

DIPLOMATIC SUBTLETIES AND FRANK OVERTURES:  
PUBLICITY, DIPLOMACY, AND NEUTRALITY  
IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC,  
1793-1801

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## ABSTRACT

Americans view neutrality in the 1790s as the far-seeing wisdom of the Founders and a weak power's common-sense approach to a transatlantic war in which it could not afford to get involved. Far from this benign image of prudence, however, neutrality in the Early Republic was controversial: it was a style and paradigm of foreign policy that grappled with the consequences of a democratic politics exacerbated by diplomatic crises. Far from promoting tranquility, neutrality provoked uproar from the very beginning. Intense print battles erupted over sensational exposés of foreign influence and conspiracy, reverberating through the international, national, and local levels simultaneously. Print exposés of foreign intrigue provoked partisan warfare that raised the larger, unsettled (and unsettling) issues of the national interest, the exercise of federal power, and the relationship between the people and their government. This dynamic reflected and exacerbated preexisting sectional fissures in the union, triggering recourse to the politics of slavery. As a result, the politics of slavery calibrated the competing national visions of the emerging Federalists and Republicans, defining the limits of American independence while challenging the ability of the United States to remain neutral.

Drawing on the efforts of diplomatic historians, political historians and literary scholars, this work illustrates the mutually constitutive relationship between print politics, foreign relations, and the politics of slavery in the Early Republic. It argues that neutrality was a style of foreign policy that both political parties used to contain sectionalism and faction, and that print politics and the politics of slavery combined to create a dynamic that made that style malleable.

For Hal.

In memory of Scholastica Wong, John Wong,  
Law-Sohn Chen, Joan Yee-Chief, Hank Schirmer,  
Anita Schirmer, Verena Klose, Abraham Akselrad, and  
Msgr. John Wendrychowicz.

In gratitude for J.R. and his own scholarly example.

For all that I have been given,  
*Deo gratias.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### CANDID WORLDS AND ROUGH NEIGHBORHOODS

From the beginning, the United States has had a troubled relationship with the rest of the world. The former colonies struggled to form independent states and then a nation in a turbulent Age of Revolution. Independence did not shield them from Old World politics, the globalizing effects of trade, and pressure from the great colonial powers. The French Revolution's declared hostility to monarchy plunged Europe into war. Throughout the 1790s the rapid deterioration of the old international order affected the young republic.<sup>1</sup>

When Thomas Jefferson submitted the case of American independence to “a candid world,” that world was a dangerous place and a rough neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> Americans often quote both George Washington's Farewell and Thomas Jefferson's Inaugural Addresses on the dangers of permanent and “entangling” alliances, foregrounding neutrality as a prime example of the Founders' wisdom. From 21st-century hindsight, neutrality appears to be obvious common sense: a young and weak nation could not afford to fight a war if it wished to survive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolution, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 185.

<sup>2</sup>In writing the Declaration of Independence as an exposure of grievances committed by the King of Great Britain, Jefferson set his sights—and that of the new nation—*globally and publicly*. He communicated these “injuries and usurpations” as facts to “a candid world” as “a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states.” See Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/declare.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declare.asp) [accessed April 4, 2011].

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study of America's Advantage from Europe's Distress* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1926); Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); George C. Herring, *From*

But the story of U.S. neutrality in the 1790s was far more complex and messy, involving more than pluck, luck, and staying out of trouble abroad. Neutrality was a full-blown crisis, punctuated by intense press battles for public opinion—over foreign affairs and foreign intrigue, and over the diplomatic lessons that Americans learned. Neutrality was controversial from the start. Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality in April of 1793 provoked disagreement between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson over which foreign powers would benefit. Moreover, its failure to mention the word “neutrality” as well as the very act of its proclamation sparked public criticism in the press. Throughout the 1790s, public debate over neutrality led to raucous domestic disputes on the local and national levels. Diplomatic dispatches became “the focus of national politics.”<sup>4</sup> The fate of the American democratic experiment was harnessed to relations with France and England. Foreign policy “dominated domestic politics and American life as it has at virtually no time since.”<sup>5</sup>

Public battles in print over neutrality dominated domestic politics and American life because they were tied to several, larger interrelated issues concerning republican government. A republic required the consent of the governed and republican survival depended on virtue. Yet, while Federalists and Republicans agreed on the federal

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*Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Bradford Perkins, *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Richard Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle over the War of 1812 almost destroyed the Young Republic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 10.

<sup>5</sup>Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy during the Federalist Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), vii; Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), 56. DeConde cites a letter from Hamilton to Colonel Edward Carrington, Philadelphia, May 26, 1792 in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (12 vols., New York: G. P. Putnam's and Sons, 1904), 8:261.

government's exclusive authority over the development of American empire, they disagreed on basic republican principles regarding the relationship of the nation state to its domestic “public.”<sup>6</sup>

Open debate over neutrality and the nature of civil society affected each other. While Americans debated foreign relations, exposure of suspected government corruption and foreign intrigue excited passions over “tyranny,” “despotism,” “slavery,” and the fate and meaning of the American Revolution. Americans and foreigners alike, leaders and ordinary people, kept their eyes on the public prints. Debates over foreign relations became discussions about the public mind, public opinion, public sentiment—the place of the people in republican governance, and the people's consent.

Staying out of foreign wars engendered conflict at home. Self-preservation begged the question of who Americans were and what they were preserving. Which powers benefitted from U.S. neutrality segued into larger concerns about how a republic with popular representation conducted itself in foreign affairs, the relationship of the people to their government, and what constituted the national interest. These issues affected the union’s tectonics on international, national, and local levels. Moreover, federal government concerned itself with persons and property; its reach affected different sections of the union—and their interests— differently.

Public debate over neutrality addressed whether these interests helped or hindered the nation's independence at home and abroad. In the process, these debates threatened to

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<sup>6</sup>Bethel Saler, “An Empire for Liberty, A State for Empire: The U.S. National State before and after the Revolution of 1800” in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, ed. James J. Horn, Jan Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 361-2, 378; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), Chapter 3.

rub up against the slavery issue, which was important to all of these larger questions of republican governance. Neutrality therefore involved multiple levels of political calibration. As a result, it was not only messy, but paradoxical: the struggle to remain neutral threatened republican government. It affected the making of U.S. foreign policy and contained the potential to destroy the very union that guaranteed American independence.

The Early Republic's cherished neutrality cannot be divorced from its political culture. This study examines how the international, emerging national and local political contexts interacted to mediate diplomatic conduct and foreign affairs, as well as the consequences of that mediation. I examine the following questions: What role did these battles over public opinion play in the neutrality crisis? What type of foreign policy would this consensual republic—with its democratized politics and union with slaveholders—pursue? How did neutrality become such a hallowed cornerstone of early American foreign policy? Furthermore, could this high-minded narrative of neutrality be used as a way to contain faction, partisanship and dissent?

I argue that print publicity was central to the mediation of diplomacy and foreign affairs. Crucial to the consent of the governed in an enlightened republic, it was significant to how Americans understood themselves as neutrals and contributed to formulation a foreign policy of non-entanglement.<sup>7</sup> I further suggest that the tension underlying neutrality concerned itself with performance, publicity, and exposure, and that in the 1790s foreign relations and the public sphere were mutually constitutive. During

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<sup>7</sup>Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (1976; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 204-207. Williams defines “mediation” as “constitutive and constituting,” and “a direct and necessary activity between different kinds of activity and consciousness.”

the neutrality crisis, foreign affairs dominated the public prints and political competition for public opinion. Moreover, I contend that Americans' grappling with neutrality through the publicizing and politicization of foreign affairs created a malleable style—and narrative—of foreign policy conducive to appropriation by both Federalists and Republicans. That style encouraged, meshed with, and reflected centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in policy and polity. It also demonstrated how Americans in the Early Republic wrestled with the very shape and nature of their public sphere.<sup>8</sup>

Each chapter, proceeding chronologically from 1793 to 1801, considers the press's treatment of a diplomatic incident as well as the actions of policy leaders. The Habermasian public sphere provides both a frame of reference and point of departure. The Early Republic's public sphere was the realm of mediation between official deliberation and civil society as protected by law. Highly contested, the public sphere was meant to be a place of democratic and rational deliberation in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The sovereignty of "the people" and the importance of public opinion highlighted how much the union and the consensual republic themselves were at stake.

I have focused this study on the Franco-American alliance. The strained Franco-American alliance of 1778 provoked the neutrality crisis in 1793 in the first place. As the French Revolution destroyed the old European balance of power, the alliance prompted

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<sup>8</sup>David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 225.

<sup>9</sup>John L. Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic" in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991); Trish Loughran, *The Republic In Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 92; Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere" *Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000): 153-182.

discussion of the kinds of allegiances a republic should court and with whom, the nature of republican government, and also the fate of federal union. The French Revolution also threatened its American counterpart by affecting consent of the governed on multiple levels even as it excited many Americans about “liberté, égalité, fraternité.” The French Revolution provoked transatlantic discussions among liberals about publicity and the stability of alliances based on the balance of power. Radical notions of consent espoused in France raised the issue of publicity in early U.S. foreign relations, which challenged conservative understandings of civil society defended in Great Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Confronting the consequences of the French Revolution's notion of consent also meant contending with its colonial dimension: the emerging Haitian Revolution further challenged the American Revolution's unresolved slavery issues through slave revolt and ongoing U.S. trade with St. Domingue. 1800 marks the endpoint of this dissertation. The Mortefontaine Convention signed shortly before Thomas Jefferson took the presidency from John Adams entailed the formal abrogation of the earlier French alliance of 1778 with the United States. In addition, Jefferson's “Revolution of 1800” marks the re-orientation of the nation toward the South and West with the change of the capitol from Philadelphia to Washington, DC.

A focus on the Franco-American alliance and the French Revolution therefore illuminates the contours of the neutrality crisis. Neutrality was formed in the crucible of an emerging, contested national identity amid international war, revolution, threats of

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<sup>10</sup>Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and in the Early American Republic,” 212; Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 8; Colleen A. Sheehan, *James Madison and the Spirit of Republican Self-Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

slave revolt, and internal division. Neutrality therefore showed itself to be a precarious attempt to maintain order, both at home and abroad. It necessarily involves the complex local, national, and international realities that the political culture of the Early Republic sought to mediate.

*Media, Message, and Mediation: Print, Publicity, and Public Opinion in the Early Republic's Foreign Relations*

Why were print, public opinion, and publicity so important in the Early Republic? What did they have to do with U.S. neutrality, let alone the politics of slavery—battles over the critical question of chattel slavery's future in the United States? Public opinion, print publicity, and neutrality were of a piece. They were important to the emerging U.S. nation state's foreign relations because of America's tenuous existence as an enlightened, New World republic. As Americans strove to stay clear of foreign wars, print, public opinion, publicity, and the politics of slavery derived their combined importance from the slippage associated with the eighteenth-century use of the word "slavery" before, during, and after the American Revolution.

On both sides of the Atlantic, "slavery" was a political term describing the subject of subjects and the consequences of arbitrary government. During the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s, the Parliament levied taxes to pay for the Seven Years' War that demanded more coherence in imperial government in the British Empire. Americans articulated their resistance to British rule on the premise that the taxes made them subjects of British subjects. Only the King had subjects. Either Americans were as fully Britons as any in the realm, or they were not. When they formed a republic—*res publica* ("public interest")—the people were theoretically sovereign. Republican government

derived its legitimacy from the people's consent. Anything compromising that consent led to arbitrary government, and thence to a state of slavery.<sup>11</sup>

In contradistinction to Old World balances of power, which encouraged arbitrary government like the one Americans had rejected, the Enlightenment presupposed the spread of knowledge. Old World balances of power encouraged war, pursuit of ambition, gratuitous diplomatic entanglements, and governmental irresponsibility—heedless of an ill-informed and easily misled political public. Openness and candor were checks against the intrigue and corruption that the new nation's elites and masses perceived to be deadly to republican government.

Not for nothing did the French minister to the United States, Edmond C. Genet emphasize close relations with the United States built on common sentiment and openness during the neutrality crisis of 1793. When neither was forthcoming from the Washington Administration, Genet decried the lack of candor:

Discussions are short, when matters are taken upon their true principles. Let us explain ourselves as republicans. Let us not lower ourselves to the level of ancient politics, by diplomatic subtleties. Let us be frank in our overtures—in our declarations, as our two nations are in their affections; and by this plain and sincere conduct, arrive at the object by the shortest way.<sup>12</sup>

He insisted on openness in diplomacy, which would fill the vacuum of the disintegrating European balance of power that the French Revolution had wrought.

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<sup>11</sup>Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 40; John Murrin, "Escaping Perfidious Albion: Federalism, Fear of Aristocracy, and the Democratization of Corruption in Postrevolutionary America" in *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-Interest: Political Values in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richard K. Matthews (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1994), 103-147.

<sup>12</sup>Edmond C. Genet to Thomas Jefferson, June 22, 1793, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. John Catanzariti, 40 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 26: 339-341; Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 65; George Gates Raddin, Jr., *Caritat and the Genet Episode* (New York: Dover, 1953), 28.



Neutrality was an alternative to violence-inducing Old World geopolitics. As a check to political entanglement, it was how enlightened powers would interact with each other. Its operative principle of “free ships make free goods” first appeared in American foreign policy with the Model Treaty of 1776.<sup>13</sup> Neutrality reflected faith in the harmonizing and civilizing effects of expanding commerce: neutral powers could take advantage of commercial opportunities with all belligerent powers until the latter realized that war was futile. Treaties were the fundamental acts that created international society. Americans sought treaties that would turn the rights that Congress had proclaimed into ones that other powers would respect. Moreover, the United States and its federal union claimed a “more perfect” balance of power at a time when liberals on both sides of the Atlantic questioned how enlightened balances of power were.<sup>14</sup> In sum, secrecy and intrigue were the bane of the Old World in domestic politics and foreign relations; candor and openness were the watchwords of the New.

But neutrality inherently faced some serious challenges. The Early Republic was a compound republic—a union of republics—that challenged this cosmopolitan, Enlightenment vision even as it claimed to embody it.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the demands of neutrality ironically challenged the ability of the republic to remain neutral. Its federal

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<sup>13</sup>Thom M. Armstrong, “Neutrality” in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Alexander DeConde, Richard Dean Burns, Louise B. Kertz, and Fredrik Logevall, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2002), 2:560. In the principle of “free ships make free goods,” a ship’s nationality determined the status of its cargo-- enemy cargo on a neutral ship, excepting contraband, was not subject to capture on the high seas.

<sup>14</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 160-161, 167; Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>15</sup>David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

union was a “peace pact:” a model world order. It also contained stumbling blocks for the republican *sine qua non* of popular sovereignty and consent of the governed. Foreign and domestic were always in tension because there was no sharp distinction between international relations and national self-determination. This pronounced conflation of foreign and domestic, of international and constitutional thought, was a holdover from the British Empire that extended to the postcolonial United States.

The Articles of Confederation had produced a union far more international than national in character. The states had their own constitutions, and hung together as “a consequence of their mutual entanglement than of the conception they had formed of their relationship at the beginning.”<sup>16</sup> At the Constitutional Convention, both Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Alexander Hamilton assumed that the foreign and domestic were inseparable, though they reached different conclusions about foreign relations. Pinckney contended that the end of republican government was not to seek foreign respect, but to make citizens happy at home. Hamilton retorted that there could be no domestic happiness without sufficient stability and strength to assure respect abroad. With the Federal Constitution only newly ratified in 1787, the republic's borders were still porous by 1790; no clearly drawn distinction between international and constitutional thought existed.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 108; David C. Hendrickson, “The First Union” in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2005), 53.

