ Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000), 22.

CHAPTER II

The election of 1800 set a new course for American republicanism. More than a decade of Federalist dominance in Washington came to a permanent end. While they may never have regained the White House, the Federalist Party was not dead. Neither was the partisan nature of American politics, and the struggle to determine what republicanism would mean in the United States continued. Even within the now dominant Republican Party, divisions could be found that threatened to bring the party and its ideology crumbling to the ground.

Foreign affairs continued to exert a major influence on American society and politics. The French Revolution and the wars that continued to engulf Europe had major implications for the United States that shaped American republicanism. A new force had emerged in Europe, a Corsican juggernaut named Napoleon Bonaparte, who would escalate the wars to new levels. Great Britain would follow in the escalation of what it saw as a struggle for its very existence. The French Revolutionary Wars were already a worldwide conflict, but with the ascent of Napoleon they would become even more so. Despite its attempts to remain politically neutral, the United States would find itself caught between the French Eagle and the British Lion. Americans felt that more than just diplomatic neutrality was at stake. Both French and especially British depredations posed serious threats to American national honor. While they still disagreed on how to defend themselves, gleams of unity among the American people can be seen as they tackled these issues.

Immediately upon entering office, Jefferson sought to either undo or change much of what the Federalists had done. The trappings of traditional, European authority—such

as the presidential coach with silver harnesses—were discarded in favor of simpler, more egalitarian styles that were almost radical in nature. Jefferson often greeted visitors to the executive mansion in carpet slippers and wore his hair without powder. At formal dinners, he did away with assigned seating where the diplomats of favored nations sat closer to the President and even went so far as to invite the British and French ambassadors to the same dinner. Jefferson saw almost everyone who petitioned to see him regardless of their standing in society. Never had a chief executive been this accessible or placed himself on a similar plane as most of his constituents.¹

The government establishment built by the Federalists came under direct attack from Jefferson. It had become “too complicated, too expensive” and government “office or officers have...been multiplied unnecessarily, and sometimes injuriously....”² Official diplomatic missions were cut to just Britain, France, and Spain as Jefferson, and many other Republicans, believed that the ideal of foreign contact was commercial and not diplomatic. Many “inspectors of internal revenue” were also laid off and Jefferson submitted to Congress to trim even more fat from the Federal government. The relatively small but well trained military built up by the Federalists lost the most under Jefferson’s knife. Believing that a peacetime regular army should not be any larger than was absolutely necessary—in this case, as garrisons in various forts—Jefferson removed all

¹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 276, 285-288. For more information on United States during Jefferson’s presidency as well as Jefferson himself, see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Brian Douglas Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2012); Peter S. Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Joyce Appleby, *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Times Books, 2003); David N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Peter S. Onuf and Leonard J. Sadosky, *Jeffersonian America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Douglas G. Adair, *The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer*, Mark E. Yellin ed. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000).

“surplus.” Outside of a small squadron to patrol the Mediterranean and keep the Barbary Corsairs at bay, the Navy was encouraged to abandon construction of larger ships and focus instead on small gunboats. Beyond the postal service, the Federal government was reduced as much as possible to only being an engine of foreign policy and an adjudicator in interstate disputes.³

Three foreign policy events would exert major influence on American identity in this period. The first was the Barbary Wars waged against Tripoli from 1801 to 1805, which created debates over national honor and how to properly defend it. The second was the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 that nearly doubled the size of the United States, which reveals some early signs of American expansionism and the nature of it. Finally (and this is more of a series of events), is the ongoing struggle with British over impressment, ship seizures, and blockades that would eventually lead to the War of 1812.

The Barbary Coast, consisting of the Ottoman states of Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers, and the independent Kingdom of Morocco, was a haven of state-sponsored piracy. For centuries, corsairs would set out from the North African coast to plunder the merchant ships of Christendom. This piracy provided most of the income for the three Barbary States under technical Ottoman sovereignty (though they rarely felt much influence from Constantinople). European attempts to destroy their ability to release dozens to hundreds of corsairs into the Mediterranean usually ended in defeat or stalemate. Eventually, it simply proved cheaper to pay the Barbary States to keep the corsairs at bay in the form of tribute, usually in the form of specie though occasionally other goods were deemed acceptable. The Barbary States still usually found an excuse to

³ Thomas Jefferson, “First Annual Message to Congress, December 8, 1801” The Avalon Project, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes1.asp; Thomas Jefferson, “First Annual Message”; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 185.

be at war with one of the Mediterranean powers as a means of maintaining a ready supply of Christian merchantmen to ensure income. Likewise, smaller states such as Denmark or Naples that lacked the large treasuries or naval power of, say, Great Britain were the most vulnerable to constant attacks from the Barbary Coast. It seems that Great Britain and France actually encouraged this as a means of eliminating competition for their Mediterranean trade.⁴

When the United States gained independence, it also lost the presumed naval protection that the British flag had afforded its ships in the Mediterranean. Several ships were taken between 1783 and 1794, though the government was largely powerless to do anything, especially prior to the ratification of the Constitution. Jefferson had initially supported military action against the Barbary States, but when Washington started constructing a navy in 1794, he back-pedaled, suspecting the Federalists were using the Barbary problem for an excuse to expand executive power. He need not have feared:

⁴ Unfortunately, there is very little recent scholarship on the Barbary Wars or the Barbary States themselves. One looks almost in vain for a description of these states, even in books about the wars between them and the U.S. Older works are also rather unsatisfying in this regard. The best description of these states can be found in Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). A more detailed picture of their politics and culture can be gleaned from Roy F. Nichols, "Diplomacy in Barbary," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 74, no. 1 (January 1950). However, it requires a reading of the entire article to piece the information related here together. Recent scholarship, both academic and popular, on the Barbary Wars has been heavily influenced by the September 11, 2001 attacks and tend to paint the conflicts as the United States first war on terror. Additionally, these argue that the Barbary Corsairs were religiously motivated in their attacks. See for example: Richard B. Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008); Joseph Wheelan, *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801-1805* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); Robert Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). While written before the 9/11 attacks, Allison's book contains similar themes to those published afterwards and was probably influenced by the Persian Gulf War. The best work on the Barbary Wars is by far Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). Lambert rightly argues that the Islamic motivations for the Barbary Corsairs is entirely incorrect: "Evidence abounds that neither the pirates nor the Americans considered religion central to their conflict. From his twelve year imprisonment at Algiers, one American captive concluded in the 1790s that money was the Algerine god, that the pirates were far more interested in taking prizes than in waging holy war." Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 7. A useful, older work in understanding the Barbary Wars is James A. Field, *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

constructing a navy from scratch took time and the Federalists, desiring safe access to Mediterranean trade as soon as possible, decided on paying tribute. Treaties were signed with all of the Barbary States but at an incredible cost: \$1.25 million, roughly 20 percent of the annual budget.⁵

One month before Jefferson came to office in March 1801, Tripoli had declared war on the United States. Bashaw Yusuf Karamanli felt slighted as Algiers was receiving annual tribute and Tripoli was not. Promises of presents and the installation of a Consulate in Tripoli from an earlier treaty had gone unfulfilled and Yusuf thought it was time that Tripoli (or, more accurately, he) received what was rightfully due to it. Thus, the declaration of war.⁶

Initially, the Tripolitan declaration of war outraged Americans. They believed the Bashaw's reasons for war and demands of the United States to be petty and insolent. That the United States government should allow the American flag to be "outrageously disgraced...and our citizens exposed to slavery" at every "whim" of the Barbary States was unthinkable. Instead of the tribute he demanded, the Bashaw should receive "chastisement."⁷ Several newspapers picked up an adage from the previous decade, declaring "*Millions for Defence—but not a cent for Tribute!!!*" Indeed, to pay tribute was "degrading" to the United States. Jefferson agreed with the warlike sentiments expressed by many of the American people. "Nothing will stop the eternal increase of demand from these pirates," he declared to James Madison, "but the presence of an armed force, and it

⁵ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 635-636; for more detail on U.S.-Barbary relations prior to 1801, see chapters 2-4 in Lambert, *Barbary Wars*.

⁶ Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 125.

⁷ "Tripoli," *The Sun* (Dover, NH), June 10, 1801, 2-3. *The Sun* lists this as having originally been published in a "George-Town Paper." It is known that this article also appeared in *Western Star* (Stockbridge, MA), May 25, 1801, 3 and the *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), May 5, 1801, 2-3.

will be more economical and more honorable to use the same means at once for suppressing their insolencies.”⁸ Almost immediately after taking office, Jefferson dispatched an “armed force,” under Commodore Richard Dale, consisting of four ships carrying a total of 126 guns.

What Jefferson and most others hoped was that the show of force would bring about a quick, cheap, tribute-free peace settlement. The Tripolitan War, however, dragged on for four years, with each year seeing a new commodore taking command of the Mediterranean squadron. The few months of Dale’s squadron in the Mediterranean did produce some hope. The schooner *Enterprise* captured a Tripolitan ship (the *Tripolitan*, appropriately enough) and the port of Tripoli was placed under blockade. Believing that Dale had the situation under control, United States Minister to Spain David Humphreys felt confident enough to offer Sweden the use of American naval vessels to escort its merchant vessels. However, these hopes quickly dissipated as it became apparent that Tripolitan vessels could escape the blockade simply by staying in the rocky shoals that the American warships could not sail into. Dale’s replacement, Robert Morris, proved ineffectual in handling Tripoli and the increasingly restless Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis. Eventually, he, too, was replaced by Edward Preble, who arrived in the Mediterranean in September 1802.⁹

⁸ “A Danish frigate...” *Stewart’s Kentucky Herald* (Lexington, KY), January 13, 1801; “From the Aurora. Not a Cent for Tribute,” *Constitutional Telegraphe* (Boston, MA), June 20, 1801; Candour, “To the Freemen of Vermont,” *Haswell’s Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), July 20, 1801; “Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 28, 1801” in James Morton Smith ed. *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 1194.

⁹ See Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 128-138; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 154-155, 159; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, 49-51. On Humphreys offer to Sweden, see David Humphreys, “Remarks on the War with Tripoli” in *The Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1804), 74.

Preble proved to be different from his predecessors. First, he developed a truly effective blockade against Tripoli. Second, he orchestrated a heroic victory from the jaws of an otherwise embarrassing defeat. The USS *Philadelphia* chased a Tripolitan vessel into shallow water and became stuck on rocks. Seeing an opportunity, the corsairs swarmed the *Philadelphia*, shooting at it from every angle. Surrounded with no hope of aid or removing his ship from the rocks, Captain William Bainbridge surrendered. Preble determined that the *Philadelphia* could not remain in enemy hands and devised a plan to have the ship destroyed. Twenty-five year old Lieutenant Stephen Decatur was chosen to lead the dangerous expedition. On February 16, 1804, Decatur led a night time attack of seventy volunteers in ships disguised to look Tripolitan. With a good dose of luck and some shrewd deception on the part of Decatur, the Americans reached the *Philadelphia*, boarded her, and set her afire. Once they were sure that there was no chance of the Tripolitans saving the ship, Decatur and his crew returned to their own boats to make their way back to the rest of the squadron. They did so in the nick of time as the *Philadelphia's* powder magazine exploded not long after they departed. It was a stunning accomplish that quickly won Decatur and the infant U.S. Navy many accolades.¹⁰

American reactions to the course of the Tripolitan War are revealing of American republicanism and identity in two ways. First, it spawned a discussion of national honor and pride, two closely connected ideas that were very dear to Americans. Second, it sparked a continuation of an ongoing debate over the nature and interpretation of the Constitution. In this case, the debates were centered on the extent of executive authority, especially in regards to its ability to support armed conflict without a formal declaration of war from Congress.

¹⁰ See Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 139-143; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, 51-52.

National honor and pride were precisely why Jefferson and the United States had chosen war with Tripoli as preferable to paying tribute. Early Republic politics was filled with language reminiscent of personal honor and duels. Joanne Freeman argues that, “For politicians in the early republic, honor was...much more than a vague sense of self-worth; it represented the ability to prove oneself a deserving political leader.” “A man without honor was no man at all. Honor was also entirely other-directed, determined before the eyes of the world; it did not exist unless it was bestowed by others.”¹¹ With honor being such a core facet of an individual man’s life, it stands to reason that he would see his nation in a similar light. Just as when a man was insulted he must, by the rules of honor, seek satisfaction in demanding an apology from or fighting a duel with the offender, the United States could not stand idly by when other nations delivered it insult or injury. If it did, other nations would dismiss the United States as a nation without honor. The fact that the United States was a republic did it few favors in the eyes of most nations, especially with the growing violence of the French Revolution. Continually bullied by the French and British navies, Americans were especially sensitive concerning affronts to their national honor. The Barbary Wars provides one of the first instances where Americans were more or less united in their feelings. The Barbary Corsairs, by demanding tribute and preying upon American ships, insulted American honor and the United States sought satisfaction by sending a fleet to the Mediterranean to wage war against the pirates. With the peace treaty Tripoli was forced to sign in 1805—without a single cent of tribute—Americans felt that their national honor had been properly defended.

¹¹ Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the Early Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 170, xvi.

Republicans were especially conscious of how the war with Tripoli could affect American honor. In this war, all Americans had a duty to “*rally round the Standard of the Government, and PROVE themselves ‘all Republicans, all Federalists’*” in defense of their country’s honor. Those who did not were labeled “British Federalists,” “old tories,” or even “*mongrel Americans.*” The citizens of Brookfield, Massachusetts, declared in an Independence Day toast that American honor would be satisfied by the chastisement of the Barbary Pirates. Decatur’s daring raid on the *Philadelphia* served to “[assert] the honor of the country.” Indeed, the “gallant conduct” of the United States Navy as a whole gave Americans something to be proud of.¹² David Humphreys, the American Minister to Spain and Portugal, could hardly contain his pride when he witnessed firsthand the results of the American expedition to the Mediterranean was producing. That the Americans were successfully fighting the Barbary Corsairs “was not only received with approbation and applause by the nations of Europe, but operated powerfully in placing the character of the United States in a more advantageous point of view than it had ever before been contemplated.” Living and working in the Spanish capital, Humphreys was ideally situated to keep apprised of European opinions of the United States.¹³

The articles quoted from above come from a mix of both Republican and Federalist newspapers. Defending national honor abroad was very important to both

¹² All italics and capitalization are as they appear in the original. “Facts are Stubborn Things: The Barbary Tribute Money,” *Republican Gazette* (Concord, NH) September 24, 1801, 2; “Toast by the people of Brookfield,” *The Political Repository* (Brookfield, MA), July 7, 1801, 3; “National Intelligencer” *Maryland Herald* (Easton, MD), June 26, 1804, 3. Other articles that praise the Navy’s role in raising American esteem and defending national honor include: “Toast given at the dinner, on Saturday, in honor of Commodore Preble,” *Daily Advertiser* (New York), April 2, 1805, 2; “A Vote of Thanks,” *Albany Gazette* (Albany, NY), March 11, 1805, 2; This article uses “dignity” instead of honor: “Toast,” *American Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), December 13, 1805, 3.