<sup>17</sup>Gerald Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1970), 127 ; Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, *Le Ferment Nationaliste: Aux originies de la politique ext rieure des  tats-Unis, 1789-1812* (Paris : Belin, 1994), 323. For the translated version, see Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment: The Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1812*, trans. Lillian A. Parrott (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 195; Alexander de Conde, Paul Varg and Fran ois Furstenberg have pointed out that Americans in the Early Republic rarely, if at all, made distinctions

Federal union was also an example of Enlightenment doctrinal rationalization. The Articles of Confederation's inherent weakness in the face of international pressure from European powers, growing factionalism, Shays's Rebellion, severe land disputes, economic depression, and slavery were vital challenges that the Constitutional Convention was meant to address. Yet, they "also [made] Convention delegates less certain of agreement and more worried about the textual basis on which agreement might rest."<sup>18</sup> Ignoring political reality at the grassroots level in favor of abstract utopianism would have severely compromised the Constitution. The "whole edifice would have collapsed" had the delegates not rejected certain radical proposals and moderated others," writes Woody Holton.<sup>19</sup>

If federal union was a "peace pact," then, the Constitution was a peace treaty. Its ratification, however, produced no immediately coherent political unity or uniformity among the states: nation, state, and union were not equivalent. The compound republic was vulnerable to both the concentration and diffusion of power. In the 1790s, those tenuous power dynamics in turn affected and were affected by the questions of what kind of political economy would preserve or corrupt a republic, as well as what kinds of sentiments would corrupt its citizens. Perfecting the compound republic's "more perfect

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between foreign affairs and domestic politics. See Alexander de Conde *Entangling Alliance*; Paul A. Varg, *The Foreign Policy of the Founding Fathers* (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 1963); Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation*. (New York: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 9; Robert A. Ferguson, "The Literature of Public Documents" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R.K. Patell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 478.

<sup>19</sup>Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 193.

union” was an ongoing process. Neutrality would involve preserving—and balancing—unity at home and independence abroad.

The formation of print discourse, and not just the people or the rule of law, grounded the legitimacy of the emerging national state before and after the Constitutional Convention. Between 1776 and 1787, revolutionary leaders became “less convinced about the self-evidence of truth in political forums.”<sup>20</sup> A yearning for certainty underscored the focus on publicity in the 1790s: to print something meant rendering tacit knowledge explicit and supposedly fixed.<sup>21</sup> Printing provided a “vernacular,” expressing and sharing political interests through a common language in both words and pictures. Printed texts also had their own politics involving the cultural meaning of their form and function as much as their objectified nature or their arguments.<sup>22</sup>

Print was also part and parcel of the Enlightenment's emphasis on “free communication.” Amid encroaching regression to Old World secrecy and intrigue, print promised emancipation and self-determination in the New World. Addressed to “the printers,” John Adams's *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765) claimed that prevalence of general knowledge and sensibility among the people ensured liberty

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<sup>20</sup>Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiv; Ferguson, “The Literature of Public Documents,” 478.

<sup>21</sup>Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Robert A. Ferguson, “We Do Ordain and Establish: The Constitution as a Literary Text,” *William and Mary Law Review*, 29 (1987); Michael Warner, “Textuality and Legitimacy in the Printed Constitution,” *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings*, 97 (1987); Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 110-111. The Onufs observe that explicitness in text was important because of the problematic relationship between the general concept of “constitution” and specific written texts in the period before the revolution.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas C. Leonard, *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4; Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, xi.

and the diminution of arbitrary government. The most sacred means of such knowledge, cherished “with more tenderness and care by the settlers of America,” was the press.

The *Dissertation* claimed that print could square an important circle: print enabled the spread of knowledge, which checked a love of power, the root of all slavery. Printing should not only be encouraged, but it should be “easy and cheap and safe for any person to communicate his thoughts to the public.” Politics in the eighteenth century also focused on character. If the “ambition and avarice” of any great man endangered the public interest, education and character notwithstanding, then it was the printer’s duty to publish and expose those vices. On the eve of the American Revolution, Adams lamented that debates and deliberations in Congress were “impenetrable secrets,” but that “conversations in the city and the chatt [sic] of the coffee house, are free, and open.” He remarked: “I wish we were at liberty to write freely and speak openly upon every subject, for there is frequently as much knowledge derived from conversations and correspondence, as from solemn public debates.”<sup>23</sup>

These beliefs about the role of the press remained as the number of newspapers increased during the 1790s. In the Philadelphia *National Gazette*, James Madison wrote that “public opinion sets the bounds for every government, and is the real sovereign in

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<sup>23</sup>John Adams, “A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,” published in *The Boston Gazette*, 1765, in Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Edward Larkin (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2004), 100, 109, 123; Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 3; The idea that ignorance breeds slavery was common in the republican ideology of print; for more on the suspicious atmosphere in the colonies that could allow even the smallest act to have enormous political repercussions and acted as an incubator for radical Whig thought prior to the American Revolution, see Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 16-17; John Adams to James Warren, October 7, 1775 in *Warren-Adams Letters, Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, 2 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 1:126.

every free one.”<sup>24</sup> The future president continued, “Whatever facilitates a general intercourse of sentiments, as good roads, domestic commerce, a free press, and particularly *a circulation of newspapers through the entire body of the people, and Representatives going from and returning among every part of them*, is equivalent to a contraction of territorial limits, and is favorable to liberty, where these may be too extensive.” For Madison, print was part of the high stakes of high politics, and on the same level of importance as diplomatic letters and treaties. Print helped form the public opinion crucial to the people's consent. When properly fostered and formed, public opinion is the manifestation of the will and reason of society. New in the eighteenth century, public opinion served as an ideal of open, republican government.

Although Americans in the eighteenth century expected public opinion to matter, in practice, public opinion was whatever anyone said it was. Unlike contemporary understanding of the term, public opinion was neither the aggregate of popular opinion, nor was discoverable by polls, nor was it a spontaneous popular outpouring. As an enlightened ideal, it did not depend upon universal or even active participation. Its inherent ambiguity also left anyone invoking it vulnerable to standards of proof: had the people actually spoken?<sup>25</sup> What mattered was that enlightened members of society form a public voice grounded in reason. Public opinion required the refinement and

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<sup>24</sup>James Madison, “Public Opinion,” *The National Gazette*, December 19, 1791; see also *The Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, 9 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s and Sons, 1900), 6:70. Original emphasis; Colleen A. Sheehan, “Madison and the French Enlightenment: The Authority of Public Opinion,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 4 (October 2002): 926.

<sup>25</sup>Christopher J. Young, “Connecting the President and the People: Washington's Neutrality, Genet's Challenge, and Hamilton's Fight for Public Support,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Fall 2011): 435-66; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 136; Sheehan, “Madison and the French Enlightenment,” 948.

transformation of the views, sentiments and interests of the citizens into a public mind. “AN OLD CUSTOMER” in the Boston *Independent Chronicle* observed what was at stake regarding public opinion and print publicity: “when the people are informed about the affairs of their country and of their government, they will never be enslaved.”<sup>26</sup>

The cultural and political function of print media, however, could both advance and hinder Adams and Madison’s views of print as a check against political slavery and as an enlightened instrument of public opinion. Print also did not constitute the whole, or even dominate the public sphere. Print coexisted with rumor, gossip, correspondence, and performance as part of a varied political matrix that signified existing tension between what was secret and what was public. Media in Early America was “emerging,” not static. Rumor and gossip formed networks of political communication among individuals who attempted to define the meaning of people, nation, national interest, and events. Manuscript both resisted and imitated print. Policy-makers appealed to the people by persuasion—by performance (presentation or exhibition)—not only in print, but also through oral communication and style.<sup>27</sup> Claims “to authenticity and relations of power,” Sandra Gustafson persuasively argues, “were given form and meaning through the reliance on or freedom from text in oral performance.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>AN OLD CUSTOMER, *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), December 12, 1793.

<sup>27</sup>David Shields, “We Declare You Independent whether You Wish it Or Not” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 116 (January 2006): 233-259; Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, 41; Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup>Sandra M. Gustafson, “The Emerging Media of Early America,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 115 (2006): 205-50.

Different forms of printed media also gained new prominence in relation to old ones. While the pamphlet remained an important medium of discourse since the colonial period, the newspaper was on the rise. Newspapers “straddled the boundaries between oral and print culture, and between private contemplation and public deliberation.” The newspapers and pamphlets of the 1790s also differed from the ones in previous years in that they were printed and priced for a readership outside of the traditional leadership class.<sup>29</sup> Newspapers advertised the sale of politically significant pamphlets. Collations of political addresses and essays appearing in the newspapers were also often printed as pamphlets. Publicity involved and derived its dynamic (and often explosive) quality from the interaction between these forms of media.

Diplomats and non-diplomats alike wrote letters that constituted a private, sometimes secret, channel of communication. Literate men and women commonly referred to information from print sources in their letters to friends, relations, and acquaintances. Sometimes, they included newspaper clippings with their letters, or sent whole copies of newspapers or pamphlets. Many foreign diplomats and U.S. leaders established close contact with those who printed them. Some, like Hamilton, Rufus King, and French ministers Genet and Pierre Auguste Adet, attempted to influence public opinion directly through the press. Within this varied and volatile political matrix, letters “often miscarried, or turned up in the hands of enemies who showed them to the wrong person or, worse, had them published.”<sup>30</sup> Putting someone’s diplomatic letters in print or

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<sup>29</sup>Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 7, 30; Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment*, Chapter 4.

<sup>30</sup>Joanne Freeman, “Slanders, Poison, Whispers and Fame: Jefferson’s ‘Anas’ and Political Gossip in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Spring 1995): 33.



leaking information could constitute an orchestrated political and diplomatic act. In a growing partisan atmosphere it mattered who printed that correspondence and in what form.

Foreign affairs publicized in print were therefore integral to a multifaceted political context. Its practitioners wrote letters, gossiped, spread rumors, and strategically leaked information to newspapers, aware that publicity could provoke crowds to action and ruin reputations. As Adams noted in his *Dissertation*, to expose a person's ill character from behind a veil of carefully constructed artifice meant showing that he was untrustworthy and unfit to govern. In a politics that had become more democratized since the years immediately preceding the American Revolution, printers developed partisan identities as they competed to keep the people well informed. They became professional politicians at a time when the Constitution's ratification hardly guaranteed coherence and unity, and political parties did not yet exist in the contemporary sense.<sup>31</sup>

As the new nation expanded and developed, newspapers formed a critical link between the federal government and its citizens. The medium of the press made Americans (including those excluded from formal citizenship) “steadily more conscious of their place in a broader but often distant national political debate.”<sup>32</sup> But print's

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<sup>31</sup>Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*; Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jeffrey L. Pasley, “The Tyranny of Printers”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 20. In the Early Republic printers were professional politicians in every sense of the word, providing communication networks and political organization through newspaper subscription, as well as through the content that they printed.

<sup>32</sup>Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

promise of “emancipation” through publicized exposure of dangers to the public good also encouraged curiosity into the private lives of public men. When local politics could become diplomacy and diplomacy could become local politics, it affected the ability of the United States to remain neutral. National security could involve minding other people's business.

In the midst of diplomatic crises, public sphere of print—newspapers, broadsides, and pamphlets—constituted a dynamic contact (some might argue combat) zone between the international, national, and local. Consisting of multiple and competing publics and counter-publics, the public sphere turned disseminators of the news into political and diplomatic actors.<sup>33</sup> Rumor and emerging media such as print became political and diplomatic tools (and weapons). The public sphere was also a space where Americans publicly debated foreign affairs, the international significance of their revolution, and the emerging nation's place in the Age of Revolution. At stake was not only the ability to remain neutral, but the power to shape the narrative over neutrality as foreign policy: who and what preserved it, and who and what endangered it? Public debate over neutrality made the exposure of diplomatic letters and papers part of partisan politics, coloring the vernacular through which early Americans discussed foreign affairs.

Public frustration over foreign policy, moreover, publicized, reflected, and exacerbated the sectional tensions that had underscored the union from the very

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<sup>33</sup>Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*; Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Making of the United States Constitution*; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Waldstreicher, “Two Cheers for the ‘Public Sphere’ . . . and One for Historians’ Skepticism,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 62 (January 2005): 17-12; Michael Meranze, “Culture and Governance: Reflections on the Cultural History of 18<sup>th</sup>-century British America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 65, (January 2008): 713-44.

beginning.<sup>34</sup> Print culture did not describe an already-existing American “people” as a political entity; it promoted the cultural fiction of one. Far from monolithic, it was both multifaceted and decentralized, even despite the existence of extensive print networks. Growing nationalism expressed through the enlightened spread of information heightened tensions between centralized and decentralized power. Decentralization made it easy for incipient and emerging American nationalism to allow extra-local unity to coexist with local particularism.<sup>35</sup> It also made it easier for Americans to imagine cohesion where none really existed. When the Constitution was printed for public consumption, Patrick Henry seized upon that discrepancy. “What right,” he demanded to know, “did they have to say, We, the people? My political curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare leads me to ask, Who authorized them to speak the language of, We, the people, instead of We, the states?”<sup>36</sup>

*Meaningful Silences and Loud Yelps for Liberty: Neutrality, Publicity, Slavery, and Union*

What did anyone mean by “We, the People”? And what interests did “the people” have? That Americans constituted a united people originated in the American Revolution. But its implications were always controversial. Print politics reflected and

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<sup>34</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 123; Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1973).

<sup>35</sup>Robert Ferguson writes: “The unanimity injected into the language of the Constitution is instead a useful fiction, a myth of glorious harmony that the framers wield in the ideological struggle to elicit and then enforce allegiance in the fight over ratification.” See “The Literature of Public Documents.” *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R.K. Patell, eds. (Cambridge, 1994), 480. See also Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup>Patrick Henry, Virginia Convention, June 4, 1788 in Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), quoted in Loughran, *Republic in Print*, 141.

contributed to the tensions underlying Patrick Henry's protest about national consensus and the public interest. Exposing intrigue and corruption that would politically enslave the people and doom republican government fixated Americans on who the intriguers were. Efforts to foster national consensus that involved rooting out sources of intrigue that endangered neutrality could draw unwanted attention to chattel slavery, and upset the public “meaningful silence” over its existence that originated in the colonial era. “Meaningful silence” amounted to tacit and public acquiescence of master-slave relations as defined largely by masters. It made slavery a private, domestic matter off limits to public scrutiny and interference.<sup>37</sup>

U.S. leaders' general efforts to keep slavery out of mainstream politics as much as possible made it the Early Republic's “unknown known”— namely, “disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices Americans pretended not to know about.”<sup>38</sup> Those beliefs and practices formed the background of the body politic's public values. The Constitution was not simply a compromise on slavery; the Founders worked the Constitution *through* slavery. Within the union's balance of power, African Americans stood “either in slavery, outside civil society in a state of undeclared war, or on the

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<sup>37</sup>John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore, 2003), 63-69; Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution in the Early American Republic,” 233. Brooke observes that “the entire history of American slavery can be read in terms of an exclusion from consent and civil society literally written into the provisions of the 1787 United States Constitution.” See also Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 3-19. I borrow the term “meaningful silence” from Waldstreicher.

<sup>38</sup>Michael Drexler, “The Displacement of the American Novel” <http://www.common-place.org> vol. 9 · no. 3 · April 2009 [accessed April 4, 2011]. In referring to slavery as the Early Republic's “unknown known,” Drexler borrows the term from psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek; George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

fringes of civil life, barely free to form families and households and to own property.”<sup>39</sup> Slavery hovered near and around the public sphere, never completely invisible. The transatlantic tectonics of three intersecting revolutions—American, French, and Haitian—increased the potential of slavery to affect U.S. neutrality internationally, nationally, and locally. The politics of slavery had the ability to affect union at home and independence abroad as open debate over republican virtue in foreign relations reverberated through the public sphere.

In fact, slavery and African Americans took center stage in Early American politics during intense partisan warfare. When the neutrality crisis provoked animated public discussion about the nature and future of republican government, chattel slavery reemerged in mainstream politics as a challenge to the republic's vaunted liberty. In 1775, English writer and moral critic Samuel Johnson scoffed at American protests against the tyranny of British taxation. Was it not strange that slaveholders yelped the loudest for liberty? Ten years later, English émigré journalist William Cobbett (alias Peter Porcupine) described the United States as “a spectacle that startles the eye of reason” where “Order walks hand in hand with the most perfect Liberty,” while “Anarchy revels, surrounded with its den of slaves.”<sup>40</sup> As print politics in the 1790s aimed to expose corruption and arbitrary government, slaves surfaced in the American Revolution's own language of rebellion, as a disembodied presence in their masters' protests against “enslavement.” Colonial-era Whig discourse remained relevant in the

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<sup>39</sup>Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere,” 225.

<sup>40</sup>Samuel Johnson, *Taxation, No Tyranny* (London: T. Cadell in the Strand, 1775), 89; William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats; Or Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, “The Political Progress of Britain”* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1795), 43; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 232.