¹³ Humphreys, “Remarks on the War with Tripoli” in *Miscellaneous Works*, 73.

parties; they simply had different ideas of how to achieve the same goal. However, a few Federalists questioned the argument that paying tribute to the Barbary States was dishonorable. One Federalist newspaper argued that the use of the word “tribute is a misapplication of language” as, by definition, the term is used to describe “payment in acknowledgement of inferiority and subjection.” For the Republicans to apply the term “tribute” to these payments was “disgraceful” as the Barbary States fell into the category of barbarians, not civilized nations. Indeed, the payments being made to them were more along the lines of gifts made to Indian tribes and “involve[d] no more dishonor than throwing bait to wild beasts...” The article continues to argue that European nations, with whom all Americans wished to be seen as at least equals, had practiced such a policy for centuries to promote commerce that more than made up the funds sent to the Barbary States. That the United States should deem dishonorable what Britain and France—two powers arguably strong enough to squelch the Barbary Corsairs—had been doing for centuries was ridiculous:

Our national honor must be frail thing indeed if it can be injured by our following the example of the greatest European states; and by our adopting the cheapest method of securing our Mediterranean commerce against pirates, whom it can be no dishonor to terrify, and no dishonor to purchase.¹⁴

While Republican militarism was not dishonorable, that they felt dishonored by paying tribute to the Barbary States was absurd. The national honor of the United States was surely made of stronger stuff.

With a few exceptions, there was a general understanding among Americans that the military action against the Barbary States satisfactorily defended national honor and, with the successes of Sterrett, Decatur, and Preble, took the satisfaction demanded of

¹⁴ “From the Palladium: Barbary Powers, a Communication,” *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia) July 10, 1801, 2.

Tripoli when it attacked American honor by pirating American ships and enslaving American citizens. However, there was not a general understanding regarding the interpretation and nature of the constitution. While the debate during the Barbary Wars dealt with the extent of executive power, it was a part of a much longer, ongoing debate that had been occurring since the Constitution was drafted in 1787. The general gist of the arguments presented by the two parties was that the Republicans favored a strict interpretation and minimal role for the federal government and the Federalists favored a loose interpretation and a strong role for the federal government.

When Jefferson was inaugurated as President in 1801, Tripoli had already declared war on the United States. Long a believer that force, and not tribute, was the solution to the depredations of the Barbary Corsairs, Jefferson was finally in a position to put his theory to the test. However, he was nervous as to whether he had the authority to act without a declaration of war and consulted his cabinet. All but Attorney General Levi Lincoln argued that, regardless of whether the United States had declared war, if another country had declared war on it then a state of war existed by default and the President was authorized to make use of his war powers. Lincoln took the strictest interpretation, arguing that Dale's squadron was legally free to repel attacks on individual vessels, but could not follow up should the attacking vessel flee. Ultimately, a policy following the majority opinion of the cabinet was adopted. Should Dale discover an active state of war existed with Tripoli, he was to act accordingly. Otherwise, he was to keep any fighting purely defensive in nature.¹⁵

¹⁵ Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on a Cabinet Meeting," May 15, 1801, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 34:114-115. There seems to be two different schools of thought on Jefferson's interpretation of the President's war powers. Lambert and Wood both assert that Jefferson was very nervous about overstepping his bounds. While Lambert and Wood agree on this point, Lambert differs from Wood and Cogliano in that he argues

Whereas Jefferson's cabinet was mostly in agreement that the action he was taking in May 1801 was perfectly constitutional, some questioned this interpretation. The *Courier of New Hampshire* demanded to know "by what part of the Constitution is the President authorised to enter on a measure of this nature, without the previous sanction of Congress?" Strangely enough given who they were referring to, the newspaper expressed concern that by giving Jefferson an inch on military action against the Barbary States he would have the ability to "drag the United States into a war" with whomever he pleased, whenever he pleased.¹⁶

Despite his earlier decisions concerning what role Dale's squadron was to play, Jefferson seems to have shared similar concerns as the *Courier*. His first annual address to Congress on December 8, 1801, described what role the Navy had played up to that point. Even the capture of the *Tripolitan*, Jefferson argued, conformed to a purely defensive interpretation of the Navy's role in the Mediterranean. As such, Lieutenant Sterrett (commander of the *Enterprise*), "liberated" the ship and its crew after ensuring it was "disabled from committing further hostilities. After praising Sterrett's victory, Jefferson continued on to ask Congress to broaden his war powers for the explicit purpose of bringing Tripoli and any other of the Barbary States that might declare war on the United States to terms favorable to the Americans. Peace, he argued, had been the driving force behind American foreign policy since 1789. A strong show of force,

that Jefferson went with Lincoln's interpretation of the war powers rather than the majority of the cabinet. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 636-637; Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 125-126. Cogliano, however, argues that Jefferson more or less had his mind made up going into the cabinet meeting, which only served to confirm his own views. The course decided upon "was consonant with Jefferson's understanding of executive power under the Constitution." The executive had a duty to act quickly in case of emergency, but once the immediate emergency had passed, then legislative approval was needed to continue. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 155-157. A perusal of the primary material they cite does not make it obvious which of these three is correct. The point still remained that Jefferson and the Navy, even with the more liberal view expressed by most of his cabinet, still had to act with a degree of restriction without Congressional approval.

¹⁶ "Philadelphia, June 3" *Courier of New Hampshire* (Concord, NH), June 18, 1801, 3.

capable of soundly defeating the Barbary Pirates should the need arise, was necessary to achieve that goal.¹⁷ Congress dutifully passed the measures he requested within a month. Jefferson had achieved both of his goals: directing a strong naval force against the Barbary Pirates to end the tribute system once and for all and maintaining a strict interpretation of the Constitution wherein he did not overstep his authority.

The Federalists also weighed in on the debate over constitutional interpretation. Most of the criticisms levelled at Jefferson by Federalists after Dale's fleet set sail for the Mediterranean had more to do with how the President was directing the war, not that it was being fought. Alexander Hamilton, for one, believed that the whole operation was hamstrung by Jefferson's constitutional scruples. He cited as an example the capture of the *Tripolitan* by the *Enterprise*. Because there was no authorization for offensive action by Congress, Lieutenant Sterrett, the victorious commander, had been forced to release the *Tripolitan* and her crew, though not before he had dumped all of her guns and ammunition in the sea. It was absurd, he argued, for the President not to immediately respond to a declaration of war by a foreign country. The idea that "without a declaration of war by Congress, our public force may destroy life, but may not restrain the liberty, or seize the property of the enemy" went completely against the spirit of the constitution that Jefferson was so nervous about following.¹⁸

The Federalists were also happy to remind Jefferson and the Republicans of their reluctance to build a navy in the 1790s, believing that it would pose a threat to American liberty. When a navy was first proposed in 1794, the Republicans described building a

¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson, "First Annual Message to Congress," December 8, 1801, Avalon Project, last modified 2008, accessed March 28, 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes1.asp.

¹⁸ Lucius Crassus [Alexander Hamilton], "The Examination" *New York Evening Post* (New York), December 17, 1801, 2-3. Hamilton would go on to publish eighteen articles refuting "point by point" Jefferson's annual message. Lambert, *Barbary Wars*, 130.

fleet “as useless, expensive, and dangerous to liberty.”¹⁹ This last point the *Connecticut Courant* derided as being downright silly, accusing the Republicans of believing that “the ships would climb the Allegheny ridge, and attack liberty, half seas over at her whisky works.” More to the point, now that the Republicans controlled the reins of power they “affect to be full of spunk, all mettle, fighting is their fort, they would not give a cent to Algiers for tribute, millions for defense.” Not only were the Republicans hypocrites, the *Courant* argued, but they were downright lying to the American people, making use of truth and deceit when it suited their nefarious designs. Who were the sailors captured by the pirates? the *Courant* asks. The answer was that they were mostly “Yankys” and immigrants, not the Republican Party’s darling Virginians.²⁰

The Barbary Wars reveal that defending national honor was a prominent part of American identity. To what degree that honor was insulted remained up for debate, but honor and the rules associated with it were omnipresent with Americans. While this shows some form of a unified identity taking shape, the constitutional debates over presidential authority show that there was still not a clear idea of what sort of republic the United States was supposed to be. One final point that can be gleaned from the Barbary Wars is a growing sense of American exceptionalism. At the very least, Americans believed, the United States ought to be treated as the equal of European nations. That the Barbary States should try to dictate policy to them, as with the case of Tripoli seeking

¹⁹ While this is from an inflammatory article published by the Federalists, it does in this part speak the truth. The Republicans feared any sort of military establishment as being a drain on the nation’s coffers and antithetical to liberty. They often cited that nations with large navies tended to become involved in affairs abroad more easily, which in turn pushed for a larger army to be sent to these locations. Great Britain, the Republican’s greatest nemesis and possessor of the world’s largest fleet, was their main example. Jefferson’s solution was a fleet of gunboats that could provide harbor defense but would be unable to travel out to sea. See Ian Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Julia H. McLeod, “Jefferson and the Navy: A Defense” in *Huntington Library Quarterly* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Feb. 1945), 153-184.

²⁰ “From the Palladium: Algerine Tribute,” *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford) July 27, 1801, 2.

tribute money, was offensive to American dignity. Anything that would place the Americans in what could be perceived by any party as a subservient rather than equal role was unacceptable. This feeling would continue to grow through the decade.

Nowhere was this more apparent than the United States' relations with Great Britain. War between Britain and France had started anew in 1803, although it was not until 1804 and 1805 that the War of the Third Coalition gained any momentum. With two of the foremost Atlantic powers at war, American merchants again began to take up the carrying trade as it had before. It was not long before American merchant ships became the single largest carrier in the Atlantic, reaping enormous profits for American businessmen and customs revenue for the government. However, they also became subject to many of the practices from France and Britain that had plagued the United States in the 1790s. Merchant ships were constantly seized for supposedly carrying contraband—a term that came to be ever more broadly defined—and the British in particular began searching American ships for deserters and many times taking American citizens to help fill out their crews. Even so, it was not until 1805 following the Battle of Trafalgar that tensions between the United States and Britain became strained again. At this point, the British came to completely dominate the oceans in a way that no nation had up to that point. With the largest navy in the world, Britain could more or less define the laws of the sea as they pleased. Given that they were locked in a massive war that they believed to be a life or death struggle, the British were more than ready to interpret international law as loosely as possible to benefit their war effort.²¹

²¹ It should be noted that there were also issues with France during this time period, but they were dwarfed by issues with Britain. After Trafalgar, the French had a minimal naval presence in the Atlantic, France and its allies were blockaded by the massive British fleet, and Napoleon seemed content to conquer Europe with only his armies. For information on the years leading up to the War of 1812 and the causes thereof,

To the Americans, impressment was much more than an illegal practice. While formal correspondence between the United States and Great Britain focused on the legal aspects, American rhetoric at home expanded well beyond that. To the majority of Americans, British practices on the ocean were a direct threat to republican government, trampled on the rights of individual citizens, and directly insulted national honor. Inextricably intertwined with each other, these issues shed further light on the development of American republicanism in this period.

One of the key aspects of American republicanism was a strong sense and understanding of liberty. This was not an idea unique to the United States as it had its origins with English thought, though the idea had developed differently in the colonies. In the United States, the term implied what today might be termed an almost libertarian view of a citizen's relationship with the government, particularly the federal government. Unless a citizen impinged upon the rights of another, he/she should be allowed to carry on as he/she pleased without interference from the government. Liberty went hand in hand with the idea of freedom, where a man was beholden to no one except himself unless he gave his consent. Otherwise, a citizen would be subject to tyranny or, in extreme cases, slavery. Rhetoric making use of these terms—"tyranny" and "slavery"—in reference to British impressment can be found throughout American newspapers in the first decade of the nineteenth century.²²

see Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1962); Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America* 9 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889-1891).

²² Impressment was a practice where British Navy vessels stopped American ships—usually merchants—and went searching for deserters from the Royal Navy or British subjects who would normally be subject to a press gang if they were still in Britain. Oftentimes, British captains abused this practice and took anyone whom they believed had an English, Scottish, or especially Irish accent. See Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 3-5. This actually sparked a major incident during the War of 1812 when several American soldiers

An article published in the *Spirit of the Press* directly expressed these views. “Born and educated in the exercise of personal liberty” Americans were subject to no laws except by their own consent and could not be unwillingly subjected to “hard labor (the common punishment of felons).” Britain is granted the sobriquet of “engine of tyranny” and is described as a hypocritical and “lawless monarchy.” The *Reporter* of Lexington, Kentucky, described impressment as “the galling captivity of freemen” and the continued forced service of three men in particular who had been “kidnapped” by the British as “slavery.” A few years later, the same newspaper would again use slavery to describe impressment. The *Trenton Federalist* would go even further and make a direct analogy between impressment and American slavery, with the British practice being as “[outrageous] and as dreadful as your democratic compeers of the southern states do the defenceless [*sic*] blacks...” These newspapers were not alone in the use of these terms and, indeed, dozens can be found using such language to describe their view of impressment. Other terms that appear are “piracy,” “oppression,” and “bondage.” One article that was published in several newspapers presented an especially damning description of impressment: “his [American citizen’s] protection torn, his country scoff’d, his freedom destroyed, his person scourg’d...” Another went so far as to argue that service in the British Navy, as many Americans were experiencing, was so horrific that it would even “disgrace the national honor of the Algerines!” Continuing to harken back to the treatment of captured Americans at the hands of the Barbary States, the article continues to describe British treatment of American sailors as going far beyond the pale

captured at the Battle of Queenston Heights in 1812 were identified as being Irish, taken out of the ranks of the paroled soldiers, and sent to Britain to stand trial for treason. See Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 178-180.

when compared to “Algerine slavery” which was already “both hard and cruel.”²³ As evidenced here, to say that Americans were angered by impressment would be an understatement.

The comparisons to slavery and other forms of forced servitude, including the use “tyranny” and “despotism”, are very telling. British impressment of American sailors went well beyond simple issues of legality. With slavery as very present system in the United States, Americans were well aware of what it meant to not have freedom. The enslaved African-Americans served as an everyday reminder of the difference between having freedom and not having it. This made Americans very touchy about freedom and liberty and very suspicious of anything that might trample on those institutions even a little. To describe impressment in these terms was to make it one of the vilest of crimes that could be committed against a free man.²⁴ For the British to be practicing impressment was to make them the vilest of criminals in the eyes of Americans. The comparisons to the Barbary States made by the *Carolina Gazette* especially evoke this and becomes even more telling if one remembers that the Americans had referred to their North African enemies as barbarians. Impressment denied Americans the institutions that were theirs by right and was the greatest insult and injury that could be imposed not only on those unfortunate enough to be forced into the Royal Navy, but on every other American who could potentially face a similar fate.

²³ “Impressment,” *Reporter* (Lexington, KY), April 28, 1810), 4; “[Sacrifice]” *Reporter* (Lexington, KY), December 10, 1811, 3; “Impressment of American Seamen,” *Trenton Federalist* (Trenton, N), August 12, 1805, 3; “Impressment” *Democratic Press* (Philadelphia) November 27, 1809, 1. Other newspapers where it was published include the *American Watchman* of Wilmington, Delaware, the *American Mercury* of Hartford, Connecticut, the *Saratoga Advertiser* of Saratoga, New York, and the *True American* of Trenton, New Jersey; “Our Seamen in Slavery,” *Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC) February 22, 1811, 4. This was also published in the *Farmer’s Repository* of Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia).

²⁴ As a brief note, this does specifically refer to men. Women were considered second class citizens and were never subject to impressment because of their sex. Free blacks were occasionally subject to impressment, but the newspapers rarely, if ever, mention them or make note of the race of those taken.

These ideas of freedom and the British taking away that freedom also tie very strongly into a sense of national honor. This has already been touched on with the Barbary States where many Americans were enraged by the practices of the North African kingdoms. The depredations of the British, though, brought out even stronger opinions. Just as with the Barbary States, Americans demanded action against the British, with some even calling for war. The “warhawks” as they came to be known as, gained in strength and numbers.

Impressment remained the major foreign policy issue of 1805-1812. Many of the descriptions of British impressment given above, wherein the practice is described as a form of tyranny or even slavery, are also strongly tied to national honor. Many Americans began to ask how their government, which was supposed to protect its citizens from such abuses, could sit idly by as the British trampled their freedoms under foot. An article referenced above (see footnote 18) suggested that “British impressment is perpetuated by American submission. We are faithless to our brethren; or Britain could not hold *FIVE THOUSAND* Americans in Chains.” The author, who signed his name “Whig,” declared that the Federal government was passively allowing great crime to be committed against its citizens, whom it was supposed to protect. National honor dictated that something ought to be done and, indeed, by doing nothing, the United States shared some of the guilt with Great Britain.²⁵

Another article provided an attempt to defend the practices of the Jefferson administration in response to impressment and other British wrongdoings. While it is a defense and contrary to the article cited above, it also reveals a strong sense of national honor. “No other nation has done to us this mortifying, pernicious and humiliating

²⁵ “Impressment” in *Democratic Press*, (Philadelphia), November 27, 1809, 1

wrong” of impressment and Britain had not used the practice on any other nation, even though Englishmen among, say, Russians would very clearly stand out where he may not on an American ship. Falling back on American rights to trial by jury and innocent until proven guilty, the former of which is guaranteed by the British Constitution to its own subjects, the author made a legal argument for why the British are wrong in what they are doing. More importantly, it reinforces that American national honor was also deeply tied to its sense of rights, especially the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. While the descriptions of impressment as slavery were much more forceful in their wording, this article revealed that Americans feel that other rights of theirs were being trampled on and that they were not going to stand for it.²⁶ National honor dictated that something needed to be done.

The issue of impressment and with it British insults to American honor came to a head in June of 1807. The British squadron stationed off the Chesapeake Bay had experienced the large numbers of desertions that plagued the entire Royal Navy. Some of these men were known to have taken up employment on American vessels, including the frigate *USS Chesapeake* stationed at Norfolk, Virginia. On June 27, Captain Barron (USN) decided to take his ship out to sea to train his inexperienced crew but was almost immediately hailed by the British *HMS Leopard* upon entering international waters. Unperturbed, Barron allowed the British to send over a boat. The British officer who came aboard relayed a demand for the return of four supposed deserters, among them Ratford. Barron refused and the British boat returned to the *Leopard*. Suspecting the British were not going to back down quietly, Barron ordered the *Chesapeake*'s crew to

²⁶ Furiscola, “A Defence Of the conduct of the President of the United States, upon the subject of the impressment of persons from American ships,” *Democratic Press* (Philadelphia) March 27, 1807, 1.

beat to quarters, but to do so as quietly as possible. The *Leopard* hailed the *Chesapeake* again, repeating their earlier demands. When Barron refused again, he was ordered to submit or to be fired upon. When Barron began bluffing for more time to prepare his ship for battle, the *Leopard* opened fire on the hapless *Chesapeake*, killing four and wounding seventeen. In response, the *Chesapeake* was only able to return one token shot before striking her colors. The British immediately boarded, took the four men, returned to the *Leopard*, and left the *Chesapeake* to limp back to Norfolk.²⁷

Outrage was immediate. “Never since the Battle of Lexington,” Jefferson noted, “have I seen this country in such a state of exasperation as at present, and even that did not produce such unanimity.” The incident was an unbearable insult to the “dignity and honor” of the United States. That a British warship had dared to fire on an American Navy vessel, a direct representative of the United States government, was unimaginable; and yet, the *Leopard* had dared to commit an act of war with impunity. The Virginia militia turned out in force to patrol their coast to prevent the British landing for food or water. The citizens of Hampton, Virginia took their revenge by destroying “the casks of a watering boat belonging to the English” and began preparing for a possible British raid. In New York, a mob attacked a presumed British supply ship and disabled the rudder. The *Columbian Centinel* of Boston, a long time mouthpiece of the Federalist Party, declared that in light of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, it was willing to put aside all dislike for Republicans aside. The *Centinel* argued that the incident was a “ferocious violation” and “an indecent attack on the sovereignty of the American nation.” A bi-

²⁷ Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 17; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 140-141.

partisan town hall meeting in Frederick Town, Maryland, echoed similar sentiments.²⁸

Almost every voice in the United States was united demanding punishment and retribution for the attack on the *Chesapeake*.

Even before the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, Jefferson and Madison were planning retaliation against British depredations. They believed that economic coercion was the best means of forcing the British to back down on impressment, the ship seizures, and their other insulting practices. While he was not opposed to using force to protect American interests (e.g. the Barbary Wars), Jefferson preferred economic sanctions to military conflict. It was believed that since American merchants dominated the Atlantic carrying trade, even temporarily cutting the British (or French, for that matter) off from it would bring them to their knees and make them more amenable to American demands. The Non-Importation Act went into effect on April 18, 1806. After the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, the United States and Great Britain came dangerously close to war. Ultimately, Jefferson's earlier policy of economic coercion won out again, only this time it would be far more sweeping than the Non Importation Act. The First Embargo Act, which was in effect from 1807 to 1809, caused some momentary damage and concern to the British economy, but absolutely devastated the United States' economy. The value of American exports dropped from \$108 million in 1807 to \$22 million in 1809. Prices dropped across the country. Pushed to desperation, smuggling became rampant, especially in Federalist New England. The state of affairs became so bad that in 1809

²⁸ "Jefferson to DuPont de Nemours, July 1807" in Brett F. Woods, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Thoughts on War and Revolution, Annotated Correspondence* (New York: Algora, 2009), 215; "Chaplain of the *Chesapeake* to a Gentleman in Hampton, VA, June 24, 1807," *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC) July 7, 1807; "The public will recollect..." *The Democrat* (Boston), July 4, 1807, 2; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 142-144; Call for action, *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), August 1, 1807, 2; "Public Meeting," *Federal Gazette* (Baltimore), July 16, 1807, 2.

newly-elected President James Madison terminated the embargo. He would try variations on the embargo in the build-up to the War of 1812, but to no avail.²⁹ The embargo has justifiably been labeled by historians as a complete failure.

American reactions were negative on both sides of the political aisle. The depression caused by the embargo was too widespread for any strong, popular defense of it to take shape. To be sure, a few Republicans made abortive attempts at defending the policy as “peculiarly adapted to the circumstances of the times, and irresistibly called for the interest, honor, and safety of our country.”³⁰ Such sentiments were few and far between.

As time went on, popular opinion on Anglo-American relations took on a more warlike tone. The “Republican Young Men” of Troy, New York, called on Americans to fall back on “the only *post of honor*, the temple of his liberties, and to prepare to repel those attacks on his independence.” They also went on to state that a “final stand” was necessary to defend American liberties and honor, which they believed to be completely inseparable. Echoing the young men of Troy, the *Vermont Republican* called on the “Freemen of Vermont” to “be in readiness to sustain the shock of foreign enmity” and “let our *arms* decide our second contest for liberty.” As far as the author was concerned, the time for politeness and attempts at peace had long passed: “My God! Shall this nation be longer insulted with impunity? Forbid it! FORBID IT *eternal justice!*” National honor dictated that Americans take up arms and forcefully defend their liberties

²⁹ For information on the Embargo Act and their impact on the United States, see Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 218-221, 237-242; Horsman, *Causes of the War of 1812*, 101-143; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 140-183.

³⁰ “Bristol County Resolutions,” in *The Democrat* (Boston), October 12, 1808, 1.

against the tyranny of Great Britain. Indeed, if they were not careful, the states could very well once “again become colonies, and receive the yoke of bondage.”³¹

In 1811, the *Lexington Reporter* argued that any republican nation that allowed its citizens to be seized by force and subjected to “tortures and slavery...surely does not merit the privileges, or even the name of a republic.” Another article went so far as to accuse the United States of cowardice for its lack action beyond the embargo. Six Connecticut sailors, it stated, were taken by the British into the Royal Navy. The wife of one of the men lamented to her daughter “that she knows not which of the two she ought more to detest—British tyranny, or American cowardice.” That the United States was doing so little, especially with the embargo rapidly becoming more unpopular by the day, was distressing to this woman. National honor as a republic dictated that the United States should do more to protect its citizens than merely cutting off trade.³²

Eventually, the calls for war would win out. Both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison continued to believe in the power of the economic coercion, overestimating the power of American trade on Britain and France. However, even they could see that the damage to not only the economy but to popular opinion was a higher cost than the American people were willing to pay. From 1805 to 1812, Americans had received insult and injury from the British, their national honor brushed aside like cobwebs. Their honor as republicans dictated that as individuals and a nation that satisfaction must be demanded from Great Britain. To do otherwise would be to wallow in dishonor and give up hope that their republic would ever be respected by the world powers.

³¹ “Republican Young Men,” *Democratic Press* (Boston), February 21, 1809, 2; Publicola, “Freemen of Vermont,” *Vermont Republican* (Windsor, VT), August 21, 1809, 3; Publicola, “Freemen of Vermont,” *Vermont Republican* (Windsor, VT), August 21, 1809, 3.

³² “[Sacrifice],” *Reporter* (Lexington, KY), December 10, 1811, 3; “Impressment” in *Lynchburg Press* (Lynchburg, Virginia, July 9, 1810), 2.

What has been covered so far in this chapter has largely been focused on issues of national honor and threats to American liberty and republicanism, as well as competing visions of what each of those meant to individual American citizens. There was another event in the Jeffersonian Era that has much to reveal to the historian on another aspect of American identity: the Louisiana Purchase and American expansionism. The Louisiana territory roughly doubled the territory of the United States and gave the United States the ever valuable seaport of New Orleans. The United States had been taking steps towards expanding since pre-Revolutionary days, with a steady stream of settlers traveling beyond the Appalachian Mountains to the Ohio Valley, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Louisiana was an Olympic leap and opened up huge amounts of land to settlement.³³

While settlers continued to pour across the Appalachian Mountains, Thomas Jefferson was one of the first to envisage a United States of America that will “cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent.” Americans needed these giant swathes of territory if Jefferson’s vision of the American republic were to have any hope of becoming true. The best citizen, in Jefferson’s mind, was the yeoman farmer. He was independent from landlords, working the land for his and his family’s own benefit for both subsistence and the market, and free from the corrupting influence of cities and manufactories. As the United States’ population increased, it would need more land for its yeoman citizenry. For him, American republicanism was “predicated on the geographic expansion of the country.” Jefferson gazed in awe (and one suspects, some jealousy) of the massive American Empires possessed by Great Britain, France, Spain,

³³ The historiography on the Louisiana Purchase is surprisingly thin. Two of the very few scholarly works is John Kukla, *A Wilderness so Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Anchor, 2004); Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York: Scribner, 1976). Otherwise, for more information, see works on Jefferson’s presidency.

and Portugal, much of it only sparsely settled. Someday, he believed, it would all become a part of the “empire of liberty.”³⁴

The Louisiana Territory and the city of New Orleans, controlled by Spain, were the prizes Americans coveted the most. As settlers pushed ever westward, the Mississippi River became an ever more important highway and New Orleans their connection to the market. The 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo granted Americans access to the Mississippi and New Orleans to sell their goods. Some Americans were beginning to settle in the territory, slowly making it their own. Indeed, Jefferson believed it would only be a matter of time before the Spanish Empire, already weak, would crumble and the United States would gradually absorb the parts as they fell off. In 1800, though, France reacquired Louisiana after first giving it to Spain forty years earlier. This caused a great deal of concern for Jefferson, who wrote, “The cession of Louisiana...by Spain to France works most sorely on the U.S.” Never, he declared, “can it ever be in the hands of France.” While Spain was weak, France was strong. It was unlikely that the United States would be able to gradually absorb Louisiana from them. More worrisome, should relations between the two countries sour again—the Quasi War had just been resolved—France was in a position to close New Orleans and the Mississippi River to American trade, which would ruin the western states. Whoever controlled New Orleans would be the United States’ “natural & habitual enemy.” The French would also have a solid base of operations from which to invade the United States if they ever decided to do so.³⁵

³⁴ Jefferson, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 35: 719; Barry J. Balleck, “When the Ends Justify the Means: Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1992), 684-688; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 172-175.

³⁵ Jefferson, “To Robert R. Livingston,” April 18, 1802, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 37:264; Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations: The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1:111-112; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 365-368. Napoleon had strategic reasons for convincing Spain to give up Louisiana. It was supposed to serve as a

Jefferson decided that he needed to find a way to acquire New Orleans and the territory around it to protect American trade. He wrote Robert Livingston, the American Minister to France, that he should offer to buy it for \$2 million and sent James Monroe to help in the negotiations. When Livingston and Monroe put forward the offer, the French Foreign Minister returned with a counter offer that astounded the two American diplomats: Napoleon was willing to sell the United States the *entirety* of Louisiana. Livingston at first could not believe that the French were serious. The French made the offer again. Realizing they were not being played for fools, Monroe and Livingston signed a treaty on April 30, 1803, purchasing Louisiana for \$11,250,000 plus \$3,750,000 in damage claims from the Quasi-War. The total territory ceded equaled 820,000 square miles. It would nearly double the size of the United States.³⁶

Jefferson and the nation were ecstatic. The Senate approved the purchase on October 20 and the House approved the needed funding a week later, both with overwhelming majorities.³⁷ The popular response was resoundingly in favor of the purchase. The acquisition of the Louisiana Territory presented numerous advantages to the United States, which the American newspapers were only too happy to relate. Confident that “[this] vast acquisition will every day unfold new advantages to the United

supply base for San Domingue (Haiti), the French sugar colony then undergoing a massive slave rebellion. However, when the French army of 40,000 soldiers sent to reestablish French authority was destroyed by disease, Napoleon realized that San Domingue was an abyss of lives and money and chose to focus his efforts to Europe. He also was looking for a source of money to help this process along. For more information on the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004).

³⁶ Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 192-194; Perkins, *American Foreign Relations*, 1:116-117.

³⁷ The House of Representatives was briefly stalled by constitutional scruples, given the Republican strict constructionist view of the Constitution, which Jefferson shared. However, both quickly argued away those issues using the “necessary and proper” clause as Hamilton had in the 1790s to support his financial program. See Jeremy D. Bailey, *Thomas Jefferson and Executive Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 7; Everett Somerville Brown, *Constitutional History of the Louisiana Purchase* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920); Barry J. Balleck, “When the Ends Justify the Means,” 679-696.