Early Republic and its politics of print. It held sway over Americans and their politics whenever they re-fought their Revolution at times of crisis.<sup>41</sup>

In the Early Republic as during the colonial period, slavery was not just a political metaphor for the deprivation of the people's consent and an institution for the brutal but profitable exploitation of human labor. It was also a precarious variance of governance. Americans, at least north of Virginia, were generally confident during the 1780s and 1790s that slavery would gradually disappear. An emphasis on gradual abolitionism fit well with the Enlightenment's faith in orderly, incremental reform.<sup>42</sup> But chattel slavery persisted long after the Constitution's ratification. It also persisted at a time when general eighteenth-century controversy over economic growth and the moral implications of political economy (namely, corruption, luxury, and what produced it) continued to confront the Early Republic. All of those issues affected foreign policy.

The neutrality debate of the 1790s produced widespread fear of "enslavement" by a foreign power. The issue affected both emerging parties along sectional lines. Politicized print exposés of intrigue and corruption heightened Americans' anxiety and bitter disagreement over which power was doing the enslaving, and who its local enablers were. When Federalists encountered opposition to their policies, they pounced on evidence of Southern francophilia and susceptibility to French intrigue. Foreign

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<sup>41</sup>Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment*, 159; Peter A. Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as Metaphor in Revolutionary America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 217; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 105.

<sup>42</sup>William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume I, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15; Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

treaties—an important issue for the Articles of Confederation and the ratification of the Constitution—made Southern slaveholders wary of a more centralized federal government's interference with their property in slaves. Republicans fearing Federalists' use of federal power to promote the particular interests of privileged groups understood that preservation of the union involved resisting corruption, consolidation, and upholding states' rights.<sup>43</sup> Sectional strife spelled the potential death of the union and a return to the colonial dependency and deprivation of political consent that to Americans meant slavery.<sup>44</sup>

Through the Franco-American alliance itself, chattel slavery threatened to unsettle the republic's structure and “a more perfect union.” Americans contended with westward expansion and St. Domingue: the Franco-American alliance would benefit western expansion, which Republicans especially saw as a cure for various social ills. French West Indian sugar plantations depended on American provisions, and most of the carrying trade fell to the United States during the Anglo-French War. Hostilities between the major European belligerents threatened this trade, and slave revolt was a looming danger in all of the slave-holding Americas. News from St. Domingue and refugees fleeing its violent rebellion poured into American coastal cities during the 1790s. By the end of the 1790s, partisan quarreling over neutrality and foreign intrigue stoked general

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<sup>43</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 158; Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Christopher Leslie Brown, “The Politics of Slavery” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. David Armitage, Michael J. Braddick (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>44</sup>Onuf, and Onuf, 123, 177; John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era: 1789-1801* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960), 104; Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1971), 217; Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 82.

fears of disunity and insurrection, of which St. Domingue was an obvious example. Not surprisingly, Southerners formulated an intellectual blockade against the dangers of French Revolution and slave revolt in the early 1800s.<sup>45</sup>

As the French Revolution raised the issue of consent of the governed through radical notions of publicity, its colonial dimension further raised the issue of emancipation, challenging the American Revolution's example of liberty in the Western hemisphere. The world economy made chattel slavery a successful way of life, which its beneficiaries would not give up easily. Slavery's importance to national and regional prosperity led to Americans contesting slavery even when they thought they were arguing about other issues.<sup>46</sup> They also used slavery to talk about foreign relations, and foreign relations to talk about slavery—a practice that built on Whig ideology from the colonial period and the Revolutionary War.

In addition, nationalist, patriotic celebrations publicly suggested that slavery was a *national* problem, and one that contradicted the nation's founding ideals.<sup>47</sup> If slavery was a national problem, it fell under the federal government's purview, and the federal

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<sup>45</sup>Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 114; Simon P. Newman, "American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans" in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup>David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Peter S. Onuf, "Foreword," in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, ed. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), xvi.

<sup>47</sup>Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 313.



government could interfere with it. In three intersecting revolutions, Americans confronted the extent and limits of their own and its role in the world. The entanglement of foreign relations with the politics of slavery via the Early Republic's domestic politics invoked the ever-present threat of disunion during times of international turmoil. So long as Americans protested “enslavement” while some of their number continued to hold slaves, chattel slavery would continue to compromise both the ability to be candid and the foundations of the republic’s basis in the people’s consent.

Chattel slavery constituted the fulcrum of the Early Republic’s most unsettling balance of power, and silence amounted to intrigue. Competition in the press to keep the people informed ironically contested the openness so crucial to a republican diplomacy and politics. In the compound republic, silence over slavery was comparable to the Old-World diplomacy supposedly obsolete in the New World. Foreign policy refers to a nation’s aims in dealing with other powers; diplomacy is the attainment of those aims. Diplomatic negotiation also constitutes a wider field of human activity, involving any social activity oriented toward a nation’s aims. While diplomacy is not politics at an international level, but rather “the implemented policy through accredited persuasion,” print politics in the service of both domestic politics and diplomacy allowed for convergence.<sup>48</sup>

Diplomacy and politics that aimed to shape the intense and divisive public discussion about neutrality risked rubbing up against the slavery issue because those

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<sup>48</sup>Peter P. Hill, “The Early National Period, 1775-1815” in *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, ed. Robert D. Schulzinger (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 49; Matt J. Schumann and Karl W. Schweizer, “The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19 (2008): 149-186. Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 13.

discussions provoked debates over the nature of republican government. Treaties and alliances, diplomatic recognition, or how to pay for an unofficial war all involved that larger question, which affected Americans along sectional lines. Sectional differences over slavery helped provoke and define sectional differences over national policy, and vice versa. Slavery's significance to the nation's founding and to the ratification of the Constitution emphasized that the union was *necessarily* a balance of power predicated on what could undermine its ability to be "more perfect." At stake was the international claim of the United States to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, and revolutionary leadership.

### *Historiography*

Historians have mostly explored neutrality as an issue of international law, American sovereignty, and as evidence of the founders' remarkable restraint. Albert Bowman, Charles Hyneman, and C.M. Thomas have explored the intricacies of international law and Americans' difficulties enforcing their neutral rights when much of the bureaucratic apparatus did not yet exist. In general, the study of foreign policy and diplomacy in early America is nothing new. Spanning decades of scholarship, beginning with Samuel Flagg Bemis and Paul Varg, and Felix Gilbert and extending through David Hendrickson, Peter Onuf, and Marie Jeanne Rossignol, legions of historians have written about the difficulties in securing the American Revolution and preserving federal union amid the multifaceted intricacies of international politics.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ammon, *The Genet Mission*; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957); Albert Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era*; DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*; DeConde, *The Quasi-*

Bemis and Jonathan Dull have drawn attention to the international complexities that Americans faced, and Frederick Marks illuminates how issues of foreign policy were central to the making of the Federal Constitution. Hendrickson, along with Peter and Nicholas Onuf, have written that the federal union was not fully consolidated, and was itself an international state system. Alexander DeConde, Henry Ammon, Varg, and Rossignol, in focusing on economic considerations and domestic politics in the Early Republic, have emphasized the inter-connectivity between the local, national, and international. Foreign relations in the Early Republic gain their dynamism from the unsettled—and often unsettling—nature of the relationships stemming from that inter-connectivity.

Despite that inter-connectivity, no historian of early U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy has situated the role of print politics and publicity in the history of foreign relations as a story within itself, much less in relation to neutrality. Diplomatic historians such as DeConde and Ammon have extensively used print sources such as newspapers and broadsides, but they have not examined their specific function in the Early Republic. Nor have they identified the publicity given to particular events as a driver of Early American foreign relations. In a republic obsessed with intrigue from international, national, and local sources, publicity and public opinion mattered. Diplomatic historians have neither considered the specific form and function of these sources as media, nor the utilization of these media as politics or diplomacy. Rarely have they explored their

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*War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966); Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Frederick Marks, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*; Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

communicative and political implications in writing the history of American foreign relations in the Early Republic.

Archival manuscript centrism, long dominating the study of U.S. foreign relations up until the Cold War's end, is partly to blame: when scholars allow the opening of new archives to influence their topics for research, what results is "the tyranny of the archives." Michael Hunt decries this "increasingly serious problem of overemphasis on the post-World War II period to the neglect of earlier periods, especially the nineteenth century." Myopic insistence on archival novelty has resulted in "an ironic diminution of historical perspective on the part of historians."<sup>50</sup> Diplomatic historians largely perceive the Early National period as a backwater, claiming to have thoroughly exhausted the archival resources.<sup>51</sup>

Historians of U.S. foreign relations can benefit from historians of Early America. In increasing numbers the latter are rediscovering the complexities of foreign relations and diplomacy. The study of Native-White relations is especially rich. James Merrell, James Axtell, Timothy Shannon, Richard White, and Leonard Sadosky have examined diplomatic culture-- the role of go-betweens, the performance of treaty signing and the exchanging of gifts and wampum-- thus demonstrating early America's intercultural

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<sup>50</sup>Michael H. Hunt, "The Long Crisis in Diplomatic History," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100. Hunt's indictment remains salient. In the last decade to the present, there is *still* an appalling dearth of scholarship on the history of American foreign relations before 1898, let alone any specifically dealing with the Early Republic.

<sup>51</sup>Kinley Brauer, "The Great American Desert Revisited: Recent Literature and the Prospects for the Study of American Foreign Relations, 1815-61" *Diplomatic History* 12 (January 1988): 19-37. In *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations (Vol. 1): Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). William Earl Weeks has not only rewritten this volume in the distinguished series, originally written by Bradford Perkins, but he has provided an excellent, up-to-date review essay of the literature on Early American foreign relations.

reality. Marie-Jeanne Rossignol reiterates its importance: intercultural complexity did not dissipate with the American Revolution and the adoption of the Constitution.<sup>52</sup>

Current approaches to the study of U.S. foreign relations have increasingly incorporated the study of culture, gender, ideology and race, both for good and ill. The overwhelming focus on the 20<sup>th</sup> century of historians of American foreign relations has diverted attention from diplomats and the nation state in order to highlight connections between the United States and the rest of the world. This phenomenon indisputably has its benefits, so long as forward-leaning historians do not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Matters of high politics have so long dominated the field that proponents of the “new diplomatic history” tend to see them as existing in a detached and rarefied atmosphere. A closer examination of neutrality in the context of the Early Republic's transatlantic political culture, however, affords diplomatic historians opportunities: they need not eschew diplomacy and high politics in order to contemplate the role of less-traditional phenomena like culture and media. Studying the foreign relations of an incipient nation state when both modern ideas of diplomacy and the nation state were themselves new allows diplomatic historians to have it both ways.

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<sup>52</sup>Fred Anderson, *The War that Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York: Penguin, 2006); James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: the Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); James Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1999); Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment*; Leonard Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians, Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Timothy Shannon, *Indians and Colonists at the Crossroads of Empire: The Albany Congress of 1754* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Historians of early American politics have in increasing numbers examined the role of print politics in the Early Republic. David Waldstreicher, Susan Branson, Jeffrey Pasley, Marcus Daniel, and Seth Cotlar transcend the more common story of party and faction, and broadening it to include parades, celebrations, style, and print culture.<sup>53</sup> In particular, Waldstreicher, Branson, and Pasley emphasize how print changed politics for everyone in the Early Republic. These more democratic, participatory, highly diverse (and contested) forms of political action were instrumental in the formation of American nationalism. Furthermore, these historians understand that the Early Republic existed within an international context that affected Americans' everyday lives socially, culturally and politically. The Atlantic World has been the recent focus of Early American studies from the colonial period to about 1820. Historians of the Early Republic studying social, political, and cultural issues are instinctively aware of "foreign relations, broadly defined," even if their focus on foreign relations is not specific.

This broader sense of politics in the Early Republic is the focus of *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. In addition, the work of literary scholars such as Jay Fliegelman, Martha Elena Rojas,

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<sup>53</sup>Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001); Martha Elena Rojas, "'Insults Unpunished': Barbary Captives, American Slaves, and the Negotiation of Liberty" *Early American Studies* 1 (Fall 2003): 159-186; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Ben Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Ashli White, "The Limits of Fear: The Saint Dominguan Challenge to Slave Trade Abolition in the United States" *Early American Studies* 2 (Fall 2004): 362-397; see also Simon P. Newman, *Politics and Parades of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

Sandra Gustafson, and David Shields has indicated the significance of different forms of media and their function.<sup>54</sup> Given these approaches to the study both American foreign relations and print culture in the eighteenth century, it is insufficient for historians of foreign relations and for historians of Early America to consider only the *content* of print sources. The role of print has not remained static and unchanged over two centuries. Moreover, the relationship between culture and power is not unchanged or even unchanging throughout the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries, for the dynamics of that relationship belong to specific historical moments. Attention to the form and function of media as well as the deliberate ways in which they were used remind diplomatic historians to ask themselves whether public and popular discourse about foreign affairs only remain “in the air.”

Historians of the Early Republic have at most only partially integrated foreign policy and diplomacy into their studies. As Drew McCoy hinted in his now classic study of political economy of the Early Republic, foreign relations tantalizingly hover at the edges of this larger body of scholarship. But despite recent efforts by Nathan Perl-Rosenthal and Christopher Young suggesting the potential of engaging foreign relations in the Early Republic more fully, entreaties by Emily Rosenberg and Peter Onuf in

*Diplomatic History* to return to the early national period have largely gone unanswered.

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<sup>54</sup>Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Michael Meranze, “Culture and Governance: Reflections on the Cultural History of 18<sup>th</sup>-century British America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 65 (October 2008), 713-744; David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Martha Elena Rojas, “Negotiating Gifts: Jefferson’s Diplomatic Presents” in *Old World, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson*, ed. Leonard J. Sadosky, Peter S. Onuf, and Andrew O’ Shaughnessy (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

The continued lack of attention to foreign relations by recent political historians of the Early Republic show insufficient progress.<sup>55</sup> Both historians of U.S. foreign relations and historians of the Early Republic have largely ignored diplomacy and the making of foreign policy in the eighteenth century, albeit in different ways.

Moving from the general to the particular, historians of American foreign relations, political historians, and historians of slavery in the Early American Republic rarely associate America's troubled neutrality with the politics of slavery. In remarking on the politics of slavery before 1808, Matthew Mason writes that "it was the Republicans' francophilia, and not slavery, that constituted 'the greatest danger which, at present, threatens the peace and liberties of our country.'" Elizabeth Varon observes that as Northerners and Southerners clashed repeatedly in the 1790s, slavery was the most obvious difference between them. Yet she maintains that slavery was not the explicit focus of these debates.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*; Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore, 2010). Martha Elena Rojas's and Matthew Rainbow Hale's unpublished dissertations "Diplomatic letters: The conduct and culture of United States foreign affairs in the early republic" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2003) and "Neither Britons nor Frenchmen : the French Revolution and American national identity" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis, 2002) respectively address foreign affairs more specifically, as does Todd Estes's book, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). In *Beyond the Founders*, even though the contributors and editors are aware of the importance of the Atlantic World to their studies of politics in the Early Republic, the only essay specifically addressing foreign relations is that by Seth Cotlar: "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse." See also McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 9; Onuf, "A Declaration of Independence for Diplomatic Historians," *Diplomatic History* 22 (Winter 1998): 71-83; Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "Private Letters, Public Diplomacy: The Adams Network and the Quasi-War, 1797-1798," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Summer 2011): 283-311; Christopher J. Young, "Connecting the President and the People: Washington's Neutrality, Genet's Challenge, and Hamilton's Fight for Public Support," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Fall 2011): 435-66. Young's work is mostly about how foreign policy required popular support, but not about the consequences of a relationship that was essentially reciprocal.

<sup>56</sup>Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 36; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! : The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 33; John Craig Hammond and Matthew



In contrast, the work of Donald L. Robinson, Don Fehrenbacher, Gordon S. Brown, and Tim Matthewson at least indirectly suggests a linkage between slavery and neutrality in the Early Republic.<sup>57</sup> Further, the work of David Waldstreicher, Peter Dorsey, François Furstenberg, and George Van Cleve reveals how integral slavery was to the Early Republic's republican rhetoric, Constitution, economics, society, and political culture. Rachel Hope Cleves has suggested that entangled within those larger fears of francophilia, and the larger discussions of corruption and danger from foreign influence, *was* slavery.<sup>58</sup>

For those reasons, Peter Onuf observes that slavery was not the central, overarching narrative of American national history prior to 1840, but there were in fact many different, interdependent ones, and slavery was important to all of them.<sup>59</sup> Print, its politics, and public discussions of how to preserve neutrality, involved several of these different, interdependent narratives about the distribution of power in a republic. The politics of slavery warrant further integration into the history of U.S. foreign relations in general, and into the history of U.S. neutrality in particular.