States,” the American newspapers spilled a great deal of ink relating the many advantages controlling Louisiana gave to the United States. The benefits to American trade, manufacturing, fishing, farming, and the economic prosperity of the country as a whole filled numerous articles. “There is all the reason for exaltation” for the stroke of luck that brought the United States the entire territory. The people of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, declared that “the purchase...will, doubtless, give eclat [*sic*] to [Jefferson’s] administration.” The *Pittsfield Sun* of Massachusetts even asserted that the massively increased size of the United States would protect them from the danger of the “black population,” though it stops short of explaining why that was the case. Almost to a man, the Americans agreed that “the acquisition of a territory so extensive, valuable” that it would be a moment of everlasting glory for the United States.³⁸

Federalist opposition to the measure was generally weak and not popularly supported, though they made no shortage of noise in opposition to it. Several newspapers argued that the territory was “worth nothing” and that the whole thing was a waste of money. The *Connecticut Centinel* referred to Louisiana as “worse than useless Others argued that creating such a large republic would prove too difficult to govern. Fisher Ames echoed these arguments and declared Louisiana to be “a great waste,” filled only with wild animals and Indians. It made the United States far too large to govern by a republican government and would cause the country eventually to be governed by “the SWORDS OF FORTY LEGIONS,” as had happened to the Roman Republic *cum*

³⁸ Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 195-196; “Philadelphia, July 19,” *Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, MA), August 1, 1803, 2; Columbus, “Of the American Business in Wood, Provisions, Horses & C. and the Carrying Trade, as Affected by the Purchase of Louisiana,” *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette* (Carlisle, PA), August 24, 1803, 1; “Our Friends at a Distance,” *Republican Advocate* (Fredericktown, MD), July 15, 1803; “[Mr. Livingston. France. Paris],” *Republican Star or Eastern Shore General Advertiser* (Easton, MD), August 2, 1803, 3.

Empire. Others argued that it was part of a plot for the slave holding South to overwhelm New England political power. Believing this to be a real possibility, Timothy Pickering and Roger Griswold considered organizing a New England secession movement.

Alexander Hamilton, however, put an immediate stop to any such idea, calling it “a clear sacrifice of great positive advantages.”³⁹

While many Federalists were opposed to the Louisiana Purchase, a few were actually strongly in favor of it. Most prominent of these was Alexander Hamilton, who wrote an anonymous article in the *New York Evening Post* outlining the benefits—as well as issues the administration would need to handle—of the Louisiana Purchase. While he grudgingly acknowledged that it would give deserving “eclat [*sic*] to his [Jefferson’s] administration,” Hamilton proclaimed that the purchase “was essential to the peace and prosperity of our Western country.” Ever mindful of opportunities of increased American commerce, Hamilton saw in the Louisiana “a free and valuable market.” “All Americans” ought to be pleased and proud of what Monroe and Livingston had achieved.⁴⁰

Southern Federalists were the most likely to support the Louisiana Purchase. An editorial in the *Charleston Courier* announced the feelings of the South Carolina Federalists on the matter. While it pained them to break ranks with the “firm and undaunted champions of federalism,” they could not bring themselves to disapprove of

³⁹ Mentor, “Louisiana,” *Albany Centinel* (Albany, NY), September 30, 1803, 2; “On the Purchase of Louisiana,” *Courier of New Hampshire* (Concord, NH), August 18, 1803, 1; Fisher Ames [Fabricius], “For the Centinel,” *Columbian Centinel* (July 16, 1803), 1; Calculator, “Argument Against Louisiana,” *Connecticut Centinel* (Norwich, CT), October 18, 1803, 1; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 195; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 369-370; Alexander Hamilton, “To Theodore Sedgwick,” July 10, 1804, Founders Online, National Archives, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0264>. As a side note, Hamilton wrote the letter that ended Pickering and Griswold’s scheming the day before he died in a duel with Aaron Burr. One of his last acts was an attempt to preserve the Union.

⁴⁰ Hamilton was very careful to give as little credit to Jefferson as possible. Kukla, *Wilderness So Immense*, 287; “Purchase of Louisiana,” *New York Evening Post* (New York), July 5, 1803, 2.

the purchase just because the “democratic faction” were the ones to orchestrate it. It continued, “we do believe [the Louisiana Purchase] to be a most fortunate event for the States of America.” The territory was bought at a “good bargain” and increased American security by removing the French and Spanish from the strategic city of New Orleans. They lamented the fact that, in their eyes, most Federalists were caught up in a campaign of “indiscriminate opposition.”⁴¹ Three Federalist Congressmen, all from south of the Mason-Dixon Line, seem to have agreed with the *Charleston Courier* as they broke ranks to cast their votes with the Republicans in favor of the Louisiana Purchase.⁴² While New England Federalists railed against the purchase, the Federalist Party as a whole did not present a unified voice.

The support garnered for the Louisiana Purchase and Jefferson’s vision for an “empire of liberty” are emblematic of growing expansionist sentiment in the United States. Americans, for their own safety and prosperity, needed to see many European powers removed from the continent as possible. Even the Republican’s beloved France posed a threat to American republicanism, which prompted Jefferson to order Livingston and Monroe to attempt the region’s purchase to begin with. Americans were beginning to fall in line with Jefferson’s view that continent the was rightfully theirs. While New England Federalists railed against the Louisiana Purchase, their voices were drowned by

⁴¹ “Whatever mortification it may cost us...” *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), October 29, 1803, 3-4.

⁴² These Representatives were John Campbell (MD), Benjamin Huger (SC), and Samuel Purviance (NC). In the Senate, Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey was the only Federalist to vote for the Louisiana Purchase. Unfortunately, none of them spoke during the debates so their reasoning can only be guessed at for now. Interestingly, Thomas Worthington, a Republican Senator from Ohio, voted against it. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875," <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llhj&fileName=004/llhj004.db&recNum=420>; *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America*, 1:450, "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875," American Memory, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llej&fileName=001/llej001.db&recNum=456>.

the overwhelming popular support for the measure, with many of their Southern supporters falling in with the Republicans. For these “black sheep” Federalists, national interest seems to have been more important to them than party loyalty. A gradual turn towards national and not sectional or party interest was emerging, and to Americans, part of that interest meant creating an empire of liberty.

The period 1801 through 1811 shows the continuing formation of a national identity. A popular interest in preserving national honor against any country peaked with the Barbary Wars and in 1807 following the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair. Impressment, ship seizures, and foreign disdain for American sovereignty deeply insulted Americans. While they continued to disagree as to the best course of action in how to handle this, the general feeling that the nation had been insulted and injured by the acts of the Barbary corsairs and the British. They Americans decided that their national honor was sufficiently insulted to warrant strong repercussions. Also during this time, the Louisiana Purchase and the widespread public support it received reveals the embryonic stages of American expansionism. An American national identity was beginning to take shape. However, this identity was not yet fully matured. It would take a war to bring it to full fruition. It was a war, however, that almost destroyed the nation.

CHAPTER III

The War of 1812 was a pivotal moment in the development of American national identity. Early high hopes came crashing down as American armies lost battle after battle. Disagreements over how to proceed through the conflict were not only between Federalists and Republicans, but also among members of the Republican Party itself. The Union very nearly came apart at the seams, and yet, at the end of it all, the Americans emerged with a strong sense of national identity. The War of 1812 is not only revealing of ongoing trends in the burgeoning American identity, but also transformative of that identity as well. The desired conquest of Canada, a few key victories, the

emergence of national heroes, and by the end of it all a sense that the United States had not only defended their honor, but had actually won the war. With that sense of honor and victory would at long last emerge a unified national vision.¹

A continuing trend in American identity was the urge to expand the United States. During the War of 1812, that urge was directed to the north. American interest in Canada dates as far back as the colonial period. When it was a French colony, the English colonists desired it to remove the threat of attack from both the Catholic French and, more importantly, their native allies. This dream was realized in the Seven Years War (1754-1763) when the British army captured Quebec and Montreal and the French gave up all claims to the colony in the peace treaty. In the American Revolution, several invasion attempts were made in the hopes that the Canadians would rise up to join the patriots, all of which failed miserably. When the United States finally achieved independence in 1783, Canada still loomed as a possible threat. Relieving the British of it would serve to remove this threat, supply Americans with more land to settle and cultivate, and free the Canadians from the tyranny many Americans assumed their northern neighbors lived under. It was assumed that if the United States and Great Britain went to war, the primary battle ground would be Canada. That was where the closest British troops were and the Americans did not have the resources to conduct an

¹ Works on the War of 1812 have largely been political, diplomatic, and military in nature. While there are many fine works covering these fields, it only reveals a portion of the war's impact. There has been an effort in recent years, though, to apply different avenues of analysis to the war which are letting in a badly needed breath of diversity. For political, military, and diplomatic aspects of the War of 1812, see J. C. A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983); Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); John K. Mahon *The War of 1812* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972); John M. Hitsman *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*, edited by Donald Graves, 2nd Edition (Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 1999), Bradford Perkins, *England and the United States: 1812-1823* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964). For newer works exploring other aspects of the war, see Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

extended campaign across the Atlantic. The War of 1812, therefore, provided the ideal opportunity to bring many American dreams of making Canada into one more new states.

In almost every newspaper description of Canada and what Americans were or ought to be doing there, the word “tyranny” appears frequently in relation to the British. In some cases, it simply refers to the United States fighting British tyranny in a very general sense, often with comparisons to the American Revolution included.² Many, though, used the term in the sense that the Americans would be liberating the Canadians from their British oppressors. American conquest, they argued, would give the Canadians “The right of self-government” and “a millennium of peace, free trade, social intercourse and unlimited commerce.” Some made the connection between what they saw as Canada’s current plight and the United States’ from the American Revolution. As early as 1809, Americans were calling for “the shackles of English tyranny” to be removed from Canada.³ Many Americans believed they were not just fighting for their own rights and honor, but also for the rights and liberty of the Canadians.

While this may have been a widespread opinion, it was not an official cause or goal of the war. As far as the Madison administration was concerned, Canada was to be taken as a bargaining chip for peace talks. Even so, American generals occasionally made proclamations implying that the United States was taking Canada for good. The first such proclamation appeared in July of 1812 and was soon after published in several

² See as an example an article originally published in the *Shamrock* of New York City in 1812 and republished in several other papers: “Remember...Montgomery and many of his compatriots who fell gallantly fighting against the tyranny of Britain!” Original publication: “Countrymen,” *Shamrock or Hibernian Chronicle* (New York), January 18, 1812, 2. For examples of other publications, see, *Cayuga Tocsin* (Union Springs, NY), February 27, 1812, 1; *The Columbian* (New York), July 24, 1812, 2; *Reporter* (Lexington, KY), February 15, 1812, 2.

³ “Advantages to be Derived from the Conquest of Canada” in *The War* (New York), June 25, 1812, 18; “Important from Canada,” *American Watchman; and Delaware Republican* (Wilmington, DE), August 30, 1809, 2.

American newspapers. Brigadier General William Hull, commanding the American army at Detroit, was an aging veteran of the American Revolution who, most historians agree, should have been spending the rest of his days out of military uniform. Shortly after arriving at Detroit with his small army, Hull issued a proclamation to the “Inhabitants of Canada.” After thirty years of insults and injuries from Great Britain, the United States had finally gone to war. “The army under my [Hull’s] command has invaded your country,” but the Canadians should have nothing to fear from it. “I have come to *find* enemies, not to make them. I come to protect, not to injure you.” Hull declared that he and his army would free Canada “from tyranny and oppression, and be restored to the dignified station of freemen.” Apparently the proclamation had some effect as scores of Canadian militia almost immediately deserted to Hull’s army.⁴

Hull’s proclamation today reads like a lot of bluster. He only briefly invaded Canada and then, believing he faced vastly superior British numbers (the Americans actually outnumbered the British), fell back to the safety of Fort Detroit. The British commander, Major General Isaac Brock, and the great Indian chief Tecumseh crossed into Michigan and lay siege to Detroit. Convinced that Tecumseh’s Indians would storm over the wall and slaughter everyone within, including his family, Hull lost his nerve and ordered the surrender of Detroit, much to the chagrin of his officers.⁵

He was immediately set upon by the American newspapers for his actions (or lack thereof). Calls of cowardice and treason were widespread. The army eventually court-martialed him on these charges in addition to others. Not only had he behave disgracefully for the American cause, he had also abandoned the Canadians to whom he

⁴ William Hull, “A Proclamation,” *Palladium of Liberty* (Morristown, NJ), August 6, 1812, 2; Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 45; Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 75, 81.

⁵ Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 45-50; Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 81-84,

had promised friendship and support. “[G]eneral Hull has abandoned them [the Canadians] to the merciless tyranny” of Great Britain, one Ohio newspaper declared. The *Virginia Argus* also expressed sympathy for the Canadians Hull left behind: “[He] has suffered those unfortunate *Canadians* who sought protection under the standard of America to be sacrificed without a stipulation or provision in their favor.” They demanded the aging general should be made into an example for leaving the Canadians to be “sold or subdued to *British tyranny*.” Colonel Lewis Cass of the Ohio Militia, who was a part of Hull’s army, lamented that the “*protection* we afforded them [the Canadians] was but a passport to vengeance.” Now “the miserable Canadians” had to hope for the “tender mercy of the enemy.”⁶

Brigadier General Alexander Smyth, operating around the Niagara frontier, issued two proclamations. The first was a call to arms issued to the citizens of New York. The second was a bombastic proclamation to his soldiers worthy of the Roman Caesars, promising “BOOTY” and a variety of cash rewards for captured weapons and dead Indians. The time had come “to conquer Canada,” he declared. However, this was not to be a case of one people trampling down another for the sake of occupying their territory. Smyth had different ideas for Canada: “You will enter a country that is to be one of the United States. You will arrive among a people who are to become your fellow citizens. It is not against them that we come to make war. It is against the government which holds them as vassals.” With this proclamation, Smyth gave teeth and official backing to American desires to liberate Canada. However, pomposity seemed to be the only thing

⁶ “From the Freeman’s Chronicle, an Ohio Paper,” *Lancaster Journal* (Lancaster, PA) September 18, 1812, 2; A description on the disgraceful nature of Hull’s surrender, *Virginia Argus* (Richmond, VA), September 28, 1812; Lewis Cass, “Letter of Colonel Cass,” *Northern Whig* (Hudson, NY), September 28, 1812.

the general was capable of. He made only one half-hearted crossing of the Niagara, fought a small battle, retreated, and then fought a duel with one of his generals.⁷

The call for liberty and freedom for Canada via conquest, both in newspapers and through generals in the field, is emblematic of a growing trend among Americans. Republican government was not just for them, but could be spread to most of the world. Canada especially could become a part of the republican experiment. Over and over, Americans referred to the Canadians as being subject to tyranny and that it was their duty as freeborn Americans to liberate their northern neighbors. While the official war aims of the Madison administration did not include the permanent conquest of Canada, they happily endorsed Hull's proclamation. Smyth's, which was the more direct of the two, received official disavowal. However, this was done privately. It seems that while the administration did not wish to make an official effort to annex Canada—there was always the possibility it would be traded back to Britain in the peace talks—it also did not want to take that option off the table.⁸ Indeed, the fervor was great enough that publicly disavowing Hull or Smyth would have been political suicide. Americans believed republicanism ought to be shared with the world and Canada was the logical next place for it to blossom. Seeing themselves as the freest people on earth, many Americans understood themselves to have a duty to the rest of the world.