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Mason eds. *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

<sup>57</sup>Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Tim Matthewson, *A Pro-Slavery Foreign Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 2003); Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971); Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>58</sup>Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Dorsey, *Common Bondage*; Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*; George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010); Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*.

<sup>59</sup>Onuf, "Foreword" in Hammond and Mason, *Contesting Slavery*, xiii.

The United States was an “empire for liberty.” But, Eliga Gould remarks, it was still an empire. Becoming a “treaty-worthy” nation involved liberty for some that meant slavery or dispossession for others.<sup>60</sup> The politics of slavery was also international, and not just national; chattel slavery in the Early National period was modern, controversial, and not wholly “peculiar.” While not singularly central, it was not marginal. What *was* indeed central—and discomfiting—was that foreign-relations crises forced Americans to grapple with how closely slavery affected their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

During the 1790s, the politics of slavery wove its way in and out of the public discussions of U.S. neutrality and foreign relations. A national interest that allowed one power or another too much influence in American internal affairs was a recipe for an ill-informed populace consenting to their own enslavement. But the attendant reality of chattel slavery provided an alarming counterpoint to American yelps for liberty and their exposures of foreign intrigue. Never far beneath the surface, the existence of chattel slavery had a way of calibrating political issues due to the republican obsession with corruption, sovereignty, and power.

When diplomatic crises produced flashpoints, chattel slavery's existence could calibrate national narratives and foreign relations—even as Americans’ public debates and celebrations over the preservation of their independence attempted to relegate the issue to the sidelines of American political life. Though they had protested and gained independence from a federal and imperial government whose regulation affected slavery,

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<sup>60</sup>Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth*, 2-4.

Americans faced the same process when they created an imperial government of their own.

### *Conclusion*

U.S. neutrality in the Early Republic involved top-down-meets-bottom-up fluidity—and the tension that it produced. Transatlantic—and transnational—connections bring people together, but they also produce pressure points that force those people to adapt to political realities. Foreign policy is not simply a statement of a nation’s aims, but the way it makes sense of itself. Nations are stories, and not just things or ideas. The nation consists of a series of narratives that have the potential to crowd out other narratives with different political implications. Moreover, what the Founders believed about the emancipating power of print and enlightened public opinion perpetuated and affected what they told themselves about America's independence and American foreign policy.

U.S. neutrality consisted of policies and narratives about what it meant, borrowing from Benjamin Franklin, to “keep the republic” at home and abroad.<sup>61</sup> On one level, neutrality made very simple common sense when it came to an incipient nation’s self preservation. On another, simultaneous level, neutrality involved the enlightened principle of “free ships, free goods.” If restricted to international power politics divorced from international connectivity, discussions of neutrality and preservation from great-power depredation can neglect important internal tensions. International power politics and preservation from great-power depredation affected the balance of power within the

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<sup>61</sup>“Papers of Dr. James McHenry on the Federal Convention of 1787,” ed. J. Franklin Jameson, *American Historical Review* 11 (April 1906): 618.

union, which in turn affected how well the United States would be able to navigate the vagaries of international power politics.

At a time when Americans made little distinction between the foreign and domestic spheres, foreign policy hit close to home. Americans, through print politics vied for the ability to shape narratives of foreign policy and also directly influence its conduct. Examining neutrality through the lens of political culture demonstrates that it served a far broader purpose and function in the Early American Republic than just staying out of trouble in an Atlantic world at war. The struggle to remain neutral testified to the nature of the republic and of federal union itself.

It was no accident that Washington's Farewell Address and Jefferson's First Inaugural simultaneously addressed both the foreign and domestic. Both hinted that in a republic that clamored for frank overtures, the politics of slavery was its *ultimate* diplomatic subtlety. Slavery could compromise the international reputation of the United States, whose revolutionary promise the advocates of American independence predicated on an antislavery future.<sup>62</sup> But on far deeper levels than international reputation or national honor, slavery's presence affected the nation's character and psyche. Washington's and Jefferson's formal and public declarations of U.S. neutrality promoted national consensus. The kind of neutrality Americans wanted "depended on their conceptions of the American future and on the inherent power of the United States to fashion it."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>For the importance of Franklin and Jefferson seeing an advantage to selling the American Revolution's projected antislavery future to the French, see Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, 57-58.

<sup>63</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 429.

Exalted in principle and in American hearts and minds, neutrality as a foreign-policy paradigm allowed for the seamless reconfiguration of the nation's orientation away from an Atlantic World shaped by European power and trade, and toward one primed for continental expansion. Casting neutrality as a problem of politics and political culture exhibits how a misplaced faith in the union's growing interdependence and harmony of its sovereign republics jeopardized the goals of Revolutionary foreign policy.<sup>64</sup> Neutrality's malleability arose less from Founding "genius" and more from the tension deriving from its suspension between two competing visions of the nation that left much unsettled. A focus on print publicity in foreign relations recaptures the anxiety over larger issues of republican governance that the struggle to remain neutral engendered.

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<sup>64</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 122; Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 24.

## CHAPTER 2

### PUBLICITY, NEUTRALITY, AND CITIZEN GENET

As soon as Edmond Charles Genet landed at Charleston, South Carolina, his activities in the United States revealed the challenges to U.S. neutrality on the local, national, and international levels. Cheering crowds greeted the French minister plenipotentiary as he disembarked from the *Embuscade* on April 8, 1793. He undertook his journey to Philadelphia on April 18, where he would present his official credentials. Genet's task was to strengthen the Franco-American alliance of 1778 that had been forged during the American Revolutionary War. France, which had helped America gain its independence, was now also a republic. Following the outbreak of war with Great Britain, it found itself surrounded by hostile European monarchies. In an Age of Revolutions it actively sought common cause with the United States. As the French minister proceeded northward to the capital, he savored adulation everywhere he went, taking it as a sign of the affection the American people had for France.

Many Americans welcomed transatlantic revolutionary kinship. They eagerly awaited Genet, perusing the newspapers for signs of his impending arrival. Newspapers referred to the Pennsylvania Democratic Society's dinner in his honor. *The Gazette of the United States* depicted France as “emerging from the depths of slavery and darkness to light, liberty, and happiness,” and thus “[impressing] feelings on every philanthropic mind too great for utterance.”<sup>1</sup> The French Revolution arose in 1789 out of a confluence of radical ideas and economic crisis resulting from debts incurred from the Seven Years’

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<sup>1</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), September 25, 1790.

War and the American Revolution. The French Republic declared war on monarchy everywhere in 1792. Louis XVI was guillotined the following year in January, 1793.

The Philadelphia printer and grandson of Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Franklin Bache, expressed his eager support for the spirit of liberty that the French Revolution portended.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson similarly speculated that “all the old spirit of 1776 is rekindling the newspapers from Boston to Charleston.”<sup>3</sup> But while Genet was en route to Philadelphia, President Washington issued his Proclamation of Neutrality on April 22, prohibiting close American involvement with any of the belligerents.

Despite Washington’s proclamation, the young republic found itself in political turmoil over foreign affairs by late 1793, over the very nature of neutrality and Genet’s activities. Most historians tell the Genet Affair as the story of an impetuous foreign troublemaker who bypassed the Executive and promoted French foreign policy aims by appealing to the American people. Mistaking public affection for public approval, he interfered in American domestic politics, outfitted captured prizes in American ports, and issued broadsides urging able-bodied Americans to serve upon French warships. Genet was recalled, but his actions and the public debate they had engendered left domestic division in their wake. In a letter to Abigail, John Adams quoted “a curious narration,” culled from the newspapers, about the affair:

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<sup>2</sup>Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, February 2, 1793. Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. John Catanzaritti, 40 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1950-), 25: 660-63.

At home dissensions seem to rend  
Or threat, our Infant State  
'Bout Treaties made; yet unexplain'd  
With Citizen Genet.<sup>4</sup>

Young and impulsive, Genet was an “*opera bouffe* bungler.” His fate, wrote Samuel Flagg Bemis, and others followed suit, “is the classical example of the danger a diplomatist runs in appealing not to the Government of the people but to the mob of the people.”<sup>5</sup> Even then-Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, first welcoming of Genet, ultimately described the minister plenipotentiary as “hot headed, all imagination, no judgment, passionate, disrespectful, & even indecent towards the P[resident] in his written as well as verbal communications.” Genet talked of appeals to Congress and to the people, “urging the most unreasonable and groundless propositions, & in the most dictatorial style.” Moreover, if it ever became necessary to lay the French minister’s communications before Congress or the public, they would “excite universal indignation.” Worse, Jefferson lamented, Republicans like himself had no channel through which they could correct Genet’s “irritating representations.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, January 6, 1794 in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, Sara Martin, Hobson Woodward, Sara B. Sikes, Gregg L. Lint, Sara Georgini, 11 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963-), 10:29-30. See also the electronic version, *Adams Family Papers: A Digital Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society.  
<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

<sup>5</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1923), 146. See also Meade Minnigerode, *Jefferson: Friend of France* (New York: Putnam, 1928), Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), and Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1973).

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, July 7, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 26: 443.



This popular narrative remains largely unchanged. David McCullough's biography of John Adams—and its treatment as a television miniseries—depicts the French minister as someone who “stirred up trouble,” noting that Adams thought him “a fool.”<sup>7</sup> In his appeals to the people, Genet ran afoul of American neutrality and overstepped his bounds. He did not understand American politics and worse, he did not behave diplomatically.

But even Jefferson's condemnation of the French minister (and historians' remarks about “the mob of the people”) suggests that there is more to the Genet affair than this traditional comedy of errors admits. At stake was the very nature of republican government—in the United States, in France, and in the wider Atlantic World. The Secretary of State had earlier observed that the Anglo-French War had “brought forward the Republicans and Monocrats in every state so openly, that their relative numbers are perfectly visible.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the French Revolution, and the Anglo-French War's pitting of republicanism against monarchy, also involved the French West Indies, where U.S. merchants had significant trading interests. These factors in combination present a larger scope for considering Genet's activities in the United States.

Print publicity played a significant role in the Genet Affair from the beginning, illustrating how much public opinion—and the nature of republican government itself—was at stake in foreign relations. Ambiguity over the nature of constitutional power in the union coupled with demands for enlightened candor made the power of the executive to proclaim neutrality a matter of public debate. The controversy over neutrality

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<sup>7</sup>David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 449.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, June 29, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 26:401-404.

surrounding both Washington's proclamation and Genet's activities stemmed from Franco-American differences over popular sovereignty.

In the process, those issues revealed their troubling potential to involve the politics of slavery. The French Revolution energized an American body politic that already contested a political culture of deference, which in turn contested the making of U.S. foreign policy. But ratcheting up the anxiety even further were slave revolt and revolutionary ideas that caused violent sociopolitical upheaval in the French West Indian colony of St. Domingue. When white refugees and their slaves fled to American shores in 1793, print politics and exposés of intrigue entangled their presence and their subsequent public quarrels with Genet with the larger issue of U.S. neutrality. The refugees' interaction with Genet not only challenged the revolution that Americans had fought for, but underscored the limits of the American Revolution's own self-image.

*Exporting Revolution: Public Opinion and the Diplomacy of the Genet Mission*

Though often impulsive, Edmond Charles Genet was not a complete political naïf. In a republic, the people are theoretically sovereign. Public opinion matters. American public opinion was, accordingly, a viable diplomatic objective in the larger plan of securing the French Revolution's survival. More idealistic than their Jacobin rivals, Genet and his Brissotin superiors had grandiose visions of the coming liberation of all mankind. France was not only at war with Britain on land and at sea, but also in competition for the hearts and minds of Americans.

Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville and his colleagues on the Brissotin Diplomatic Committee drafted Genet's official instructions in late 1792. They mandated Citizen

Genet to promote relations between France and the United States that would “amalgamate their commercial and political interests... [and to] promote ... the extension of the Empire of liberty.”<sup>9</sup> The Franco-American alliance would guarantee the sovereignty of all peoples, and punish those powers that still retained colonial systems by refusing to admit their ships to the harbors of both France and the United States.<sup>10</sup> The alliance would act as a basis for “the liberation of Spanish America.” It would “open the Mississippi to the inhabitants of Kentucky, deliver our brothers in Louisiana from the tyrannical yoke of Spain, and perhaps add the glorious star of Canada to the American constellation.”<sup>11</sup>

To secure the French Revolution's promise of liberation, Genet's *modus operandi* was to advocate commercial partnership with the United States and to promote the spread of revolutionary ideals. Strategically, France did not require direct American participation in the war in order to preserve the French republic and liberty. Cut off from its colonies by the British fleet, France needed the United States as a partisan neutral that would serve as a source of supplies and as a neutral carrier of French goods. The United States would supply provisions to the French West Indies colonies and act as a French base of operation in North America.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Mémoire pour servir d’instruction au Citoyen Genet adjudant-Général-Colonel, allant en Amérique en Qualité de Ministre Plénipotentiaire de la République Française près le Congrès des Etats Unis, October, 1792 in “Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903* (hereafter, *AHA Report 1903*), ed. Frederick Jackson Turner, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:210-11. Girondins are also referred to as Brissotins.

<sup>10</sup>Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, 26.

<sup>11</sup>Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:210-211.

<sup>12</sup>Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 204-5.

But if Congress hesitated or proved unwilling to agree to French aims, the instructions directed the Minister to “use all measures in his power to germinate the principles of liberty and independence in Louisiana and in the other provinces bordering the United States.” Genet’s Girondin superiors granted him *carte blanche* to enlist American citizens as well as American Indians in French service. They also gave him leave “to tamper with American domestic politics for whatever advantage might accrue to France.”<sup>13</sup>

So he did. Tampering with American domestic politics for French gain was part of the new, radical diplomacy that Genet practiced. Arising during the second part of the eighteenth century, this form of transatlantic statecraft questioned balances of power. It operated according to radical Enlightenment ideals concerning candor and openness in the press. Prior to that period, “the rules and methods of diplomacy were not yet fixed.”<sup>14</sup> The modern nation state and modern nationalism were likewise in the process of emerging.

Genet and his associates understood the potential roles of public opinion and the press in politics and diplomacy. Brissot de Warville and Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit, were journalists. Mangourit, who would be appointed French Consul General to Charleston, South Carolina in 1792, published *Le Haraut de la nation*.

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<sup>13</sup>Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:210-211; DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 199.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolution, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 112. Felix Gilbert, “The ‘New Diplomacy’ of the Eighteenth Century” *World Politics*, 4 (October 1951): 15; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, “‘The Reign of the Charlatans is Over’: The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice” *The Journal of Modern History* 65 (December 1993): 706-744; Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 13; for the importance of the freedom of the press in the radical Enlightenment, see Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 205-206.

Genet's own father, Edmé Jacques Genet, worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the American Revolution, Edmé Jacques contributed to the propaganda organ of the Ministry of Bureau of Interpretation, the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et l'Amérique*. Genet *père* wrote articles under the guise of a London banker stressing French commercial advantages in supporting the American cause. Benjamin Franklin, who had been in Paris with the American delegation, was a sometime collaborator.<sup>15</sup>

The “public spirit” in the United States and its close relationship with liberty fascinated Brissot, who decried European “enslavement” to “antiquated constitutions.” He saw the United States as a potential trading partner and also as a foil to the *ancien régime*. In 1789, he wrote that it “is necessary to read the American gazettes—not those altered by the English gazette-writers, but those which are printed in America; these only can give a just idea of the situation of the United States.”<sup>16</sup> As Genet prepared to take up his role as minister plenipotentiary, he received a letter from Louis Guillaume Otto, a former French consular agent at New York. Otto informed him that in the United States, “English lies” constantly circulated in the public prints. The newspapers “were of the greatest importance, more or less constituting as they do public opinion and contributing to the success of our mission to supply the public with the true details of our affairs.”<sup>17</sup>

The traditional narrative of the Genet affair, and the excoriation that Genet receives, are therefore limiting given the Age of Revolution’s high stakes. These

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<sup>15</sup>Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, 2.

<sup>16</sup>Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, and Etienne Claviere, *On the Commerce of the United States of America* (New York: T and J. Swords, 1795), 167-8.

<sup>17</sup>Louis Guillaume Otto to Genet, April 10, 1793. Genet Family Papers, MS 243, New York Historical Society (New York, NY). Author’s translation.

narratives assume distinctions between foreign and domestic as well as diplomatic protocol that conform to twentieth-century standards. The uproar over neutrality and Genet's conduct instead underscores the existing uncertainty about how to conduct diplomacy and politics in a republic. The New World's vaunted opposition to Old World secrecy prompted highly contested discussion and deliberation over how open foreign relations should be. Whatever trouble Genet's indiscretions stirred up in the United States, it reflected and exacerbated tensions that had existed in the republic and its federal union in the first place. It raised the issue of the place of public opinion in republican governance, and by extension, its role in foreign policy. Viewing the Genet affair through the lens of political culture recaptures the tension inherent in the post-colonial new republic as the former colonies strove to become a nation.

*"With Sincerity and Good Faith": Neutrality, Revolution, Print, and Candor*

These tensions—over republicanism and monarchy (and their relationship to an emerging nationalism)—converged when Washington issued the Proclamation of Neutrality. Genet's arrival further compounded them, as did print politics. Neutrality provoked controversy over which power it would benefit, the nature of federal power and its public communication, the affection of many Americans for France, and also preexisting treaty obligations. The 1778 Franco-American alliance consisted of two treaties: the first stipulated reciprocal trade privileges and the establishment of certain free ports in the West Indies. Each nation could bring their privateers into the ports of the other while prohibiting the same convenience to the enemies of the other. The treaty forbade citizens of the United States and France to oppose the interests of the other, and

forbade any third nation from fitting out privateers to be used against either in the ports of the other. The second mutually guaranteed the territorial integrity of both countries. It stated that food and naval stores were not contraband, and that free ships made free goods.

But Washington believed that too close a tie to France would jeopardize U.S. security and prosperity should a war between France and Europe's monarchies erupt, which seemed likely. "For the sake of humanity I hope such an event will not take place," he remarked. "But, if it shou'd, I trust that we shall have too just a sense of our own interest to originate any cause, that may involve us in it; and I ardently wish we may not be forced into it by the conduct of other Nations."<sup>18</sup> When France did declare war on England, Spain, and Holland, the French Revolution became an international conflict.

Washington and key members of his cabinet, including Jefferson, sympathized with France. They recognized that their two republics shared certain ideals. An alliance with France, however, meant possible war with any power opposed to the French Revolution, particularly Great Britain. British power remained at close quarters with troops in Canada and occupying the strategically and commercially vital northwestern frontier posts. The posts controlled the possible routes for military movements between Canada and the United States as well as dominated the fur-trade routes. Britain possessed the most powerful navy, which could seriously hamper U.S. trade, notably its lucrative trade with the French West Indies. The United States had no navy in 1793, for

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<sup>18</sup>George Washington to David Humphreys, Philadelphia, March 23, 1793, in *The Writings of George Washington* (hereafter *GW: Writings*). Prepared under the direction of the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission and published by authority of Congress, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 32:398

the Confederation had sold the Continental Navy's last ship in 1785. Upon the outbreak of war between Britain and France, Britain closed European ports to neutral vessels, a considerable number of which flew the American flag.<sup>19</sup>

The president had asked his cabinet for advice on whether the United States should issue a proclamation of neutrality, and whether it should receive a minister of the French Republic (if so, should it be with or without qualification?). In light of the war in Europe, was the United States still compelled to adhere to the French treaties of 1778, and if obliged to do so, was it expedient? Washington wondered:

If we have the right to renounce the treaties, would it be a breach of neutrality to consider them still in operation? If the treaties are still binding, does our pledged guarantee to French possessions in America in the treaty of alliance apply to a defensive war only? Is France presently engaged in a defensive war? If the war is not defensive, does the guarantee, under any event, still apply? What is the effect of the guarantee? Do the treaties grant special privileges to French warships in American ports? If the future regent of France were to send a minister, should he be received? In view of the European crisis, should I call Congress in session?<sup>20</sup>

Washington's cabinet unanimously agreed that the United States should remain neutral avoid acts both public and private that would provoke a war. Emerging Federalist and Republican differences over foreign policy aims and over the nature of power within the union would make it difficult. Federalists advocated a more centralized federal government and a political economy based on commercial manufactures supported by public credit. Republicans preferred a more decentralized federal government and a commercial, yet agrarian, republic; they and their "country" outlook scorned the luxury

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<sup>19</sup>Allan R. Millett, and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 99; Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 121.

<sup>20</sup>DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 186-189.



and pomp of the “court” as well as those who depended on the state or new, unstable forms of wealth.

Those issues were manifest in the differences between Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. Hamilton believed that Washington had acted within his executive prerogative, and Jefferson believed that declaring neutrality was the prerogative of Congress. The success of Hamilton's controversial financial policy of funding the national debt was also highly contingent upon the relationship between Britain and France. For Jefferson, Hamilton's view that British power was substantially more important than that of France meant offering “our breech to every kick which Great Britain may chuse [sic] to give it.”<sup>21</sup>

Growing differences between Federalists and Republicans reflected many Americans' feelings that men eager to overturn republican principles should not control the federal government. Those differences touched off a newspaper war in 1792 between Philip Freneau's Republican-leaning *National Gazette* and John Ward Fenno's Federalist-leaning *Gazette of the United States*. The pro-French sympathies of the Jeffersonians and the pro-British sympathies of their Hamiltonian rivals, however, were not reducible to the problems of political economy and democracy. Rather, they were understood in mutual relation. They also formed the basis for two emerging, competing nationalisms that were local in origin and practice, but international in orientation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 25: 660-63.

<sup>22</sup>Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 282; Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, 33; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 184; Andrew W. Robertson, ““Look on this Picture . . . And on This!’ Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States” *American Historical Review* 106 (October 2001): 1263-1280.

Therefore, when Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality appeared in print, it was a well-orchestrated appeal to impartiality. The proclamation was printed in the *Columbian and Alexandria Gazette* and *The General Advertiser* (and was reprinted in newspapers throughout the United States). It also appeared as a broadside: a single, printed sheet which was cheap to produce and distribute. It contained no explicit mention of the word "neutrality." Rather, the United States would "*with sincerity and good faith* adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers."<sup>23</sup> Just as Washington the president viewed himself above party and faction, the United States would refrain from taking sides in an Atlantic world at war. No citizen of the United States was permitted to aid and abet hostilities against any of the powers at war with each other, or to carry any articles deemed contraband. The proclamation was also conspicuously silent on the French treaties and American obligations to France under the Franco-American alliance of 1778.

The ensuing debate over U.S. neutrality reflected and compounded the emerging differences between Federalists and Republicans over the nature of federal power. The neutrality crisis foregrounded that tenuous and contested relationship at a time when Americans challenged the deferential political culture of earlier eras. Public proclamations were delicate, for the fundamental change in the politics of the Early Republic was in public representation. What, after all, was the role of the people in the conduct of republican governance, and how were they to be included in the body politic?

During the days of "no taxation without representation," there had been no consensus on the extent to which the people could exercise political authority. The

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<sup>23</sup>George Washington, "Neutrality Proclamation," in Fitzpatrick, *GW: Writings*, 32:430.

Constitutional Convention did not spend much time discussing the meaning of the particular powers vested in the executive. Furthermore, governance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was personal. Personal government required government through character. Pressure from foreign relations provoked ongoing debate in the 1790s over what constituted the American “national character” in executive power and leadership.

U.S. leaders generally continued to subscribe to a more deferential political style, while not rejecting popular sovereignty. But they no longer earned authority by a show of genteel superiority. They had to publicly enact their friendship for the people, and had to do so at a time when newspaper men—some of whom held more democratic and radical republican views on publicity akin to those of Thomas Paine—were emerging as significant political actors in their own right. Applied to the executive's chief responsibility for foreign affairs, government through character produced irony that compounded ambiguity in the relationship between president and people. The need for public appeal could in turn subject foreign policy to public scrutiny, severely constraining a president's ability to act. But ignoring the *vox populi* could endanger the American Revolution's promise of liberty, and mark a return to the English forms of government from which the United States had declared independent.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 4; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 120; Gary J. Schmitt, “President Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality” in *The Constitutional Presidency*, ed. Joseph M. Bessette and Jeffrey K. Tulis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 54-75; Alan Taylor, “From Fathers to Friends of the People: Political Personae in the Early Republic” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron S. Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 245; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 41; Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3-18; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early American Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93-104; Andrew Shankman, *Crucible of American Democracy: The*

Public discourse therefore bristled with prior anticipation that France's war on Europe's monarchies would revive the American revolutionary spirit, lest monarchy reassert itself in the United States. In early 1793, *The National Gazette*, *The Boston Gazette*, and *The Phenix* commented on the marked contrast between popular enthusiasm for France on the one hand and the administration's indifference and the "national coyness" of Congress on the other.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache eagerly recounted for his father that since the successes of the French, American politics in general had taken "a very different turn." It was a critical one which would prove significant for the national character: the spirit of republicanism was reviving; no-one would have spoken disrespectfully of Washington as early as six months ago. In 1789-1791, Washington the revolutionary war hero conducted his tours of the East and South with much pomp. Then, huge mixed crowds celebrated his presidency and the national unity and consensus that it promoted. But now, Washington was "freely spoken of, and in print, found fault with, his lives, his six horses, etc., etc., are generally censored." The "national character," he concluded, was "refermenting a will no doubt to take a shape less inauspicious to liberty and equality."<sup>26</sup>

While Genet was making his way to Philadelphia, savoring Americans' enthusiasm, Thomas Jefferson likewise hoped that U.S. neutrality would accommodate

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*Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism & Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), Chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup>*The Boston Gazette* (Boston, MA), December 17, 1792. *The Phenix* (Dover, NH), December 26, 1792. *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), February 2, 1793. Quoted in Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press During the Federalist Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969).

<sup>26</sup>Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, February 2, 1793. Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA. Original emphasis.

popular enthusiasm and sympathy for the French Revolution. As he awaited the arrival of the new French minister, Jefferson summed up the U.S. position: “[O]ur friendship for all the parties at war; our desire to pursue ourselves the path of peace, as the only one leading surely to prosperity and wish to preserve the morals of our citizens from being vitiated by courses of lawless plunder and murder, are a security that our proceedings in this respect, will be with good faith, fervor, and vigilance.”<sup>27</sup> But he was wary of Hamilton's aim to enforce Washington's proclamation at the local level, claiming that it amounted to spying.

The Secretary of State confided to James Madison that “a manly neutrality, claiming the liberal rights ascribed to that condition by the very powers at war, was the part we should have taken, and would I believe have given satisfaction to our allies.” Jefferson also noted that “if any thing prevents its being a mere English neutrality, it will be that the penchant of the P[resident] is not that way, and above all, the ardent spirit of our constituents.”<sup>28</sup> U.S. neutrality should allow France all possible benefits while denying them to Great Britain. But Washington's proclamation was itself ambiguous enough to be read in either a pro-French or pro-British direction.

Far from producing tranquility, then, the Proclamation of Neutrality and its calculated show of detachment provoked ardent public fervor. Public meetings occurred in response to earlier criticisms of Washington, and resolutions in support of the neutrality proclamation had begun to appear in the newspapers in mid May, continuing

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<sup>27</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Edmond C. Genet, Philadelphia, May 15, 1793, in *Message of the President of the United States to Congress Relative to France and Great Britain*, Delivered December 5, 1793 (Philadelphia: Charles and Swaine, 1793), 16-17. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 26334. It consists of the correspondence between Genet and Jefferson over the issue of neutrality.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 13, 1793 in *PTJ*, 26:27.

through April 1794. Some of Washington's responses were also printed and reprinted throughout the country. Not only did the president thank his supporters, but he aimed also to impart brief lessons about what was at stake. For example, his reply to the Citizens of Alexandria, Virginia, read: “to complete the american [sic] character, it remains for the citizens of the United States, to shew [sic] to the world, that the reproach heretofore cast on Republican Governments for their want of stability, is without foundation, when that Government is the deliberate choice of an enlightened people.”<sup>29</sup> Washington's hopes notwithstanding, the resolutions and public meetings reinforced the role of public opinion in foreign relations, perpetuating contest over the larger issue of the relationship between the people and the president.

Genet arrived in Philadelphia almost at the same time as the resolutions and public meetings. When the *Embuscade* reached Charleston at the beginning of April 1793, the enthusiasm he received as he traveled northward to the capital seemed to echo Benjamin Franklin Bache's expectations regarding a revival of the republican spirit. The French minister's activities challenged the public sentiment and deference to Washington that the president's national tours had cultivated. Republican fetes in Genet's honor—complete with addresses, toasts, and dinners, the latter of which were advertised in the

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<sup>29</sup>See for example “From the Philadelphia Merchants and Traders,” *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA) May 18, 1793, reprinted in the *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA) May 22, 1793; “To the Baltimore Merchants and Traders,” *Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA) June 5, 1793; Many are available in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition* (hereafter *PGW, Digital Ed.*), ed. Theodore J. Crackel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008; see Young, “Connecting the President and the People” for details on the resolutions sent and printed, but not sent, to the president. Washington to the Citizens of Alexandria, VA, July 4, 1793 in *PGW, Digital Ed.*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/GEWN-05-13-02-0122> [accessed July 26, 2013]; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 136.

newspapers— was clearly meant to be partisan affairs.<sup>30</sup> Genet himself arrived quietly on May 16 by a different route than had been expected. While his official reception on May 17 was cool and restrained, numerous citizens came to greet him. The French Benevolent Society, “consisting of French, and the descendants of Frenchmen,” greeted the minister with a rousing address:

...A union thus cemented by the blood of the two nations, and strengthened by so strong a similarity of sentiments and principles, is able to resist the most violent efforts of those who may have any interest in destroying it; *for liberty tends to unite men, as despotism doth to divide and destroy them.* The mission with which you are charged imposes, therefore, a pleasing duty, since it is yours to give and receive the assurances and testimony of so sincere a friendship and so fraternal a union. We will cooperate with you as far as may be within our power, in maintaining that fellowship and in preventing the enemies of liberty from destroying it.<sup>31</sup>

Genet's experiences with Americans expressing gratitude to France convinced him that his ideals of common sentiment and republican brotherhood had popular support—the true basis of republican sovereignty.

Delighted to be “in the midst of perpetual fetes,” the new minister pledged to be “frank and open” and critical of the *ancien régime*'s institutions as a proponent of “the new diplomacy.”<sup>32</sup> To prove his *bona fides*, he exposed and denounced the *ancien régime*'s corruption and past sins toward the United States when presenting his diplomatic documents to the Washington administration. Addressing the citizens of Philadelphia on May 22, 1793, Genet promised that his conduct “with those wise and

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<sup>30</sup>Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, 54-55. See also *Dunlap's American Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), May 18, 1793; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), May 19, 1793; and *New York Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), May 23, 1793.

<sup>31</sup>*The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), May 22, 1793. Original emphasis.

<sup>32</sup>Genet to Lebrun (French Minister of Foreign Affairs), Philadelphia, May 31, 1793 in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2: 224.

virtuous men into whose hands you have entrusted the management of your public affairs” would be one of “unbounded openness” and a break from the past intrigue. Genet's actions also implied that in a republic, the people were potentially diplomatic actors in their own right. Moreover, he expected that “the voice of the people” would “[continue] to *neutralize* President Washington's declaration of neutrality.”<sup>33</sup>

*The Truth Will Win Out? Executive Power, Authenticity, and the People at Stake*

Unbounded openness, however, evoked the problem of authenticity, and had implications for the larger issue of executive power and its relation to the people. What constituted a licit or illicit appeal to the people? The public meetings and resolutions in support of Washington's proclamation and the challenge that Genet posed to executive power also illustrated how much the people themselves were implicated in the conduct and consequences of U.S. foreign relations. Due to many Americans' palpable sympathy for France, the French minister's views found potentially fallow ground. Madison deemed the proclamation “an unfortunate error” which wounded the national honor by the seeming disregard of its stipulated duties to France. It also wounded popular sentiment by its apparent indifference to the cause of liberty<sup>34</sup>—a conclusion that some

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<sup>33</sup>Genet to Lebrun (French Minister of Foreign Affairs), Philadelphia, May 31, 1793 in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2: 224; Frederick W. Marks, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution*. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1986), 108; Edmond C. Genet to the Citizens of Philadelphia. *The General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), May 17, 1793. Reprinted in *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), May 22, 1793.

<sup>34</sup>James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, June 19, 1793, in *Papers of James Madison*, ed. Thomas A. Mason, Robert A. Rutland, Jeanne K. Sisson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985), 15:33.