This desire to spread republicanism went hand-in-hand with growing American expansionism. Thousands of settlers poured over the Appalachian Mountains into the western states and territories every year. With the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803, huge tracts of land suddenly became available for settlement and efforts were already

⁷ "More Proclamation War!" in *Albany Gazette* (Albany, NY) November 30, 1812, 2.; Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 86-88.

⁸ Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 74-75; Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 55.

underway to obtain Florida by whatever means possible short of open war. Canada seemed like the next logical step.

By the time of the War of 1812, Americans were coming to believe that they should control all of North America by right. The *Aurora* of Philadelphia certainly seemed to believe that Canada would “naturally” become a part of the United States regardless of whether American troops were sent there or not.⁹ Indeed, while the official plan was to use Canada as a bargaining chip with Britain, most Americans seemed to prefer keeping it. Senator William Crawford of Georgia told Madison that any attempt to return Canada should it be successfully conquered “will be very ungraciously received.”¹⁰ Even John Adams wrote the President that “Either Canada must conquer the United States or the United States must conquer Canada.”¹¹ The ultimate folding of Canada in the United States was a natural process, a necessity as many saw it, and one that many Americans openly desired and believed should be actively sought. Canada was “exactly the annexation the United States require[d],” declared the *Democratic Press* of Philadelphia. This paper’s profession of the United States’ need for Canada is one of the strongest made. In addition to “require[ing]” Canada, the paper openly admits to desiring it and encourages the federal government to take active steps to do so. Publishing two months before war was even declared, the *Democratic Press* asked, “But does not Canada afford exactly such a field as could be wished” on which to fight a war? “We want the Canadas... We want the river St. Lawrence... We want the British expelled from

⁹ The *Aurora* also believed that it was inevitable that Florida would settle “under the wings of the American eagle.” “From the Aurora,” *Lexington Reporter* (Lexington, KY) January 10, 1813, 2. For further information about American machinations to acquire Florida at this time, see James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Hickey, *A Forgotten Conflict*, 74.

¹¹

every inch of the North American continent” and the *Democratic Press* was willing to fight for it. They were not alone, either. Several newspapers reprinted the article in the following months, trumpeting their desire for Canada.¹² The Americans not only wished to spread republicanism, they also wanted to expand their already rapidly growing North American Empire because that was how it was supposed to be.

This desire for Canada is a clear indicator of the strength of expansionist feeling among Americans. However, the War of 1812 marks a very important point in the development of American expansionism. Americans wanted to expand and to settle new lands. They did not wish to have overcrowded cities like London and Paris. The very thought of this horrified Jefferson who always maintained that a yeoman farmer was the ideal citizen. Many shared similar views, but also imbued them with some of the commercial and industrial ideas of Hamilton. American republicanism by the War of 1812 had taken on an expansionist tone, both for the betterment of the United States, the land that would become a part of the United States, and any people already living there who the Americans believed could be incorporated into their republic. Canada remains one of the best examples of this idea. Excluding the Quebecois and other French Canadians, the Anglo-American Canadians (who by this point were the majority) were very similar in culture, shared the same political heritage, and were thus ideally situated to be brought into the republic.

¹² “John Adams to James Madison, May 14, 1813” in *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, J.C.A. Stagg, editor (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010) <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-04-06-02-0296>. The original article published in the *Democratic Press* has not been located. It was republished in the following newspapers: “Conquest of Canada,” *Vermont Republican* (Windsor, VT) April 27, 1812, 3. It was also published in the *Columbian Gazette* (Utica, NY), May 12, 1812; the *Palladium of Liberty* (Morristown, NJ), May 14, 1812; the *Chenago Weekly Advertiser* (Norwich, NY); May 21, 1812, the *Weekly Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), April 30, 1812; *The True American* (Trenton, NJ) May 11, 1812; the *National Aegis* (Worcester, MA), April 29, 1812; and the *Sentinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), May 12, 1812.

While Canada and American expansionism are important to understanding American national identity, the War of 1812 is revealing in other ways. Battlefield victories often created nationalist fervor. The War of 1812 was not a terribly glorious war for the United States. Within two months of war being declared one of their armies had surrendered and given up most of Michigan. Not long afterward, another force surrendered at Queenston Heights, though at least the Americans could claim that they had fought hard before giving up. Most of the campaigns were marred by bungling on the part of the generals and obstinacy from the militia. In 1814 the United States would see what has been called its worst military defeat at Bladensburg, Maryland. The poorly led and deployed Americans quickly caved and ran for their lives in the face of better led and better trained British soldiers. The retreat from the battle infamously became known as the “Bladensburg Races.” This is hardly a history to be proud of.

Despite these defeats, the War of 1812 did produce its share of American victories that would produce national pride. These helped to rally the populace during some very dark times in American history and contributed to Americans being able to claim overall victory once the Treaty of Ghent was signed. Three battles in particular will serve to highlight this: the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813, the Battles of Plattsburgh and Lake Champlain (they occurred simultaneously and are sometimes considered one battle) in 1814, and the defense of Baltimore in 1814.¹³

The Battle of Lake Erie was probably the single greatest naval victory of the war. As preparations for war were being made, everyone on both sides of the Atlantic (including Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington) acknowledged that naval

¹³ The discussion of Baltimore will also include the Battle of Bladensburg and the burning of Washington, DC, as the two are tied together. New Orleans, another battle that created strong nationalist fervor, will be dealt with separately.

control of Lakes Ontario and Erie was key to any campaign in North America.

Whichever side controlled the lakes could bombard the other's fortifications and ferry troops at will. Most importantly, whoever controlled the lakes had a major advantage in moving supplies. When war began, the British had undisputed control over both, though not enough so that they could prevent the Americans from building their own fleets.¹⁴

The battle for Lake Erie was fought on September 10, 1813, near Put-In-Bay off the coast of northwest Ohio. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry led the American fleet against the British under Captain Robert Barclay. Both fleets had suffered from lack of trained sailors, cannons, and supplies to keep their ships afloat. All in all, the two fleets were equally matched. Starting at noon on a calm September Friday, the two sides closed for battle. Perry in his flagship, *Lawrence*, led the way with several of his smaller ships following and engaged the British fleet head on. The two largest British ships, *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, closed on the *Lawrence* and began pummeling her. Perry and his crew put up a fight for two hours, losing over two thirds of the crew. For some reason that historians have not been able to adequately determine, Perry's second in command, Jesse Elliott, had kept his ship, the *Niagara*, of roughly the same size as the *Lawrence*, away from the fighting. Perry abandoned the *Lawrence* with four or five of his sailors and rowed for the *Niagara*. He took command from Elliott and brought the unscathed warship into the fray with guns blazing. This tipped the balance and the British fleet became so battered—every commander and their lieutenant, including Barclay, was killed or wounded—that they struck their colors and surrendered to the Americans. That day, Perry penned his most famous words in a brief letter to Major General William

¹⁴ Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 257; Hickey, *A Forgotten Conflict*, 127.

Henry Harrison, American commander of the Army of the Northwest: “We have met the enemy and they are ours—two ships, two brigs, one schooner and a sloop.”¹⁵

News of Perry’s victory was met with immediate joy. Very quickly, the American press began not only praising the “glorious victory” but also using it as a means of proving American superiority to the British. The Battle of Lake Erie proved, claimed the *Baltimore Patriot*, that “not only *gun to gun, and man to man, but fleet to fleet*...American seamen are superior to the champions of ‘the mistress of the seas.’” This theme was picked up in several other papers as well. Perry was declared the equal or even the better of Nelson, the victor of Trafalgar. Perry, they noted, had achieved something Nelson had never done: capture every enemy vessel in the battle. One even claimed that Nelson had predicted that the “achievements of our infant navy” would eventually end “England’s maritime ascendancy.” To top it all off, a Dr. Cochran of Lexington, Kentucky, raised a toast to “Commodore Perry. *Veni, vidi, vici.*” These praises and toasts came not just from Republicans but also from Federalists. The material quoted above from the *Baltimore Patriot* was reprinted in the *Essex Register* of Salem, Massachusetts, which only days prior had been publishing articles very damning of the Madison administration! The people of Boston, a strongly Federalist city, voted to give Perry a sword and referred to him “as a second Nelson.”¹⁶ While there were still

¹⁵ Oliver Perry, “To Harrison,” September 10, 1813 in *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1922), 2:539; Mahon, 166, 168-170; For more in depth information on the campaigns to control the Great Lakes, see George C. Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), ch. 9, 14, 17, 18, 21; David Curtis Skaggs and Gerald T. Althoff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign 1812, 1813* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997).

¹⁶ “The Victory on Lake Erie!” *Essex Register* (Salem, MA) October 2, 1813, 1. Originally published in the *Baltimore Patriot*; “[Erie Victory],” *Farmer’s Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), October 11, 1813, 2. Articles with a similar tone include “Naval Victories,” *Vermont Republican* (Windsor, VT), October 25, 1813), 8; “Commodore Perry – Lord Nelson,” *Savannah Republican* (Savannah: October 14, 1813), 2. “Public Dinner,” *The Reporter* (Lexington, KY), November 13, 1813), 2; “Communications,” *National Aegis* (Worcester, MA) November 10, 1813, 3. Interestingly, the *National Aegis* was a Republican newspaper

naysayers and some Federalists who argued the victory was being overstated, the country had a hero to rally around and many, regardless of political beliefs, did so.

The comparisons of Perry and his men to Nelson and his is of especial note. One of the primary reasons for declaring war in the first place was the impressment of American seamen. Showing that American seamen, who were never pressed into service, were superior to their British counterparts, who were almost to a man pressed into service. Liberty loving Americans, fighting for their rights and independence, could defeat the subjects and forces of tyranny. Additionally, in the eyes of the Americans, the British had made a habit of bullying them and stomping on their rights and sovereignty. The ability to defeat the greatest naval power in the world at their own game was a huge boost to American morale and helped to further shape and cement American national identity.¹⁷ As noted above, party divisions became less noticeable as members of both celebrated the victory. Certainly there were still Republicans who condemned Federalist anti-war efforts and Federalists who claimed the Republicans were biting off more than they could chew, but the overall effect was unity and not division.

The year 1814 would see a new phase of the war begin. Napoleon had abdicated, bringing peace to Europe and freeing hundreds of British ships and thousands of British soldiers for service in North America. It was decided that two armies were to be formed for invasions of the United States: one to march south from Canada and another to attack New Orleans. Sir George Prevost, governor-general of Canada, took personal command

and the purpose was to call out the Federalists of Boston on their hypocrisy of criticizing the war effort and not participating and yet celebrating the victory on Lake Erie.

¹⁷ See also Chapter 3 of Nicole Eustace's *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Her argument is more focused on American ideas of virtuous love and how that connects to American nationalism during the war than of republicanism, but there are similarities.

of the northern army. Reinforced with veterans for the Peninsular War in Spain, Prevost was able to gather an army of 12,000 regulars and Canadian militia supported by a fleet of sixteen ships, most of which were small gunboats, for the invasion of the United States. He decided to follow Lake Champlain south. The plan was to attack the American army and fleet near Plattsburgh simultaneously by land and sea. Opposing the British was Brigadier General Alexander Macomb, who had at his command 1,500 soldiers, most of whom were either invalids or green militia. The American fleet under Lieutenant Thomas MacDonough consisted of fourteen ships, also including a large contingent of small gunboats. Macomb did receive something of a saving grace in the form of 2,500 Vermont volunteers shortly before the British arrived at Plattsburgh. Vermont Governor Chittenden, a lifelong Federalist, had made certain that his state remained out of the war in 1813. But with British troops advancing down Lake Champlain so close to the Vermont border, he dropped his party-line scruples and called for volunteers to assist Macomb's army. As the British advanced southward, Macomb took a leaf out of the Continental Army's book when the British had followed a similar path to Saratoga by having his militia forces swarm the advancing British and pick off as many enemies as they could.¹⁸

The British forces—land and sea—arrived near Plattsburgh on September 10. Light winds delayed the naval assault and Prevost held back his soldiers until they could attack in tandem. Early on the morning of September 11, the British navy commander,

¹⁸ Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 317-321. See also "Copy of a letter from Governor Chittenden to Gen. Newell. Jericho, Sept. 4, 1814" in *Virginia Patriot* (Richmond: November 12, 1814), 2. While Chittenden was a Federalist and tried to guide his state along Federalist views of the war, all Vermont's representatives in Congress were Republicans, indicating that the state was probably moderate in its views, though leaning more Republican. A survey of their newspapers indicates that they were generally supportive of the war effort. See "Congress Profiles: 13th Congress (1813-1815)," History, Art, and Archives, <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/13th/>.

George Downie, ordered his fleet forward. By 8:30AM, the two fleets were engaged. Two hours later, the British fleet was a shambles and the Americans were victorious. On land, Prevost had expected a longer naval battle (and presumably one that went in his favor) and so had issued orders for his men to attack at 10:00. The attack started when planned, but the British soldiers almost immediately became lost. When they finally crossed the Saranac River, the British were met with only light resistance from some of the American militia who quickly melted away. However, because of the American victory on the lake, Prevost ordered a general retreat. Some three hundred British soldiers, almost all of them Napoleonic veterans, deserted. It was an amazing victory for the Americans and one that would earn MacDonough and Macomb laurels for years to come.¹⁹

As they had for Perry's victory on Lake Erie, the American public loudly applauded MacDonough and Macomb's victory. Much of the pride was directed toward the Navy and the militia. To the former was given many of the same compliments that Perry's fleet had received, including the proofs that Americans sailors were better than British. The *Dover Sun* of New Hampshire included in their brief description of the battle two lines from a song declaring as much: "Yankee sailors have a knack / Of hauling down a Briton's jack." Continuing to describe the, albeit small, land battle, the *Sun* believed that the British had learned a lesson, "that American citizens, altho' an 'undisciplined rabble,' in defence of their soil, are an over-match for the veteran myrmidons...seeking to trample on American rights."²⁰ Vermont was especially proud of its involvement in the battle. "It is our good fortune once more to record another

¹⁹ Mahon, *War of 1812*, 320-328.

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triumph of American Naval intrepidity and discipline, over British bravery,” declared the *Vermont Mirror*. They proudly declare the contributions of the “Green Mountain Boys” to the battle. “They will soon teach the enemy,” it said, “that however we may differ with respect to the necessity or justice of the present war, there is perfect unanimity in repelling invasion.” The Vermont legislature expressed its thanks by voting MacDonough a farm worth five thousand dollars within sight of his victory.²¹ Freeborn citizens, regardless of their training, could overcome even the best soldiers in the world when faced with the possibility of tyranny. Again, much of the same that was lauded on Perry.