Americans debating neutrality in the newspapers under classical pseudonyms did not hesitate to draw.

Republican newspapers teemed with strident criticism of the proclamation, bemoaning its apparent snubbing of the French alliance and reminding readers of the gratitude that Americans owed to its war-time ally in 1778. Critics of Washington's proclamation and its impartial posture fixated on the president's lack of openness and his implied "monarchical" tendencies. One notable critic was "VERITAS," who "insinuated that the proclamation of neutrality smacked of "double-meaning" and "double-dealing," mystery, secrecy, and court intrigue. Underhanded sneakiness in government might be fashionable in Europe, wrote VERITAS, but they infringed upon the privileges of the people, and "ought surely to be rejected with abhorrence" by those committed to the concerns of the American Republic.<sup>35</sup>

Communicating that he made no apologies for directly addressing the president "through the channel of a public print," VERITAS claimed that the people should do their duty by conducting themselves according to the recommendations of a proclamation made them *subjects*, and not citizens. The anonymous writer's criticisms of Washington's proclamation appeared on June 1, 5, and 8, 1793 in Philip Freneau's Republican *National Gazette*. He cautioned Washington "to beware that you do not view the state of the public mind, at this critical moment, through a fallacious medium. Let not the little buzz of the aristocratic few, and their contemptible minions, of

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<sup>35</sup>VERITAS No. 1, May 30, 1793 in *The Papers of George Washington*, W. W. Abbott, et al. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1987- ), Presidential Series (hereafter *PGW Presidential*), 12: 647–649. Printed in *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), June 1, 1793. VERITAS No. 2 and 3 appeared on June 1, 5, 8, 1793, respectively. VERITAS was reprinted in the *Argus* (Boston, MA), June 14, and June 18, 1793. Republished in *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), June 15, 1793. Reprinted in *The Virginia Chronicle* (Norfolk, VA), June 22, 1793.

speculators, tories, and British emissaries, be mistaken for the exalted and general voice of the American people.” Republican government should “ever avoid the narrow policy” involving mystery in the acts of public men. A lack of transparency created distrust in the minds of the people, and fueled corruption, all of which would lead to anarchy. Furthermore, it was Great Britain that truly despised U.S. neutrality, and its retention of the Western posts added insult to injury.<sup>36</sup>

Hamilton published a series of rebuttal essays to VERITAS in the *Federalist Gazette of the United States* under the name “PACIFICUS.” PACIFICUS claimed that “spirit of acrimony and invective” in VERITAS and other critics demonstrated that more than free discussion of a public measure was in the works. Rather, he uncovered a “design” aimed at weakening the confidence of the people in their president. Hamilton argued that it was the president's prerogative to declare neutrality, and that national security considerations made the alliance with France was no longer binding. France's motivation was expedience rather than altruism, for declaring war on England meant it was fighting defensively. Aiding France would draw the United States into war with Britain.<sup>37</sup>

When criticism of the president’s foreign policy did not abate, and Genet’s public provocations did not wane, Hamilton followed up as “NO JACOBIN” in *Dunlap’s Daily American Advertiser*. NO JACOBIN was a response to “A Jacobin,” who appeared in the *General Advertiser* on July 13, 1793. Hamilton first mentioned the “public rumor” that Genet threatened to appeal to the people. He then argued that the French right to

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<sup>36</sup>For VERITAS No. 2 and 3, see *PGW Presidential*, 13: 17-19, 34-37.

<sup>37</sup>The series of seven PACIFICUS essays ran from June 29, 1793 to July 27, 1793.

outfit privateers in American ports was without foundation in the Law of Nations. Furthermore, the agents of France were “industriously employing every expedient” to draw the United States into war by “*electrifying the people.*”<sup>38</sup>

Taken together, PACIFICUS and NO JACOBIN comprised an exegesis of the Constitution and the Law of Nations. Communicated through the newspapers, they constituted a strategic press campaign, akin to Hamilton's earlier efforts on behalf of the Constitution in *The Federalist*, which was published in *The New York Packet* and *The Independent Journal*. In PACIFICUS and NO JACOBIN, Hamilton's Federalist interpretation of neutrality aimed to direct public opinion against France and against Genet, while rallying the people behind Washington. In the process, Hamilton constructed a narrative about the correct relationship between the people and the president in foreign relations. He also built the basis for a Federalist narrative of Franco-American relations that cast France as the violator of U.S. neutral rights, and as the instigator of diplomatic intrigue through use of the press. This narrative would gain traction as the 1790s progressed.<sup>39</sup>

Aghast at Hamilton's boldness, Jefferson feared that the Secretary of the Treasury would go unanswered and unchallenged. He exhorted Madison: “for God's sake, my

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<sup>38</sup>The series of nine NO JACOBIN essays ran from July 31 to August 28, 1793 in *Dunlap's Daily American Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA). See also Stephen Peter Rosen, “Alexander Hamilton and the Domestic Uses of International Law,” *Diplomatic History* 5 (Summer 1981): 183-202.

<sup>39</sup>NO JACOBIN No. 1, *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), July 31, 1793. There, Hamilton writes: “it is publicly rumored in this City that the Minister of the French Republic has threatened to appeal from the President of the United States to the People.” At a private meeting in late July 1793, Genet apparently revealed his determination to arm, outfit, and put to sail the captured prize *The Little Sarah* (renamed *La Petite Démocrate*) in the service of France. NO JACOBIN No. 4, August 10, 1793, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (hereafter *PAH*), ed. Harold C. Syrett, 26 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1979), 15:145-151, 224-28. NO JACOBIN No. 5, August 14, 1793 in *ibid.* 243-46. Original emphasis in both NO JACOBIN Nos. 1 and 5.

dear sir, take up your pen, select the most striking heresies and cut him to pieces in the face of the public. There is nobody else who can & will enter the lists with him.”<sup>40</sup>

When Madison decided to answer PACIFICUS as “HELVIDIUS” between August 24 and September 18, 1793, he had them printed in *The Gazette of the United States* to ensure that he reached the same audience as did Hamilton. Madison denounced Hamilton and the Federalists as monarchical, claiming that PACIFICUS had been read “with singular pleasure and applause by the foreigners and degenerate citizens among us, who hate our republican government and the French Revolution.”<sup>41</sup>

While public opinion was, in practice, not subject to universal standards of participation and was whatever anyone said it was, it raised the issue of standards of evidence. As both Jefferson and Madison saw, appeals to the people that could be identified as illicit or unauthorized were potentially explosive in the politics of the 1790s, with its personal government of character and, its demands for enlightened openness. Prominent New York Federalists John Jay and Rufus King realized this also. They sensed an opportunity, all the more because public resolutions and rallies in support of Washington's executive prerogative simultaneously reinforced the role of public opinion in foreign relations. Existing opposition to Federalist policies and to the Washington administration reminded them that they had competition. Jay and King orchestrated a public appeal of their own, which served also as an exposé of Genet's perfidy.

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<sup>40</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, July 7, 1793, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (hereafter *TJ: Writings*), ed. Paul Leicester Ford, 12 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 6: 338.

<sup>41</sup>James Madison, “Helvidius No. 1,” August 24, 1793, *Papers of James Madison* (hereafter *PJM*), ed. Thomas A. Mason, Robert A. Rutland, and Jeanne K. Sisson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 15:66–74. “Helvidius” appeared from August 24 – September 18, 1793 in the *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA).

With Hamilton's encouragement and cooperation, they utilized the press to further his earlier “public rumor” that Genet had “threatened to appeal to the people.” Jay and King's efforts appeared in *The New York Diary; or Loudon's Patriotic Register* on August 12, 1793. Building on NO JACOBIN No. 1, they charged the French minister with defying executive power, personally authenticating their charges by using their real names instead of aliases.<sup>42</sup> Whether Genet had actually intended to appeal to the people mattered little. What *did* matter were the interpretation, implications, and political import of the purported appeal. Hamilton recognized the possible threat that Genet posed, and Jay and King made sure that it became public knowledge. Genet then appealed directly to Washington through a letter that appeared in *The New York Diary and Loudon's Patriotic Register*, and also in the *National Gazette*. Decrying his treatment, he urged the president to “dissipate these dark calumnies by truth and publicity” with “candor and probity and explicit declaration.”<sup>43</sup>

Political acts of publication and exposure could constitute diplomatic acts when foreign policy became part of a public sphere whose contours were being shaped (and contested) by the ideals of openness and the politics of the press. Diplomacy is not simply politics at an international level, for its distinctive character of being the implementation of policy through accredited persuasion.<sup>44</sup> Genet's activities in light of his official instructions fit those latter criteria. Print publicity provided a means of

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<sup>42</sup>*The New York Diary; or Loudon's Patriotic Register* (New York, NY), August 12, 1793.

<sup>43</sup>*The New York Diary; or Loudon's Patriotic Register* (New York, NY), August 21, 1793 and *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), August 28, 1793.

<sup>44</sup>Black, *History of Diplomacy*, 13.

mediating the aims and pursuits of foreign policy, illustrating close relations between foreign and the domestic, and the international stakes of republican government.

Genet admitted as much when he criticized Jefferson's conduct four years later, when the latter was vice president in 1797. He accused Jefferson of having increased the fear of Washington and his cabinet by informing the latter of the alleged appeal to the people. Moreover, since Jefferson had not forgiven Genet "for having preferred the large interests of liberty" to his own "petty political views," he sought to end the French minister's political existence and "*unpopularize and smother the republican fires which were being kindled on every side.*"<sup>45</sup> Americans were realizing that foreign affairs and the public sphere reciprocally affected each other. That reciprocal relationship also affected the exercise of federal power. Genet and his actions challenged the role of the executive and raised the question of whether the international scope of "the large interests of liberty" had definite limits.

*Revolutionary Volcano in the Caribbean: St. Dominguan Refugee Intrigue and the Politics of Publicity*

As the more commonly mentioned aspects of the Genet affair demonstrated, clamoring for candor came with the price of open contention of the relationship between the people and the executive. But demands for openness to guard against corruption threatened to rub up against the issue of slavery in the Early Republic, not least because of the geographic scope of the French Revolution. Differences between France and the

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<sup>45</sup>Edmond C. Genet to Thomas Jefferson, 1797. Facsimile of original letter from the Genet Papers reproduced in Meade Minigerode, *Jefferson, Friend of France, 1793: The Career of Edmond Charles Genet, 1763-1834* (New York: Putnam, 1928), 265-66.

United States over popular representation were only part of the larger challenge that the French Revolution posed to its American counterpart. Revolutionary upheaval in France also affected its West Indian possessions.<sup>46</sup> The politics of print publicity and the politics of slavery combined in the summer and fall of 1793. Both were international in scope and began to confront U.S. domestic politics with the same issues operating within the republic itself.

The French National Convention debated the fate of the West Indian colonies, among them St. Domingue—France’s wealthiest colony due to its cultivation of sugar and coffee for export. In response to the August 1791 revolt, the National Convention decided on March 28, 1792 to promote the rights of *petits blancs* and free people of color.<sup>47</sup> Affairs in the colony exploded in June, 1793. The Brissotin government sent commissioners to the island in order to rein in colonial assemblies and to quell the violence that had erupted among whites, blacks and free people of color (mulattos). French revolutionary commissioners began to arrive in Saint Domingue to enforce the March 28, 1792 decision. On June 21, 1793, in the midst of the chaos, the civil commissioners Léger Félicité Sonthonax and his colleague François Polverel granted freedom and citizenship to those slaves who would fight for the French Republic. This was a controversial gambit aimed at subverting the power of white planters who earlier

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<sup>46</sup>Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 107-112; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>47</sup>Edward L. Cox, “The British Caribbean in the Age of Revolution” in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 276; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 113.

welcomed the French Revolution as an opportunity to seize more governmental control over the West Indian colony.

If promoting mulatto rights already upset the political hierarchy of St. Domingue, granting freedom and citizenship to slaves threatened to shatter the very foundation of the island colony's plantation society.<sup>48</sup> The slave revolt on St. Domingue was the largest and bloodiest yet seen in a slave society in the Western Hemisphere. Spreading swiftly over the island colony, it "snowballed into overwhelming proportions."<sup>49</sup> White planters on the island first attempted to petition the National Convention in the form of pamphlets, demanding clarity on their rights as Frenchmen, but met mostly with hostility.<sup>50</sup> While the St. Dominguan capital of Cap Français dissolved into violence from June to August, white planters fleeing the fiery wrath of the slave rebellion arrived en masse in the large Eastern coastal cities of the United States. The St. Dominguan newcomers brought with them "all the furor of the French revolutionary struggle, along with the shadowy menace of slave revolts." They were a daily reminder of the perils of involvement in European quarrels.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 156.

<sup>49</sup>David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>50</sup>*Revolutions de Saint Domingue* (Vol. 3)—a collection of refugee letters, pamphlets and newspapers, some of it originating in St. Domingue, some of it printed in the United States, found in the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI. One theme that often emerges is that Polverel and Sonthonax were a danger to the planter-refugee rights as Frenchmen—and as Frenchmen who had helped cultivate St. Domingue. See C.C. Tanguy de la Boissière, "Prospectus d'un journal des revolutions de la partie française de Saint-Domingue," August 29, 1793.

<sup>51</sup>Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 89.



From 1791 through 1793, St. Domingue and all it stood for became a concern of everyday life in the United States. Mainstream, pro-French Republican newspapers like *The National Gazette* informed its readers of the French Revolution under siege in Europe. They also carried information about the disorder that beset the French West Indies. Newspapers made Americans constantly aware of the violence that had engulfed Saint Domingue. American newspapers conveyed printed reports and extracts from letters containing details about St. Domingue (some of them spatially juxtaposed with reports about British debates on the slave trade in the House of Commons).<sup>52</sup> The physical presence of boatloads of refugees arriving in the midst of Americans' political squabbles made the dangers of slave revolt more immediate. They became yet another subject of contest over diplomatic conduct and the nature of Franco-American relations, enmeshed within the larger matrix of political activity in the Early Republic.

Genet's interaction with the refugees seldom appears in discussions of U.S. neutrality or the standard accounts of the Genet Affair. But the newcomers from St. Domingue are significant because their interactions with the French minister pointed to the further repercussions of the controversy over neutrality and public opinion. The refugees were another reason for the French minister's involvement in U.S. domestic politics. Moreover, Genet's interactions with them illustrated how insistence on enlightened candor and the exposure of intrigue could draw attention to chattel slavery. Federalist rumor-mongering constituted one source of hostile opposition to his mission. The refugees, who opposed the Brissotin regime and its anti-slavery sympathies, constituted another.

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<sup>52</sup>See *The Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 7 and June 14, 1792.

As Genet combated this conscious effort to sabotage his mission, he and the refugees clashed bitterly during the summer of 1793 through early 1794. Both parties aimed to expose the other's alleged perfidy and intrigue against American public sentiment. They became visible in an already-contested public sphere, but their mutual accusations of intrigue reverberated through the Early Republic's political culture. For the United States, the visibility of the refugees had implications for the politics of slavery and its attending public silence: how far was the American Revolution prepared to go in advancing the larger cause of liberty?

Genet viewed the arrival of the refugees with mixed feelings: being anti-slavery, he sympathized with the slave revolt on St. Domingue. Brissot de Warville, who had issued him his diplomatic instructions, founded the *Société des amis des noirs* in 1788.<sup>53</sup> Genet likened the St. Dominguan situation and its influx of white-planter refugees to the United States as a volcano that had spewed forth all of its lava. While the St. Dominguan slave revolt benefited the colony, he saw it as a misfortune for his mission because of the extent to which it “spread fear among all slaveholders.”<sup>54</sup> The refugees also harbored the worst sorts of prejudices of skin color. Before Genet left Paris, his superiors had warned him that white-planter refugees had been trickling into the United States since 1791, and that they would work against him. The refugees were very vocal in their opposition, identifying Genet and the Brissotin regime with their wretched condition. They also

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<sup>53</sup>Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 62.

<sup>54</sup>Edmond Charles Genet to Lebrun (French Minister of Foreign Affairs), New York, September 19, 1793, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:243-5.

hoped that gaining sympathy from the American people would give them leverage in French colonial affairs.<sup>55</sup>

In response, Genet capitalized on the existence of Republican socio-political networks in the United States, making contact with French émigrés and Americans who favored the French revolutionary cause. Significant in these networks were the democratic clubs that Genet said appeared “as if by magic from one end of the continent to the other” during this period.<sup>56</sup> He refused to attend the meeting of the Cincinnati, a Federalist organization, where he would undoubtedly encounter members who were unsympathetic to the regime he represented. Instead, he actively patronized the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania and the *Société Française des Amis de la Liberté et de L'Égalité*. The latter had not only welcomed him shortly after his arrival with a celebratory dinner but also extended to him membership on June 8, 1793. Genet became president of the society on July 9. He associated with well-known Republicans, such as Governor George Clinton of New York—and his daughter Cornelia, whom Genet would marry in 1794. Further still, he agitated for an early session of Congress to reconsider Washington's neutrality policy. While avoiding the planters from Saint Domingue, “Genet was glad to associate with all good patriots.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>“Supplement aux instructions données au Citoyen Genet” in Turner, *AHA Report 1903,2*:210-211; White, *Encountering Revolution*, 99-100.

<sup>56</sup>De Conde, *Entangling Alliance*, 252.

<sup>57</sup>Eugene R. Sheridan, “The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet: A Study in Transatlantic Politics and Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 18 (Fall 1994): 469; Frances Sergeant Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800: An American Chapter of the French Revolution* (Baltimore: John’s Hopkins University Press, 1940; Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1978), 166. Quotations are from the 1978 edition.

The St. Dominguan planters were a source of intrigue that the French minister believed, regardless of how much he wished to avoid acknowledging, he had to expose for the sakes of both French security and republicanism. He warned Jefferson of this “most frightening conspiracy against the armies of the French Republic” and “infernal network” that menaced the security of French vessels and colonial possessions.<sup>58</sup> In addition, he alerted the Secretary of State to the threat they posed to American independence. He identified “the traitors galbaut [sic] and tanqui [sic], and several other villains” as having committed bloodshed on St. Domingue and seeking to return there to commit even more. Thomas-Francois Galbaud had become Governor-General of St. Domingue in May, 1793, and was responsible for enforcing all of the laws in the colony. But instead of demanding adherence to the decrees of his overseers, Polverel and Sonthonax, Galbaud sided with the white planters. Claude Corentin Tanguy de la Boissière was a planter-journalist active in local politics on the island, who wrote numerous tracts in support of planter supremacy. Moreover, Galbaud and his allies wished to deliver French forces and its colonies over to Great Britain.<sup>59</sup>

Genet reiterated that he expected U.S. neutrality to be pro-French: “a friendly and allied government” would inform him of all plots forming on American soil against France, and give their ally “all proper means to suppress them.”<sup>60</sup> The French minister

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<sup>58</sup>Edmond C. Genet to Thomas Jefferson, September 6, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 27:41.

<sup>59</sup>Genet to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, September 19, 1793, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:243. For the collaboration between white planters and British occupation forces, see David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>60</sup>Edmond Genet to Thomas Jefferson, September 6, 1793, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 6 vols. (hereafter *ASP: FR*), ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke (Washington DC: Gales and Seaton, 1833) 1:177.

ended his missive on a strong note, challenging the United States to affirm its friendship for France rather than continue on a course of lukewarm (and non-committal) neutrality:

May “this signal act,” he wrote,

leaving no doubt as to the sincerity of the wishes of the Government of the United States for the success of the French republic, cause all these traitors to tremble, whom my esteem for your country has led me perhaps too much to despise, and who avail themselves of the access which the kindness and hospitality of your nation offer them, to conspire, within its very bosom, and in the circle of its most elevated personages, against France and the general freedom of nations.<sup>61</sup>

But like the majority of his other actions, Genet’s appeal to Jefferson to arrest the conspirators collided with the Washington Administration’s official policy of neutrality. Jefferson replied that he stood “on different ground,” for the laws of the United States took no notice of crimes “committed outside their jurisdiction.” Furthermore, “the evil of protecting malefactors of every dye is sensibly felt here, as in other countries; but until a reformation of the criminal codes of most nations, to deliver fugitives from them, would be to become their accomplices: the former therefore is viewed as the lesser evil.”<sup>62</sup>

Genet saw the refugees as a clear and present danger to the French and American Revolutions and to international liberty. The “counterrevolutionary” newcomers from St. Domingue who flooded into U.S. port cities had betrayed their country to the English and the Spanish, had strong royalist connections, and were determined to “pervert public opinion.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, those refugees whom he had especially singled out as conspirators, Tanguy and Galbaud, would compete with him for influence over American

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<sup>61</sup>Edmond Genet to Thomas Jefferson, September 6, 1793, *ASP: FR*, 1:177.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Genet to Jefferson, October 30, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 27:285-286.

public opinion. He warned Jefferson that they are “truly dangerous for your internal security, and even a threat to your independence.”<sup>64</sup> When Jefferson responded somewhat more coolly, the latter wrote subsequently: “I only insinuated, sir, most of all as a friend of liberty, that as a public Minister, it would be useful for the maintaining of your rights to restrain the prodigious importation of royalist aristocrats.”<sup>65</sup> Echoing Republican criticisms of Washington's proclamation, Genet believed that neutrality and national security notwithstanding, larger republican interests behooved the United States to guard its independence from aristocracy and monarchy.

*“A New Kind of Enemy”:* *Print Publicity and Refugee Grievances*

As Genet (and everyone else) knew, the problem with any insistence on candor was that public opinion, so vital to both diplomatic relations and the evolution of America's political culture, was up for grabs. The refugees and their intrigue worried him, because they were capable of inserting themselves into the public sphere and influencing American public sentiment. As Hamilton, Jay, King, and others had demonstrated with their rumor and newspaper campaign against Genet, the function of print as a political and communicative medium made it a potential diplomatic tool and a weapon in a republic that put a premium on ideals of openness and the consent of a well-informed populace. Refugees like Tanguy de la Boissière and Thomas Galbaud saw that they could exploit the press, first from St. Domingue, in their earlier appeals to the

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<sup>64</sup>Genet to Jefferson, November 2, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 27:296.

<sup>65</sup>Genet to Jefferson, December 4, 1793, *ibid.*, 482.

National Assembly in Paris and condemnations of Polverel and Sonthonax, and now against Genet in the United States.

Refugee voices expressing grievances against Genet and Brissotin policies appeared in American newspapers, as did repeated evidence that the refugees were well aware of the power of the press.<sup>66</sup> They portrayed themselves as victims of tyranny: the tyranny of the French Republic forced mulatto rule and slave emancipation upon St. Domingue, resulting in the exile of the refugees to the United States. Addressing Genet in the *National Gazette*, a refugee calling himself M. Cotelle, articulated his “equal indignation and surprise” over a letter written to Genet by commissioners Polverel and Sonthonax. “Its object,” he stated, “seems to be to raise the same prejudices among the Americans that [the two commissioners] availed themselves of in St. Domingo, against those emigrants whom their blind indignation pursued to these hospitable shores.”<sup>67</sup>

A Republican answer to M. Cotelle came a few short days later. “A. Pichon, a French citizen,” accused this colonist of the French West Indies (and those of his color) “before the whole world” of having “sullied the name of Frenchmen,” and for having opposed the sovereignty of the people. “Nobody but YOU (your colour, I mean) has been guilty of an infringement of those very laws you had sworn to support. Nobody but *you* opposed the sovereignty of the people, and the DECREES of their representatives. . . . [Y] ought to have declared to the world that you never meant to have a share in the

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<sup>66</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), December 31, 1793.

<sup>67</sup>Copy of a Letter from J.L. Cotelle, an inhabitant of Cayes, to Citizen Genet, dated Chestertown, June 9, 1793. Appearing in the *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Saturday, June 29, 1793.

glorious toils of France . . .”<sup>68</sup> Likewise, in two public letters to Genet in *The Aurora and General Advertiser*, Thomas Galbaud accused the minister of stifling “the voice of oppressed patriotism,” warning him that “the time is at length arrived to unmask your perfidies.”<sup>69</sup> Just as Genet attempted to expose refugee intrigue to Jefferson, Galbaud threatened to do the same to Genet in print.

Even as refugee voices inserted themselves into public discourse on Genet’s conduct and the plight of St. Domingue, the minister turned to the American people through the press so as to expose the danger that the newcomers represented. He claimed to have learned from the French consul at Charleston, Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit, and from the public prints that these refugees were “a new kind of enemy” who would endanger French interests, and endeavor to turn American public opinion against France. “Amongst the refugees who are spread over this continent, some counter-revolutionists,” the French Minister continued, “sheltered under the cloak of misfortune, insinuate themselves into the people’s favor, and after having disquieted their minds with apprehensions of evils similar to their own, they openly endeavor to alienate us from the confidence and affection of the nation.”<sup>70</sup>

Little wonder, then, that the French minister suspected Galbaud and the St. Dominguan journalist, Tanguy de la Boissière. Tanguy published anti-revolutionary pamphlets and gazettes in St. Domingue. Genet feared that Tanguy would renew the

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<sup>68</sup>*The National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 1, 1793.

<sup>69</sup>Citizen Galbaud to Genet, *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA) January 2, 1794

<sup>70</sup>Copy of a circular letter from the Minister of the French Republic, to the Consuls of the Republic to the United States. New-York, November 11, 1793. Printed in *The Aurora and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), November 30, 1793. Reproduced in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), December 4, 1793.



publication of his gazettes in the United States. Adding insult to injury, they would be “read with avidity.”<sup>71</sup> Louis Pierre Dufay de la Tour Duray, a commissioner from St. Domingue, concurred that the refugees and their publishing of “counter-revolutionary gazettes” in Philadelphia represented a foreign-relations menace. Publishing a pamphlet addressed to “the legislators of France,” Dufay wrote that these “turbulent agitators,” under the guise of patriotism, were guilty of calumny and “alienating France in the hearts of Americans.”<sup>72</sup> In a consensual republic with a free but politicized press, the refugees contested Genet and other official representatives of the French Republic over the meaning of the French Revolution and its implications for liberty. The French Revolution’s colonial conflict over its West Indian colonies was being fought on American soil.

Tanguy, like Galbaud, also stressed the importance of candor. In his bilingual *Étoile Américaine/American Star*, a “historical, political, critical, and moral journal,” Tanguy intended for the duty of his gazette to be to “show things as they really were” and “offer to readers only a just detail of public events.” He also carefully crafted his

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<sup>71</sup>Genet to Minister of Foreign Affairs, November, 1793, Genet Papers, 1793-1801, Library of Congress. Cited in Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States*, 166.

<sup>72</sup>Louis Pierre Dufay de la Tour Duray, *Compte Rendu Sur la situation actuelle de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, Convention Nationale: February, 1794), 15. John Carter Brown Library, Providence RI. Americans did take notice of St. Dominguan refugee correspondence and the press: see *The Aurora and General Advertiser*, January 2, 1794, where the correspondence between Genet and Galbaud took up one long column on the left-hand side of the page. There is also mention of public exposure of the correspondence between Galbaud and Alexandre Maurice Blanc de Lanautte, comte d'Hauterive, the French consul in New York. In addition, a note in the Rufus King Papers indicate that “the Bulletin no. 2 published in Greenleaf’s Paper of Saturday, which is understood to be patronized by the French minister, contains an article of intelligence which cannot fail to excite [. . .] of alarm [crossed out: the highest and most virtuous indignation]. The article referred to is that which announces a discovery of the Treachery and Crimes of Galbaud by the [...] of the Papers of Tanguy [crossed out: which were lately seized]” in Rufus King, Notes, December, 1793. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York NY.

narratives, steeping them in republican allusions, to appeal to an American audience.<sup>73</sup> In a fashion similar to the American Patriots before him, he portrayed colonists like himself as the true patriots, accusing the mother country of trying to enslave him and his fellow Frenchmen. He identified free citizens of all colours and all situations as “the enemies you have to fight against”; they were “more dangerous than our enemies of opinions.”<sup>74</sup>

Tanguy also exploited the politics of slavery’s presence in pre-existing narratives about the American Revolution. Before he began printing *Étoile Américaine/American Star*, his prospectus referenced the way in which the suppression of slave emancipation was bound up with the promise of American liberty:

I shall not paint here all the military events which have broken the chains of America; they are too fresh for to be out of memory; but I cannot pass unnoticed, the heroism of the women, the wives, and of the mothers of Norfolk: This delicate sex, that neither nature nor politics had destined to the fierce occupations of arms, have arose beyond men. The fair sex fought like heroes for LIBERTY; and set fire to the houses of that city sooner than to see it yield to *barbarous Dunmore, whose name recalls here all the crimes of fury, insanity and despotism.*<sup>75</sup>

Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775 promised to free all slaves belonging to American Patriots who fled their masters to fight for the British. It raised a hue and cry among Virginians in particular, who feared slave revolt. The Declaration of Independence referred to this arming of slaves against their masters as inciting “domestic insurrections.” For American Whig slaveholders, defying Dunmore's Proclamation

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<sup>73</sup>Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 107.

<sup>74</sup>Tanguy de la Boissière, referring to Dumore’s Proclamation in *Prospectus d’un journal des revolutions de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*. August 29, 1793. John Carter Brown Library, Providence RI.

<sup>75</sup>Tanguy de la Boissiere, *Prospectus d’un journal des revolutions de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*. August 29, 1793. Author’s emphasis. See White, *Encountering Revolution*, 96; Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 9.

constituted an act of defiant liberation against British colonial “despotism” and “enslavement.”<sup>76</sup> This “despotism” also reached the most intimate levels of American society. Freeing the slaves of patriots amounted to barbarism: it inverted the existing racial order and drove women to a noble—albeit desperate and unnatural—heroism.

Tanguy's prospectus mimicked what Americans told themselves about “domestic insurrections,” British “enslavement,” and slavery's place in their revolution. Tanguy also relates that it had been white planters like himself, exiled from France due to religious persecution, had cultivated St. Domingue. Prior to that, Spanish depredation had left the colony a decrepit island in the Caribbean. He accuses the National Assembly of reducing St. Domingue to slavery, claiming that the French Republic wished for the colony's annihilation. Furthermore, he protests the idea that republicanism and slaveholding are not compatible. Tanguy cast himself and his fellow planters as Huguenots (when in reality, the planters retained their Catholic faith) who had established a flourishing society, which fit within the American narrative that deemed Catholicism and “Popery” inimical to republicanism, and which cast British tyranny in anti-Catholic terms.

The *Étoile Américaine/American Star* targeted the Atlantic coast, whereby a number of individuals from Philadelphia to Fayetteville—among them Mathew Carey—would sell subscriptions.<sup>77</sup> In this newspaper, “Genetique” (Genetical) became a word of

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<sup>76</sup>See Peter A. Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as Metaphor in Revolutionary America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). These themes will be treated more at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>77</sup>Tanguy de la Boissière, *Plan of a French and English Periodical Paper, Composed by a Literary Society and to be published at Philadelphia Entitled The American Star: A Historical Political, Critical and*

derision as Tanguy impugned the celebrations and toasts held in honor of Genet and the French Revolution (and how they defied Washington's authority). Even after Genet was recalled and awaited his replacement in early 1794, the journal launched a jeremiad against Polverel, Sonthonax, and especially Genet, the "negrophile minister."<sup>78</sup> St. Domingue's prestige in the French colonial Empire might have been saved had Genet sent French forces to the rescue. Genet might also have arrested Guillaume Castaing, an accomplice of the mulatto leader Vincent Ogé, in the United States. But, Tanguy sneered, "Mr. Genet will say, that in a free and neutral country he has no right to arrest, or cause the arrest of a *mulattoe*."<sup>79</sup> The Brissotins' close connections with the *Société des amis des noirs* and the abolition of slavery in the colonies made Genet a visible representative of the empowerment of free people of color and the emancipation of slaves that had caused white planters considerable loss.

Refugee activities included more than attacks against Genet and French Commissioners in the United States in print. Those hostile to Genet also took their grievances into the streets, instituting their own fetes and celebrations.<sup>80</sup> They formed expeditions and held mass meetings in American ports against French republicanism in St. Domingue while conspiring with the English.<sup>81</sup> French ministers to the United States

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Moral Journal. January 30, 1794. The list of people selling subscriptions is available in this statement of purpose for the newspaper.

<sup>78</sup>*L'Étoile Américaine/American Star* (Philadelphia, PA) February 6, 1794.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.* Italics are original.