Of more interest is the unifying effect of Lake Champlain and Plattsburgh. Lake Erie had garnered some Federalist praise, but there were still plenty of those who derided the victory as just a stepping stone in a completely mishandled and unjust war. Almost exactly a year later, the tone was completely different. There was hardly a negative voice to be heard. Even the *Columbian Centinel*, a proud defender of the Federalist Party and once the most widely read paper in Boston, doffed its hat to “our Naval Heroes.” The *Connecticut Herald* proudly claimed that “Every man did his duty, every one fought for his country, his family and his fire side.” The *Herald* also published a brief biography of MacDonough, which referred to him as “our hero” and praised his victory. Desiring to keep apprised of their new hero, *Connecticut Journal* published a brief article on MacDonough’s wedding, which was “illuminated” by his victory.”²² The resounding

²¹ [Champlain; Plattsburgh; Baltimore],” *Dover Sun* (Dover, NH), November 24, 1814, 3; “Glorious Naval Victory,” *The Vermont Mirror* (Middlebury, VT), September 14, 1814, 3; “Honor to the Brave,” *Columbian Patriot* (Middlebury, VT), November 30, 1814, 3.

²² “Glorious Victory!” *Columbian Centinel*, (Boston) September 20, 1814, 2; “Defeat of the British Army at Plattsburgh” *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), September 20, 1814, 3; MacDonough’s Wedding, *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 26, 1814, 2.

defeat of a major invasion had a unifying effect on the country. Federalists still critiqued the war, but the growing willingness of the population to celebrate American victories was a sign of things to come.

Thus far, the battles discussed have taken place on what was largely still considered frontier land. While the territory was well settled, it lacked major population centers such as those along the Atlantic Coast. Most of the major battles occurred far away from these places and, outside of the economic effects and the men marching to war, most of them were untouched by the conflict. For the cities and people of the Chesapeake Bay, the war took on a very ugly and brutal tone. The British admiral in the area, Sir George Cockburn, was intent on unleashing hell upon the Americans.²³ For two years he and his sailors and marines pillaged, plundered, and burned their way up and down the Chesapeake Bay. Some attempts were made by the Virginia and Maryland Militia to stand in the way of the British raids, but they were rarely able to muster enough men to be effective and the British easily brushed them aside almost every time. Notable exceptions to this were the battles of Craney Island (June 22, 1813) and Caulk's Field (August 31, 1814), but neither captured the national consciousness.

The two battles that captured national attention were Bladensburg and Baltimore, though for two very different reasons. In August of 1814, Admiral Cockburn received reinforcements in the form of a small British army (approximately 4,000 soldiers) led by Major General Sir Robert Ross. They were to work together to launch an assault on any of the major cities in the Chesapeake. Once this was completed, Ross and his troops were to travel south to form part of a larger army that would attack New Orleans. Their

²³ Despite the spelling, Cockburn's name is pronounced "CO-burn." This was something of a sticking point with him; he famously hated that the Americans mispronounced his name.

options were Norfolk, Washington, and Baltimore. Of the three, Ross wanted to attack Baltimore and leave it at that. Cockburn, though, had more aggressive plans. First, he argued, they should attack Washington and strike a serious blow to American morale. Then, they could turn their attention to Baltimore, a haven of pro-war Republicans and a nest of privateers, which would be the real prize. Ross acquiesced and plans were put in motion to invade Maryland and the District of Columbia.

To face the British, the United States was able to muster two understrength regular infantry regiments, a few companies of artillery, a squadron of dragoons, and perhaps four hundred sailors and Marines from the Chesapeake Bay Flotilla.²⁴ To supplement this were the militias of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Reluctance of the militia to turn out because of party-line politics had disappeared a long time before in the face of Cockburn's ruthless tactics. The issue was that because Cockburn was willing to burn and destroy any building found housing a firearm that most were afraid to abandon their families and homes. Still, when the British landed at Benedict on August 19, the Americans were able to muster an army of about 7,000 men, the majority of whom were militia. They were placed under the command of Brigadier General William Winder, the nephew of the Federalist governor of Maryland. A decent politician, Winder did not have a head for soldiering. His greatest military feat up to this point had been getting himself captured in Canada.²⁵

The British and American armies met just outside of Bladensburg, Maryland, on August 24. It was an almost instant disaster for the Americans. Winder, with the

²⁴ The Flotilla was a fleet of rowed galleys commanded by Joshua Barney. They were unable to make much of a difference in stopping Cockburn's raids, but they made a good account of themselves in the battles they fought. For more information on the Flotilla, see Christopher George, *Terror on the Chesapeake: The War of 1812 on the Bay* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 2001), 52-64.

²⁵ George, *Terror on the Chesapeake*, 65-157.

assistance of President Madison and Secretary of State James Monroe (both of whom ultimately did more harm than good), had positioned the army horribly. Many of the American cannons could not even see the advancing British to shoot at them. It was not long before most of the militia were running pell-mell away from the advancing British. Commodore Joshua Barney's contingent of sailors and marines provided the only strong resistance. However, the British outnumbered them ten to one and eventually they, too, were forced to retreat. The British entered Washington unopposed and, after dining on President Madison's dinner that was still laid out in the Executive Mansion, burned all of the public buildings. It has gone down in history as one of the worst military defeats dealt to an American army.²⁶

The nation was stunned and outraged. It did not take long before anyone and everyone began looking for someone to blame for the disaster. Of more immediate importance though was preparing the defenses of Baltimore. It had originally been assumed the British would ignore Washington and attack Baltimore. Now, with the capital lying in ashes, there could be no doubt that the next assault would be against Baltimore. Major General Samuel Smith of the Maryland Militia took the reins of command from the disgraced Winder and energetically set about the task of protecting his home city. From the sea, there was at least already a strong fortification in the form of Fort McHenry, which had a regular army garrison under the command of Major George Armistead. Smith guessed that the British army would advance against the city from the east while their fleet would bombard the fort in the harbor. As such, he gave Armistead reinforcements from the Maryland Militia and set about preparing the main defenses on Hampstead Hill. Every available soldier, sailor, man, slave, and even a few

²⁶ George, *Terror on the Chesapeake*, 65-157.

women worked feverishly with picks and shovels to erect a breastwork. Militia forces poured in from Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and Virginia. The general understanding seems to have been that if the British were willing to burn Washington, then they would also burn Baltimore. After Baltimore, they might turn to Philadelphia or Norfolk and do the same. If the British could be stopped at Baltimore, then perhaps those other cities would be safe, or at least safer. Conservative estimates usually place the American force around Baltimore at 10,000 men, which was the single largest army assembled during the War of 1812 by the United States.²⁷

Half of the rest of the story is fairly common knowledge. One need only pay attention to the lyrics of the “Star Spangled Banner” to learn how the defense of Fort McHenry fared. The land portion of the defense of Baltimore, though, is often glossed over and will be described here briefly. Ross landed his troops near North Point on September 11. Smith anticipated the British plan and dispatched 3,000 militia under Brigadier General John Stricker to delay the British advance at North Point. While the battle was technically a defeat for the Americans, they did achieve their goal of slowing the British advance. The British army was badly bloodied and Ross fell to a rifle ball. When the British, now under Colonel Sir Arthur Brooke, reorganized and continued their advance, they were stunned by what greeted them on Hampstead Hill. Nearly 10,000 soldiers behind a breastwork supported by a hundred cannons, many of them crewed by experienced navy men. With the Fort McHenry still holding after an all-night bombardment, Brooke decided that discretion was the better part of valor and ordered a

²⁷ George, *Terror on the Chesapeake*, 65-157; Mahon, *War of 1812*, 305-310; Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 202-203; “Defence of Baltimore” in *Intelligencer* (Dartmouth: August 10, 1814), 2.

retreat back to the ships. The last major incursion of British troops in the Chesapeake Bay had ended.²⁸

The news of Baltimore and Plattsburgh reached most Americans around the same time. The two victories together were a major boost to American morale, partially removed the disgrace of Bladensburg, and proved a major unifying force between Republicans and Federalists. The *Columbian Centinel* could be found publishing articles praising the efforts of the troops at Baltimore. Other articles can be found that were originally published in Republican newspapers, such as the *Boston Patriot*. Even the *New England Palladium*, a paper supported by no less a figure than arch-Federalist Fisher Ames, published an article describing the defense of Fort McHenry as “noble.” In the town of Dorchester, some of the residents who were otherwise exempt from militia duty and still believed the war to be uncalled for formed a militia company to assist in the defense of their homes. Federalists were becoming more active in and supportive of the war effort.²⁹

The continued vilification of the British and proofs that American citizen soldiers were better simply by being free of tyranny continued to appear. Favorite nicknames for the British following Washington and Baltimore were “Goths” and “Vandals,” referring to the Germanic tribes that plagued the late Roman Empire.³⁰ Implicit in these names

²⁸ George, *Terror on the Chesapeake*, 154-157; Mahon, *War of 1812*, 310-312; Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 203-204

²⁹ “Extract of a Letter from Our Correspondent at Baltimore” in *New England Palladium* (Boston: September 23, 1814), 2; “Patriotic Spirit of Dorchester” in *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), September 21, 1814, 2; Hickey, *A Forgotten Conflict*, 255-280.

³⁰ Articles that used either or both of these terms include “Attempt on Baltimore,” *Geneva Gazette* (Geneva, NY), September 28, 1814, 2; “The War,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), October 6, 1814, 2; “Our Correspondent in Washington,” *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), September 6, 1814), 2; “From Our Correspondent in Baltimore,” *The National Advocate* (New York: August 30, 1814); 2; “For the American” *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), July 25, 1814, 2; “Mobile Not Taken” *Dover Sun* (Dover, NH) October 15, 1814; 3.

was the label of barbarian. In American eyes, the British had gone so far with their destruction in the Chesapeake that they had abandoned any pretenses to being a civilized people. This was a theme that had been present in Virginia and Maryland papers especially since 1813 when Cockburn first arrived in the Chesapeake Bay. After the burning of Washington, this sort of language spread nationally. As with their descriptions of Plattsburgh, the Americans proudly trumpeted the ability of their citizen-soldiers to defeat the “myrmidons” of the British Army. The American people, fighting under the banner of liberty, would “not give up the soil” of their nation. If the British were to make another attempt on Baltimore or any other American city, “it will be a desperate one, and *desperately it will be met.*”³¹ Plattsburgh, Washington, and Baltimore had a strong unifying effect that made the Americans, regardless of their views on the war, determined to fight off the British to the bitter end.

On Christmas Eve, 1814, the American and British dignitaries in Ghent signed a peace treaty. It would not go into effect until both governments had ratified it, but there was little doubt that either would. Two weeks later, before news of peace reached the United States, the Battle of New Orleans was fought. The result was a resounding American victory and one that continues to live in the American consciousness. News of both events reached the rest of the United States at roughly the same time and the effect was electrifying. Celebrations occurred across the country in celebration not just of peace and a great victory won at New Orleans, but victory in the War of 1812 itself! This may seem rather amazing given that the United States had only the tiniest of footholds in Canada and suffered several embarrassing defeats on the battlefield, but the timing of the

³¹ “From Newark Centinel, Tuesday Morning, September 20” in *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ: September 20, 1814), 2; “Attack on Baltimore” in *American Watchman* (Wilmington, DE: October 1, 1814), 4.

news for both peace and New Orleans was perfect. To the Americans, it seemed like they had defended their nation from the onslaught of tyranny and not only survived, but had sent the tyrants running with their tails between their legs.

Attempts at diplomatic negotiation began not long after war was declared. However, the particulars of this back and forth need not be of concern; suffice it to say that they were unsuccessful. It was not until the summer of 1814 that peace negotiations began in earnest. After several months of bickering in choosing a proper location, the United States and Great Britain settled on the small city of Ghent, Belgium, as neutral ground where the two sides could meet and negotiate a settlement. To represent the United States, President James Madison sent Albert Gallatin, Swiss-born former Secretary of the Treasury; John Quincy Adams, son of second United States President John Adams, currently serving as the Minister to Russia; Henry Clay, United States Congressman from Kentucky and former Speaker of the House; James Bayard, former Federalist Senator from Delaware; and Jonathon Russell, United States Minister to Sweden. With the exception of Russell, Madison sent some of the best statesmen the United States had to offer at the time. Gallatin and Bayard had already had long, successful careers, and Adams and Clay were just beginning long and successful careers of their own, with the former becoming the sixth President. The British, on the other hand, did not send their best and brightest. The Congress of Vienna was in full swing by this point and the leading British diplomats were sent there to supervise British interests during the reorganization of Europe after the twenty-year-long French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The British would further hamstring themselves by micromanaging their diplomats. The United States, on the other hand, trusted the on the ground judgment

of their diplomats, giving them a great deal of flexibility and which would allow them to almost constantly outmaneuver the British during the negotiations.³²

Adams and Clay are especially revealing of the trends in American identity at this time. Both men were nationalists and would go on to become some of the most prominent leaders of a group usually referred to as the National Republicans. Bayard and Gallatin fall into this category, too, but become much less prominent in American politics after War of 1812. This national interest, as well as other trends in American identity, are revealed almost immediately in the Ghent negotiations. Americans refused to be seen as a second-class nation compared to the likes of Great Britain or France. They would be treated as equals and would stand for nothing less.

The formal peace negotiations began in August 7, 1814. The British delegation had arrived in Ghent the night before and sent a note to the Americans inviting them to meet at the hotel where the British were staying to exchange credentials, what Adams referred to as an “exchange of our full powers,” which was a very common formality among European diplomats at the time. Despite being a usual meeting to open negotiations, the Americans saw in the invitation “an offensive pretension to superiority.”³³ Adams referred his colleagues to a portion of a treatise on the law of nations written by Georg Martens, which states that diplomats “of an inferior order” were to be received at the home location of the “superior” diplomats, whether it be their capital—Martens uses the term “court,” referring to the royal court found in most European capitals—or simply their base of operations. Bayard also produced an example from a treatise by Robert Ward, who described a situation between England and Spain in

³² Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 20. The superiority of the American emissaries over the British is one that is widely accepted among historians, both American and British.

³³

1600 that the American commission found uncomfortably similar to their invitation from the British. The Americans, after calming their tempers (especially Adams's), made a polite reply that while they were ready and happy to meet with the British and begin the negotiations, they would prefer to do so on neutral ground. The British assented and ultimately the two parties decided to meet in another hotel about halfway between their respective residences.³⁴ The British and Americans would meet as equals and continue the rest of the negotiation process as such.

Having crossed that first hurdle, the two delegations met in the Hotel Pays-Bas, exchanged their credentials, and laid out their basic terms that would need to be discussed during the peace process. In short, it was a meeting to prepare for further meetings. Indeed, they had a few more where the two sides tried to determine what the basis of negotiations would be. Although they did not tell the British this, all of the American emissaries agreed that they would strive for *status quo ante bellum*, which they believed to be the best situation they could hope for given the overall poor progress of the war up to that point. In an attempt to retain more flexibility during the negotiations, they decided to divulge as little of their intentions to the British as possible, preferring to counter any propositions put forward by them. The British then presented two points as terms for peace, the first of which they presented as *sine qua non*: an independent boundary or territory would be drawn up for the Indians, with the boundaries stipulated in the 1794 Treaty of Greenville proposed as a starting point for discussions; and the demilitarization

³⁴ John Quincy Adams, "August 7, 1814" in *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 1970 ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 3: 3-4; George Friedrich von Martens, *A Compendium of the Law of Nations Founded on the Treaties and Customs of the Modern Nations of Europe*, trans. William Cobbett, English ed. (London: Cobbett and Morgan, 1802), 225; Henry Clay, "Journal of Ghent Negotiations, "August 7-10, 1814" in *The Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. James F. Hopkins (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1959), 1: 952.

of the Great Lakes by the United States, with the British being allowed to maintain their own fleets and forts on the lakes. The goal of both, the British stated, was not to humiliate the United States and remove territory as punishment, but rather to include the Indians in the negotiation process (albeit indirectly) and establish a buffer zone to protect Canada from invasion.³⁵ Both of these propositions raised American eyebrows and fomented much debate.

In regards to the first of these, the creation of a new, independent Indian Territory, the British and Americans had different understandings of the role played by the Indians during the War of 1812. The British understood them to be allies who ought to have some considerations in the peace negotiations (though, they never suggested that a representative of the Indians ever be brought to Ghent). Henry Goulburn, one of the British negotiators, instead took up their case and argued that, as Adams recorded it, “as being the allies of Great Britain she must include them [the Indians], as she made peace with other powers, including Portugal as her ally....” The Americans saw the situation quite differently. First, they believed it to be a cession of territory to Great Britain in disguise. The British, Clay argued in a letter to U.S. Secretary of State James Monroe, were “attempting, without powers, to treat for savage tribes, scattered over our acknowledged [*sic*] territory, the very names of which she probably does not know.” Adams argued that the Indians’ situation “resembled more the case of subjects who, in cases of invasion, sometimes took part with the enemy, as had sometimes occurred to Great Britain in Ireland.” By this argument, all Indians inhabited land that was under the

³⁵ James A. Bayard, “The American to the British Commissioners, August 24, 1814” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1913: Papers of James A. Bayard*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, (Washington: American Historical Association, 1915), 2:320-325; Adams, “August 13-August 31” in *Memoirs*, 3: 16-20, 24-25

jurisdiction of either the United States or Great Britain and they therefore deserved no part in the negotiations.³⁶

Adams, ever mindful of legal precedent, continued the American argument regarding Indian sovereignty with Goulburn following a party hosted by the mayor of Ghent on September 1, 1814. Indian possessions and settlements were respected by the United States, Adams argued. However, since Indians were not considered civilized and “could never be prevailed upon to adopt this mode of life...they could not reconcile themselves to any other condition than that of wandering hunters. It was impossible for such people to ever said to have possessions.” Since the Indians only used the land as “hunting-grounds” the United States had, reasonably enough, paid them to renounce their rights and removed them to “remoter regions better suited...to their mode of life.” This practice, Adams argued, could be traced back to the original settlers of New England and was then picked up by Pennsylvania. Eventually, the British government would endorse these decisions when these regions were still under their control as colonies. Finally, Adams stated that the British proposal constituted a “game-law” that deserved no place in a treaty, especially between two Anglo-Saxon nations. Combining this with the British proposition that the United States cede the Great Lakes to Great Britain, Adams then turned the tables on Goulburn. How would he feel if this proposal had been put to them? Goulburn avoided answering the question and Adams continued his line of argument. “[S]uch stipulations were indeed often extorted from the weakness of a vanquished enemy, but they were always felt to be dishonorable” and often proved the cause of more wars than preventing them. Goulburn, apparently growing uncomfortable with this

³⁶ Adams, “September 1, 1814” in *Memoirs*, 3: 27-30.

discussion, quickly changed the subject to several pictures the diplomats had won in a lottery earlier in the day.³⁷

This debate over the inclusion of the Indians in the treaty continued for quite some time with neither side giving ground. The American commissioners, following the premise of Adams's debate with Goulburn, asserted their sovereignty over the Indians within their borders. An additional issue was that many Americans had already settled well beyond the line proposed by the British for the Indian Territory. With neither side willing to give up the point, the negotiations dragged on and were very nearly broken off. At one point, the British wrote to the Americans that they "must now decide whether to continue the negotiations, refer to their government for further instructions, or 'take upon themselves the responsibility of breaking off the negotiations altogether.'" Eventually, probably realizing that the Americans would not be moved to cede territory to the Indians, the British altered their *sine qua non*: the Indians were to be included in the final treaty and returned to their status prior to the Battle of Tippecanoe.³⁸ However, the British warned the Americans that they would "propose for *discussion* [*sic*] an article providing that within a certain described boundary within the Indian territory neither party shall purchase lands from the Indians." The British also backed away from the proposed cession of the Great Lakes.³⁹

³⁷ Adams, "Septemer 1, 1814" in *Memoirs*, 3: 30-31;

³⁸ The Battle of Tippecanoe was fought on November 7, 1811 between American soldiers and militia under William Henry Harrison and a confederation of several Indian tribes under Tenskwatawa, better known as The Prophet and brother of Tecumseh. The Indian force was completely destroyed and was a major setback to Tecumseh's dream of forming a massive Indian Confederation to counter the steadily advancing United States. See Hickey, *A Forgotten Conflict*, 25.

³⁹ "[Abstract of a Letter from] The British to the American Commissioners, September 4, 1814" in Clay, *Papers of Henry Clay*, 1: 973; Clay, "To William H. Crawford, September 20, 1814" in *Papers of Henry Clay*, 1: 979.

Still understanding portions of the British proposal to encroach upon the United States' sovereignty, the Americans stated that the return to the *status quo ante-Tippecanoe* once peace was concluded with Great Britain was assumed and continued to insist that the Indians deserved no place in the treaty; they were not sovereign nations. As a matter of fact, they argued, there was no precedent for including the Indians in treaties between European nations (including the United States). Citing the Treaties of Paris signed in 1763 and 1783—ending the Seven Years War and the American Revolution, respectively—the Americans reminded the British that they had not insisted on including them in either, even when they had been faithful allies. The British proposals were both “novel and alarming.”⁴⁰ This final attack against the British regarding the Indians finally killed the proposal and the British, once again, abandoned their native allies.⁴¹

However, the Americans also relented slightly and later agreed to include an article in the final treaty stating a return to the *status quo ante bellum* for those tribes that either had not already made peace or immediately made peace upon ratification of the treaty. Even so, they were careful with the wording of Article IX of the Treaty of Ghent and avoided granting the Indians any sovereignty over their territory. The second

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⁴¹ “The American to the British Commissioners, October 13, 1814,” in *Papers of Henry Clay*, 1:982-986; Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 91-101. Perkins argues that the British government had not meant for their emissaries in Ghent to defend the *sine qua non* so strongly, though they had hoped to include the Indians in the treaty. Worn out by lengthy letters from the American commissioners and with the Congress of Vienna looking like it might fall apart, Castlereagh ordered his diplomats to drop the issue altogether. Additionally, following the 1813 defeat of the British and the Indians at the Battle of the Thames, many of the northern tribes had made peace with the United States and some had even agreed to fight against the British, though London did not learn of this until early fall, 1814. Given the source evidence, this is likely the case.

paragraph of Article IX also declared that the British would do the same for Indians that had joined the Americans.⁴²

Once again the Americans had asserted themselves as a sovereign nation that was to be respected. Falling back on the law of nations and precedent, they had argued for their sovereignty over the Indians within their territory and successfully convinced the British to back down. Steadily, they were gaining ground against an enemy that was making more and more concessions. The United States would not be treated as an inferior and it would not relinquish its sovereignty to those they did not believe deserved to have it. The treaty, though, had not yet taken form. The British had taken another issue to the foreground: their right to navigation on the Mississippi River and American rights to fish in Canadian waters.

One of the provisions of the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution was that American fishermen were allowed to continue fishing off the shore of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, something very dear to New Englanders like Adams. The French and Spanish had, in turn, allowed the British to navigate the Mississippi River, which the United States continued once they bought Louisiana from Napoleon. Early in the Ghent negotiations, the British had brought up possibly terminating American fishing rights in British waters their right to navigate on the Mississippi was not guaranteed. Initially, the Americans had declared that, since neither of these had been involved in the issues leading to the War of 1812, they should not be discussed during at the peace table but should be taken up by a commission appointed upon the conclusion of hostilities. The British dropped the subject as they had more important

⁴² "Treaty of Ghent" in Fred L. Engleman, *The Peace of Christmas Eve* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960), 310-311.

issues to push. However, once the British government decided to drop the issue of an Indian Boundary State, they brought these issues back to the forefront. The Americans initially replied as they had in August, that they were not at liberty to discuss issues already guaranteed by treaty that had not been causes of the war.⁴³

Finally, on November 4, Gallatin proposed simply including within the final treaty an article that would renew the rights of both countries as laid out in previous treaties. This would grant a sign of goodwill to the British, since the Americans had rejected almost every other proposal they had received, and would ultimately just result in the *status quo ante bellum* on that particular issue. Unexpectedly, Clay declared he would not sign a treaty that allowed the British to navigate the Mississippi. The river was already an important highway for trade and would likely become more important as the United States continued to expand westward and the Kentuckian did not want the British to have access to what could become the middle of the United States. Clay also argued that the American commissioners had been ordered not to agree to any renewal of the 1794 Jay Treaty, which had allowed the British to cross American territory to trade with the Indians. Granting that right again would only subvert American sovereignty. Finally, on November 28, when Gallatin again proposed granting the British navigation rights in exchange for continued American fishing rights, Clay lost his temper. Adams, always taking detailed notes described a portion of the Kentuckian's rant: "That the navigation of the Mississippi...was an object of immense importance, and he could see no sort of reason for granting it as an equivalent for the fisheries." When Gallatin tried to sooth him, stating that New England, which was already threatening secession, would have

⁴³ Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 102-114; "The American to the British Commissioners, November 10, 1814," in *Papers of Henry Clay*, 1:999

more incentive to leave if the fishing rights were not granted, Clay lashed out again, hinting that if the British were granted navigation rights, a Western secession movement might arise, too. Finally, after a month of bitter arguing that very nearly ended in the American mission falling apart, Adams and Gallatin finally convinced Clay to accept the *status quo ante bellum* on the issue. Additionally, to further sooth the Kentuckian's still simmering temper, provisions were made in a proposed treaty that would be sent to the British, who would be required to pay customs duties on all goods they received or delivered via the Mississippi. Clay finally agreed and calmed down. After a brief debate, the British accepted these terms as part of the treaty.⁴⁴

Other issues had fomented concurrently to Clay's spat with his fellow plenipotentiaries. After months of negotiation that seemed to be leading nowhere, the American delegation was becoming pessimistic about the chances for peace. On October 24, 1814, the Americans received a note from the British plenipotentiaries offering peace on the basis of *uti possidetis*.⁴⁵ As they controlled a large portion of Maine and the northern half of the Michigan Territory, the Americans seemed impotent remove them. The British were in a strong position for this line of bargaining.⁴⁶

Around the same time, the Americans and British began to draft *projets*. In each of these drawn up by the Americans, they insisted upon *status quo ante bellum*. The British, in turn, insisted on *uti possidetis*. One of these went so far as to propose that each side would receive "territories *belonging* [*sic*] to on party and taken by the other." The Americans immediately rejected this proposal, with Adams arguing that "It would

⁴⁴ Adams, "November 4, 1814" in *Memoirs*, 3: 63-64.

⁴⁵ This was the same note that had brought the issue of fishing and navigating the Mississippi back to the negotiating table.

⁴⁶ Indeed, an American attempt to retake Michilimackinac in far northern Michigan failed miserably. "[Abstract of:] The British to the American Commissioners, October 21, 1814" in Clay, *Papers*, 1:991

enable either party to refuse giving up at its option any portion of the possessions of the other taken by it, merely by saying, This does not belong to you.” What the British proposed only formed the basis for another—possibly uglier—war between the two nations. The two sides met in person to argue the finer points of this particular *projet*. One of the issues that arose with this was ownership over several islands in the Bay of Fundy. Mimicking an earlier quip made by Golbourn, Adams observed that “the island of Grand Menan, in the Bay of Fundy, a larger and more valuable island than any of those they so confidently claimed, was as much ours as the city of New York.” Golbourn claimed that he had “voluminous” amounts of evidence to the contrary and that this would also support ownership of other areas in along the two nations’ borders. William Adams added that further land disputes, as the Americans feared would come about if the British *uti possidetis* became the basis of the peace treaty, would not happen as “it was not presumed that a Government agreeing to a stipulation would not carry it into effect with good faith.” Possession was a matter of right, not of fact.⁴⁷

Still refusing to even open up the possibility of yielding an inch of territory, the Americans did their best to counter the British argument. Bayard repeated that *uti possidetis* would only lead to further disagreements and possibly war between the United States and Great Britain. Even if both sides followed such a treaty in good faith, disputes were bound to arise simply over misunderstandings as to the location of borders and land titles. The debate on this subject see-sawed for several weeks, with the arguments for *uti possidetis* and *status quo ante bellum* becoming very repetitive. Finally, though, in early December, the British yielded to the Americans and granted that they would negotiate peace on the basis of *status quo ante bellum*. Any disputed territories between the two

⁴⁷ Adams, “December 1, 1814” in *Memoirs*, 3: 80-81.

were to be dealt with by a new commission that would meet once the peace treaty was signed.⁴⁸

On December 24, 1814, the eight men gathered in the Hotel Pays-Bas to put an end to the War of 1812. Celebrations, both for peace and the birth of Christ, ensued. “I cannot close the record of this day,” John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary,

without an humble offering of gratitude to God for the conclusion to which it has pleased him to bring the negotiations for peace at this place, and a fervent prayer that its result may be propitious to the welfare, the best interests and the union of my country.

James Bayard was also celebratory in a letter to his son, writing:

The war has raised our reputation in Europe and it excites astonishment that we should have been able for one campaign to have fought Great Britain single handed. The peace we have made will add to the consideration in which we are held as it proves that Great Britain expected nothing from a continuance of the contest.

And well they might praise God and celebrate. During five months of arduous negotiations with stubborn British diplomats, the Americans had successfully asserted themselves as equals, defended their territorial sovereignty, and ceded on only what proved to be the most minor of issues. Their staunch resistance against the British *sine qua non*, the Indian Border State, forced the British to effectively abandon their allies that, combined with the death of Tecumseh in 1813, destroyed Indian resistance in the old Northwest, smoothed the way for American westward expansion, and set up the framework for the Monroe Doctrine.⁴⁹ The American diplomats had asserted a national vision to the British that was becoming common among the American people.

⁴⁸ Adams, “December 1, 1814” in *Memoirs*, 3: 80-82.

⁴⁹ Adams, “December 24, 1814” in *Memoirs*, 3: 127; Bayard, “To Richard Henry Bayard, December 26, 1814” in *Bayard Papers*, 366-367; Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 2.

As the ink was drying on the Treaty of Ghent, Major General Andrew Jackson was preparing to defend the city of New Orleans against a British invasion. Gathering together perhaps the most diverse army in American history up to that point, Jackson commanded a force of 4,000 men consisting of regular army soldiers, marines, former pirates, French speaking Creoles, free blacks, Choctaw Indians, and Kentucky and Tennessee riflemen. Arrayed against were over 10,000 British soldiers, sailors, and marines, all of them well-trained veterans under the command of Sir Edward Pakenham, who had the distinction of being the Duke of Wellington's brother-in-law. The odds against the Americans were long, indeed.

On December 14, 1814, the British navy maneuvered to attack the American flotilla of gunboats near Isle aux Pois, where the British army was to disembark. A cat and mouse game ensued that ended six days later with the capture of the American flotilla. While it was a tactical disaster, it had bought Jackson and his army a week to further prepare the cities defenses. He also now knew where the British would attack. After a portion of the British finished disembarking, Jackson decided to attack. The December 23 fight was ultimately a British victory, but the Americans had done plenty of harm to British morale. Badly bloodied, the British commander, John Keane, became extremely cautious about advancing against New Orleans and advised Pakenham that the city would not fall easily.⁵⁰

The Battle of New Orleans that is now remembered occurred a week later on January 8, 1815. The British assault on the American defenses began at daylight and lasted several hours. The British advanced in line formation with skirmishers deployed to their front. American artillery fire ripped through their ranks. Among the dead lay Sir

⁵⁰ Mahon, *War of 1812*, 354-357, Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 206-208.

Edward Pakenham, along with several other high ranking British officers. An attempt to advance through a swamp on the American left was met with a withering fire from the rifles of the Tennessee militia. When the battle ended, there was no doubt as to who had one. The British had lost 2,444 men killed, wounded, or missing to 336 Americans. It was a truly amazing victory and would launch the battle, the American rifleman, and Andrew Jackson into American legend.⁵¹

News of the Treaty of Ghent and the victory at New Orleans swept through the United States. Almost every American voice was uplifted in joy and pride for their nation. In the light of New Orleans, as well as several other victories gained in 1814, Ghent was also seen as a great victory. New Orleans and Ghent “both rebound[ed] to the fame of the people of the U. States” and “could not but fill the heart of ever American with exultation and joy.” The Americans had been “kicked” into the war and they had “kicked [Britain] into the peace.” The *Boston Patriot* quipped that “America wanted nothing so much as *national character*.” The United States was poorly esteemed in the eyes of other nations, especially with Britain abusing the sovereignty of the country since the American Revolution. The War of 1812, though, “will exalt the character of the American Republic throughout all civilized Europe.” As had the diplomats at Ghent, the American people saw their nation as the equal of any in Europe and the War of 1812 had proven it. In the words of the *Providence Patriot*, “Henceforward, neither England nor any other country will be anxious to seek a quarrel with America.” The *Essex Register* agreed, writing “That the War has given the United States a proud and commanding station among the Nations of the earth, is indisputable. ‘I am an American citizen’ will hereafter be not only a passport of safety, but a pledge of valor.” National pride was at an

⁵¹ Mahon, *War of 1812*, 354-368, Hickey, *Forgotten Conflict*, 208-212.

all-time high. Having defeated “Lord Wellington’s best generals and bravest soldiers,” Americans felt that they were not just the equals of the powers of Europe, but in many ways they were better.⁵²

It did not take long for comparisons to the American Revolution to also appear. The fight for Americans rights, declared the *Herald Gospel Liberty*, was “begun July 4, 177[6], when they threw off the tyrannical yoke of England” and was finished with the War of 1812.⁵³ The *Boston Patriot* was one of the papers that began spreading the term “Second War of Independence” that is now a common nickname for the War of 1812. In a speech to the people of Lexington, Kentucky, James Austin echoed these sentiments and added a few of his own:

Thus the war of the Revolution gave existence to the American nation, and enabled the increasing millions of your countrymen to enjoy the blessing of self-government.—The war of 1812 has drawn into notice the republican virtue of the American people, and established the foundations of your national character.

Republican virtue, in Austin’s mind, had won the latest war against Great Britain and had launched the United States to new heights of fame and glory. Indeed, the deeds of the Revolution rivalled those of the War of 1812, according to the *Richmond Enquirer*.⁵⁴ Not an American had a doubt that the War of 1812 was a fulfillment of the American

⁵² “Celebration of a Glorious Victory and a Glorious Peace” in *Weekly Aurora* (Philadelphia: February 28, 1815), 3; “From the Boston Patriot: Peace Between Britain and America” in *Star* (Raleigh), March 3, 1815, 3. This last one was originally published in the *Boston Patriot* (original not available to author). It was also published in the *American Watchman* of Wilmington, Delaware. “Great and Good News,” *Providence Patriot* (Providence, RI), February 18, 1815, 6; “[The Blessing of Peace]” *Essex Register* (Salem, MA), February 22, 1815, 1; “Victory! – Peace!” *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore) February 17, 1815, 2.

⁵³ “Peace!! Peace!!” *Herald Gospel Liberty* (Portsmouth, NH), March 3, 1815, 6. The date given in the paper originally read “1774.” This author contends that it is likely a printing mistake. Regardless, the message remains the same.

⁵⁴ From the Boston Patriot: Peace Between Britain and America,” *Star* (Raleigh), March 3, 1815, 3; James Austin, “American Eloquence: An Oration Pronounced at Lexington ([illegible] July 4, 1815” in *The Yankee* (Boston, MA: October 6, 1815), 1. A similar speech was also given by James Wilson to the people of New Salem, Ohio, and published in the *Steubenville Herald* (Steubenville, OH), August 3, 1815, 1; “[War and Glory]” *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), March 5, 1815, 2.

Revolution, and that it was their love of liberty and republican virtue that had allowed them to do so against one of the mightiest countries on the planet.

The War of 1812 was the final step in the emergence of a unified American national identity. To the historians it reveals a new version of expansionism that is uniquely American: Canada provided many benefits to the United States, but the United States could give as much if not more in freedom and self-government in return. American expansionism, then, was understood to be a two-way street. Victories on the battlefield gave Americans new events and heroes that swelled their national pride. This pride was shared by both Republicans and Federalists and was widely celebrated. Even if an individual opposed the war, he/she could still feel proud in the great victories their nation's heroes achieved on the republic's behalf. Very quickly, a reinvention of the War of 1812 in to the Second American Revolution gave a new generation of Americans a sense of shared accomplishment. Their fathers had fought the British to free themselves from tyranny, now the sons had fought the British to maintain and cement that freedom. This was made even more important with the Battle of New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent, which convinced Americans that they had won a great victory. Free American citizens defending their hearth and home would not—could not—be defeated by the red coated soldiers of tyranny. The fact that the invasion of Canada failed, that the Americans probably suffered more defeats than victories, or that the Treaty of Ghent officially ended the war as a tie did not matter. The American viewpoint was that the War of 1812 was a victory for republicanism.

CONCLUSION

March 4, 1817, was a mild, sunny spring day with temperatures in the fifties. James Monroe stood on a platform constructed in front of the temporary capital building where the United States Supreme Court building now stands. He would be the first president to take the oath of office and deliver his inauguration speech outdoors. Tall, handsome, a veteran of the American Revolution, he stood out as a leader. Groomed as the heir to Madison, he won the election of 1816 in a landslide victory against Federalist Rufus King, taking nearly seventy percent of the popular vote and carrying sixteen of nineteen states. His inaugural address brimmed with confidence as he extolled the “excellence of our institutions” that had guided the United States through “a period fraught with difficulties and marked by very extraordinary events the United States have flourished beyond example. Their citizens individually have been happy and the nation prosperous.”¹ Monroe was sure that the United States was bound for a glorious and flourishing future.

And well he might be optimistic. Whereas throughout his entire political career the nation had been marred by bitter partisanship, threats to national honor and sovereignty, and a poorly executed war with Great Britain, now that he was being sworn in as President, Monroe could look to the future with optimism. His lopsided victory in the election showed remarkable political unity that up to this point the United States had lacked. Americans now had a national vision to help guide themselves through the future and prominent nationalists, such as Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, and John C.

¹ James Monroe, “First Inaugural Address. Tuesday, March 4, 1789” in “The Avalon Project.” http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/monroe1.asp. General information on the inauguration is taken from the website of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, <http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/swearing-in/event/james-monroe-1817>.

Calhoun, held prominent positions in the federal government. Monroe's presidency has been called the "Era of Good Feelings" for a reason.

While Monroe's inaugural address was highly optimistic about the future, Monroe and many other Americans were wondering what would happen to the Federalist opposition. The partisan division between Republicans and Federalists was still strong in American memories. However, the opportunity for reconciliation was there. While Federalists had remained consistent in their opposition to the War of 1812, even they had lavished praise on American victories. In addition, during and following the War of 1812 the Republicans had adopted many old Federalist policies. Shortly before leaving office, James Madison had signed into being the Second Bank of the United States and had given his support to many internal improvement projects.² Monroe himself had visions of canals, manufactories, and increased commerce. With American military's weakness and the burning of the capital from the war fresh in his mind, Monroe also advocated a much stronger and larger army and navy. With the Republicans adopting old Federalists measures, the differences between the parties were diminishing.³

There was also a strong push to remove political parties from American politics. Most Americans were tired of the previous decade's partisan politics. In terms of ideology, Monroe believed them to be unnecessary and potentially harmful in a republican society. In this spirit, the new President wished to find a means of reconciling the Federalists and Republicans and eliminate the two parties. Andrew Jackson

² Madison stopped short of providing full federal funding of internal improvement projects when he vetoed the Bonus Bill. He did, however, float the proposal that a constitutional amendment be made giving the government authority to support internal improvements.

³ Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 371; George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1952), 98-100.

suggested making North Carolinian and avowed Federalist William Drayton the Secretary of War. However, Monroe did not want to go so far as to allow into the cabinet members of a party that he believed had once plotted to turn the American republic into a monarchy. Something else would have to do it.

In the spring of 1817, Monroe announced his intention to go on a tour of the northern states. Clearly inspired by Washington's national tour in 1789, Monroe hoped it would "provide an occasion for the people to demonstrate the new spirit of unity animating the nation." He would travel northward to New England first, the heartland of the Federalists. Monroe paid for the trip out his own pocket and traveled as much as he could as an ordinary citizen. Passing through Baltimore, Philadelphia, Trenton, and New York on his way north, his visits produced massive crowds and he attended numerous public dinners held in his honor. Strong, national sentiment thundered across the countryside where the President traveled.⁴

The pinnacle of Monroe's tour was the days he spent in Boston, what Harry Ammon termed "the Citadel of Federalism." He arrived on July 2 and stayed in the city long enough to partake in the celebration of Independence Day. The timing of his visit could not have been more perfect; the President riding into the city of his old rivals seeking reconciliation, the two parties uniting in celebration of the most patriotic of American holidays. The people of Massachusetts turned Monroe's visit to Boston into something of a week-long, carnival celebrating American Independence. Governor John Brooks met Monroe in Dedham with the Independent Cadets, a dashing Massachusetts militia company, to escort him to Boston for the festivities. The executive party's progress was marked by cannon fire. The city streets were lined by upwards of 40,000

⁴ Ammon, *Monroe*, 372, 374.

people. 4,000 boys and girls dressed in blue and buff (boys) and white (girls) formed the official welcome party. Symbolizing the reconciliation of the Republicans and Federalists, each child wore either a red or white rose. The Society of Cincinnati threw Monroe a banquet in his honor where his health and the glory of the United States were toasted. He was cheered nine times after a toast was drunk in his honor. The President reviewed the Massachusetts Militia on Bunker Hill, toured the *USS Constitution* with Isaac Hull, received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Harvard, and attended Sunday services at both an Episcopal (his own denomination) and a Unitarian church (the denomination of John Adams). The whole affair was a symbol of national unity.⁵

The New England newspapers lavished praise on the nation. They did not exalt Monroe as a hero, but rather as a symbol of the nation. His tour “was a circumstance likely to awaken all the feeling of national pride.” The people took great pride in that their President was greeted in each city “without the distinction of party.” Almost every Federalist saw the tour as an opportunity to seek friendship with their Republican counterparts. Remembering the many times Monroe supported policies the Federalists abhorred, the *Hampden Federalist* asked its readers, “[Y]et is it not more honourable to forget and forgive an injury received, than it would be to return evil for evil?” The tour was their opportunity to make amends. The “bitterness of party spirit” would be removed and the Federalists would prove that they, too, were “a free and independent people.”⁶

Monroe’s landslide election and his reception by the Federalists on his tour of New England shows a strong spirit and sense of unity among Americans. Republicans

⁵ Ammon, *Monroe*, 374-377; “The President’s Tour Through Rhode Island,” *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), July 3, 1817, 1; “Independence,” *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), July 5, 1817, 2.

⁶ “The President’s Tour,” *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven, CT), July 8, 1817, 1. “Tour of the President of the U. States,” *The Oracle of New Hampshire* (Portsmouth, NH), July 10, 1817, 3; “The President’s Tour,” *Hampden Federalist* (Springfield, MA), July 24, 1817, 3.

were adopting some Federalist economic policies and the Federalists threw their full support behind the Monroe Administration. It was time for Americans to come together as one nation and to be proud of their republic. This would not be possible if there were not some sense of a common identity among them, as free, liberty loving Americans.

This new American identity did not emerge just because the War of 1812 ended in a semi-invented victory. It had numerous causes just as much as there were numerous facets to it. It slowly developed over the space of some twenty-five years as Americans argued and fought over what being a republic and an American meant. Bitterly divided over the French Revolution, at first it seemed as though there would be no reconciliation of American ideologies. But other forces and influences were at work. The democratic push, accelerated by the 1801 Revolution, continued through the entire period into the Era of Good Feelings and beyond. The attacks of the Barbary Pirates and the outrages of Britain's disdain for American sovereignty offended every American's sense of honor, though they remained divided over how best to seek satisfaction. The idea of Jefferson's "empire of liberty" and the acquisition of Louisiana encouraged dreams that one day, the United States might yet rule the entirety of North America, bringing liberty and republicanism to its peoples. By the War of 1812, the pieces of American identity were all gathered, but they were hardly connected. National heroes who led American citizen soldiers to victory in what was reinvented as a Second American Revolution provided the glue to bring it all together. Monroe's tour of New England revealed the sense of unity Americans now felt. They were not forced together by a common enemy, but rather a common vision that they were all Americans, regardless of their views on the details of governance; details that seemed to matter very little.

After 25 years of political arguments and warfare, Americans finally emerged with a national identity. It was one that highly valued a democratic view of republicanism, advocated expansion of the “empire of liberty,” and was highly sensitive about national honor. The Monroe Doctrine and Jacksonian Democracy still lay in the future, but the groundwork had been laid. Eventually, slavery would once again divide the nation, but for the time Americans were united. Party politics were a thing of the past and the sense of pride Americans had for their country brought them together. The United States of America, long divided and unsure of itself, was finally united.

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