<sup>80</sup>See Tanguy de la Boissière, *Journal des Révolutions de St. Domingue* (Cap François, St. Domingue), January 20, 1794. John Carter Brown Library, Providence RI. This edition quoted an extract from Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Aurora and General Advertiser*, which termed a memorial service to Louis XVI an "insult" to the French in Philadelphia, to say nothing of a disturbance of the peace.

<sup>81</sup>DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 281; Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States*, 165-171.

from 1793-1794 also reported being “violently attacked by royalist refugees.” These reports make credible Dufay’s allegations that he was “set upon by assassins sent by French emigrants in Philadelphia.”<sup>82</sup> Genet also instructed all French consuls in the United States to take legal action against “those traitorous French refugees from St. Domingue.” According to newspaper reports and the reports of the French consul at Charleston, Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit, the refugees sought to discredit French diplomatic and consular officials by spreading lies that the latter were conspiring to stir up slave revolt and damage property in the United States.<sup>83</sup>

St. Domingue refugees created the *Société Française de Bienfaisance* in order to aid “all white persons of French extraction who have been or shall become reduced to want, by misfortune and not by bad conduct.”<sup>84</sup> As an illuminating note, the Republican *Société Française des Amis de la Liberté et de L’Égalité*, which Genet frequented, and to which he was elected president, viewed the organization as “reactionary.” The minutes from the society show that Genet appropriated some three-hundred dollars for the relief of the refugees, most likely in the hope of buying their silence, but to no avail.<sup>85</sup> *L’Étoile Américaine/American Star* weighed in with a letter from a refugee who stated that the minister had lied about such aid, and that the St. Domingans were averse to accepting

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<sup>82</sup>Louis Pierre Dufay de La Tour Duray, *Compte Rendu Sur la situation actuelle de Saint-Domingue*, 15-16.

<sup>83</sup>Enclosure in a letter from Genet to Jefferson, both dated November 11, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 27:347.

<sup>84</sup>Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States*, 106.

<sup>85</sup>*La Société Française des Amis de la liberté et égalité* minutes, July 9, 1793, MFilmXR .797, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA.

Brissotin generosity. Refugee hostility to Genet reminded Americans that the politics of slavery was not merely local or domestic. It was also international and national. The print politics of the white St. Domingans also raised the question anew as to whether slavery and republicanism were compatible.

*“Shewing them St. Domingo”: the Seeds of Factionalism*

The physical presence of the refugees St. Domingue and their woeful, self-publicized tales of “enslavement” by the French Republic were volatile reminders of how slavery in the Atlantic World challenged the American Revolution. American whites feared the white planters who brought their slaves with them, since revolutionary ideas might contaminate their own slave population. The influx of white planters and their slaves were also a source of information which American slaves could use to corroborate information about St. Domingue that they received from mariners and newspapers being read aloud. In Virginia, one slave reminded another who was skeptical of “plans to kill the white people” that “the blacks had kill’d the whites in the French island ... a little while ago.” Sentiments like these continued well into the 1800s, as African Americans tried to participate in the democratization of public life—an endeavor that encouraged both Federalist and Republican whites to erect them as “symbols of inappropriate participation.” By then, both feared that African Americans who insisted on entry into the public sphere would “shew them St. Domingo.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 156; Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Making of Philadelphia’s Black Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 176-177.

The massacre at Cap Français and its implications were not lost on those in the upper echelons of American society and government. Jefferson related his fears about St. Domingue to Madison. He had become “daily more and more convinced” that all of the West Indies would remain in the hands of people of color, and that “a total expulsion of the whites” would sooner or later take place. In such circumstances, it was “high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children, and possibly ourselves (South of Patowmac [sic]) have to wade through and try to avert them.”<sup>87</sup> In the South, rumors spread of the dangers of a St.-Domingue-style slave revolt throughout the 1790s.<sup>88</sup>

The enslaved St. Domingans were also running away. Newspapers, such as Bache’s *Aurora and General Advertiser*, often ran runaway-slave advertisements in both English and French. The runaways lost themselves among the free black population of Philadelphia whenever possible, protesting their much-resented servitude and seeking freedom for themselves. Runaway slaves who successfully eluded capture demonstrated the precarious and partial ways in which information and people circulated in the Early Republic. The United States during the 1790s experienced an array of information and people over a certain spatial logic. Free blacks were a theoretical and actual threat to the efforts of the federal Constitution to instill unities of time and space. Manumissions in the South and emancipation in the North contributed to a growing and vigorous free-black population in both sections—a population whose presence challenged the idea that

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<sup>87</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, July 14, 1793, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 26: 503. For Jefferson’s more universal thoughts on African Americans as a hostile, “captive nation” see Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. David Waldstreicher (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2002), 14; Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 148-9.

<sup>88</sup>James Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800” *Journal of Southern History* 63 (August 1997): 538.

“black” and “slave” were synonymous<sup>89</sup> The beginning of the Haitian Revolution and its transatlantic resonance highlighted the various ways in which slavery was a precarious form of governance.

Genet and his public battles with the St. Dominguan refugees inflamed sectional tensions as well. St. Domingue seemed to signify the consequences of spreading French revolutionary doctrines, and Southerners seemed too partial to France. “William Wilcocks” wrote several letters in the New York *Daily Advertiser*, accusing Genet of being involved in intrigue with Americans who dared criticize Washington, the father of his country. Wilcocks singled out as the American conspirators ambitious, traitorous Southerners, “who ride in their coaches, and hold thousands in bondage, unwilling and unable to pay their British debts, to the amount of a million sterling.” He also suggested that had Genet landed in Massachusetts instead of in Carolina, he would have moved in far more stable social—and political—circles.<sup>90</sup>

Southerners were apprehensive of the refugees’ political activities. A reader of the *Southern Centinel and Universal Gazette* claimed that “whilst our citizens exhibit daily proofs of their benevolence and humanity to the unfortunate people of Cape Francois, these very people, in their truly distressed situation, are continually endeavouring to sow the seeds of dissension among their generous donors.” He added

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<sup>89</sup>Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 127-129; Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 381; Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>90</sup>“William Willcocks,” *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), August 15, 1793; pieces with similar themes ran earlier in the *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), May 22, 25, 1793. See also William Willcocks, *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), October 31, 1793; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 160, 706, n 83.



that “the least they should do would be to keep their political opinions to themselves.”<sup>91</sup> In order to bolster the French cause in South Carolina, Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit published some of Genet's letters in the Charleston *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (operated by Peter Freneau, brother of Philip Freneau) only to set off a firestorm in that state.<sup>92</sup>

Sectionalism and the political activity in the public sphere of slaveholding refugees from the West Indies could endanger American neutrality and Washington’s impartiality. A national battle over race inequality and slavery was a damaging political and social fissure— tantamount to factionalism— that the republic could ill afford. Americans who observed the skirmishes in print between the refugees and Genet were beginning to fear the ill effects of faction. By late 1793, they saw both the St. Domingans and Genet as unwanted, meddling disruptions preying upon American goodwill.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the refugees, with their print politics and their slaves, pointed to the paradox underscoring the republic’s existence. The republic rested on a precariously manufactured consensus and sense of union that absorbed slavery and yet could not completely silence it.

The refugees and their print battles with Genet in late 1793 and early 1794 illustrate how Saint Domingue and the politics of slavery enlarge the scope of neutrality’s story in the Early American Republic. The Haitian Revolution as a logical extension of

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<sup>91</sup>*Southern Centinel and Universal Gazette* (Augusta, GA), September 12, 1793, quoted in White, *Encountering Revolution*, 110.

<sup>92</sup>Robert J. Alderson, Jr., *This Bright Era of happy Revolutions: French Consul Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit and International Republicanism in Charleston, 1792-1794* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 33-34.

<sup>93</sup>White, *Encountering Revolution*, 110.

the French Revolution threatened to make more explicit the problem of slavery in the American political unconscious. This “dominant, but repressed problem” of an empire for liberty with a sizable population in bondage was connected to other, larger issues of republican governance.<sup>94</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg observes that the dark, dirty secrets that threatened to destabilize the republic were unbridled capitalism and slavery. Both tied the United States to Africa and the Caribbean, economically and morally, allowing for porous borders.

Consequently, those ties exacerbated ongoing eighteenth-century controversies over republican survival—controversies over the size of a republic, vice, virtue, luxury, and corruption.<sup>95</sup> Republics could only be free so long as its citizens remained virtuous. Public exposures of vice in print heightened fears of republican and national collapse. Viewing the refugee problem as part of the story of U.S. neutrality directs historians' much-needed attention to how foreign affairs foregrounded and complicated these internal challenges to the republic and its federal union.

Washington counseled strict neutrality for America and Americans in the hopes that “if we are permitted to improve *without interruption*, the great advantages which

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<sup>94</sup>Michael Drexler, “The Displacement of the American Novel,” <http://www.common-place.org> · vol. 9 · no. 3 · April 2009 [accessed April 4, 2011], for a discussion of Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo* (Philadelphia: Bradsford and Inskoop, 1808) regarding the idea of slavery being the republic’s “unknown known.”

<sup>95</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire*, 417; Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), Chapters 5 and 6; Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation, and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011), Chapter 8; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, especially Chapter 7; Emily S. Rosenberg, “Considering Borders” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 176-192.

nature and circumstances have placed within our reach, many years will not revolve before we may be ranked not only among the most respectable, but among the happiest people on this Globe.”<sup>96</sup> Just as Washington viewed himself above party, the United States would refrain from taking sides in the Anglo-French War. Neutrality at the time of Genet’s mission was becoming politically bound with Washington’s public position of impartiality—and with an emerging Federalist “partisan anti-partisanship.”<sup>97</sup>

The refugees' clashes with Genet in the public sphere threatened to disrupt this ostensibly impartial republic in several ways. In attempting to counteract the refugees, Genet first appealed to Jefferson and then resorted to print in order to address a public which he was sure supported the French Republic. He attempted to use the refugees to rally both the American government and people behind France, contrary to strict neutrality. As the white St. Domingans harangued Genet in print and in the streets, he simultaneously had to promote the French Revolution amongst Americans and defend it from the refugees. The Genet Affair forced Americans to choose sides in the Anglo-French war: in reality, they could not be completely neutral in their sentiments.<sup>98</sup> These further divisions continued throughout the 1790s, segueing into ongoing newspaper battles that heightened regional differences with their differing political economies and sensitivities to the exercise of federal power.

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<sup>96</sup>Washington to David Humphreys, Philadelphia, March 23, 1793 in Fitzpatrick, *GW: Writings*, 32: 398.

<sup>97</sup>David Waldstreicher, “Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron S. Ben-Atar and Barbara Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 99-118.

<sup>98</sup>Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 146.

*Genet's Recall: A Study in Political Finessing*

The *mêlée* over the Genet business was present not only in American newspapers but also in American streets, and it threatened to add to the already existing divisions among Americans over the French Revolution. The refugee problem added further fuel to an already highly charged atmosphere. In late July, 1793, while Genet was embroiled in both foreign concerns and in American domestic politics, the president and his cabinet deliberated about his recall. Soon thereafter in December, Congress debated the issue of aid and assistance to the St. Domingan refugees. Republicans and Federalists were at loggerheads with each other not only within American civil society but also within Washington's own cabinet. Internecine political disputes further manifested themselves as Jefferson, Hamilton, and their associates tried to use Genet's impending disgrace to their own political advantage.

Washington valued the alliance with France as highly significant to American diplomacy and sympathized with France as the defender of liberty in the current European war. But, viewing himself as above faction and governing parties, he regarded the French minister's activities as a danger to American neutrality and political stability. Genet had to go. Jefferson drafted Genet's recall letter to Gouverneur Morris, the U.S. minister in Paris. In its defense of U.S. neutrality policy, the letter was subtle and evasive in condemning Genet but not France. It arraigned him for repeatedly defying the federal government's ban on fitting out French privateers in American ports, enlisting American

citizens in French service, and for sanctioning the exclusive jurisdiction of the consular admiralty over French prizes in American harbors.<sup>99</sup>

Jefferson dismissed the minister's accusations that the United States had turned a blind eye to the British seizure of French goods on American ships by arguing that the practice was "thoroughly sanctioned by prevailing standards of international law."<sup>100</sup> The United States accordingly considered it a long-standing and acceptable practice of the Law of Nations. Furthermore, Jefferson denounced Genet for rejecting the president's constitutional authority over American affairs and impugning Washington's motives for adopting the policy of neutrality. The French government was to recall their minister because "it is impossible for two sovereign and independent authorities to be going on within our territory, at the same time, without collision."<sup>101</sup> Until the French government could appoint Genet's successor, the United States reserved the right to suspend his diplomatic functions.

Jefferson's letter also noted the impact of Genet's recall on American public opinion. Contrary to Hamilton's urging, it downplayed Genet's involvement in domestic politics "as evidence of a calculated French design to subvert popular confidence in the Washington administration."<sup>102</sup> The Secretary of State knew that this inclusion would provide Federalists with anti-Republican ammunition and further strain Franco-American relations. He carefully avoided implicating either the French nation or its American

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<sup>99</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Gouverneur Morris, August 23, 1793 in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 26: 747-49; Sheridan, "The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet," 476.

<sup>100</sup>Sheridan, "The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet," 476.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

sympathizers in Genet's actions. Jefferson made no mention of the French minister's involvement with the Republican opposition in Philadelphia and its various organizations. He remained silent also on the plans that Genet confided to him about using the United States as a base from which to attack and undermine British and Spanish power in North America. For his part, Jefferson was unaware of the official instructions that Genet had been given by the French minister of foreign affairs and completely absolved the French government. Therefore, he praised France while condemning its obstreperous emissary.

Washington requested that Jefferson prepare copies of his correspondence with Genet for review by the cabinet. The official view of the imbroglio would emerge from this process. The burden of authenticity that stemmed from the tussle over candor and the exposure of intrigue forced the government's hand as well. When in the waning months of 1793 the Washington administration decided to demand Genet's recall, it published all of the diplomatic correspondence between Genet and Jefferson for examination, including by Congress. The collection of documents appeared in print on December 5. Jefferson testified to the documents' authenticity, and they bore the seal of a Notary Public.<sup>103</sup>

But the government's action, as John Adams wrote to his wife and confidante Abigail, would set a bad precedent and confront the country with "an awkward situation." "How a Government can go on, publishing all their Negotiations with foreign Nations, I

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<sup>103</sup>*A Message of the President of the United States to Congress Relative to France and Great Britain* (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1793). Printers Childs and Swaine oversaw this first printing. According to the card catalogue of the Library Company of Philadelphia, this documentary collection was reprinted in 1795 under the auspices of Matthew Carey.

know not,” he despaired. “To me it appears as dangerous and pernicious as it is novel: but upon this occasion it could not perhaps have been avoided. You know where I think was the Error in the first Concoction. *But such Errors are unavoidable where the People in Crowds out of Doors undertake to receive Ambassadors, and to dictate to their Supreme Executive.*”<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Genet prepared a set of his correspondence in early January, 1794, for publication as a pamphlet by the Republican printer Benjamin Franklin Bache. His purpose was to lay before Congress his diplomatic conduct and to counteract the “series of impostures which for a while have fascinated the minds of the public.”<sup>105</sup> Bache promptly advertised the pamphlet's sale in his newspaper, *The General Advertiser*. He promised that Genet’s correspondence were to follow in order “to satisfy without delay the public curiosity.”<sup>106</sup>

Public interactions between leaders, the people, and Genet constituted a possibility (or a threat) that diplomacy might be more open and democratic—where the people were to be better informed and consulted more closely. These were the French minister’s concerns when he protested to Jefferson the lack of candor and non-committal conduct of the Washington administration over the French treaties. Genet wanted to

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<sup>104</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, December 19, 1793, in Taylor et al., *Adams Family Correspondence*, 9:476–477. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>105</sup>Edmond C. Genet, December 20, 1793. Preface to *The Correspondence between Citizen Genet, Minister of the French Republic to the United States of North America, and the Officers of the Federal Government; to which are prefixed the Instructions from the Constituted Authorities of France to the Said Minister* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin Bache, 1794). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 25496.

<sup>106</sup>*The General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), January 6, 1794. See also Cornelia Clinton to Edmond C. Genet, January 1, 1794 and Genet to Cornelia Clinton, January 10, 1794. Genet Family Papers, MS 243, New York Historical Society, New York NY.

avoid “diplomatic subtleties” and cut right to the chase—to frankness and true principles. That was what *republicans* ought to do. To do otherwise was to resort to “ancient politics.” Genet claimed that it was not how the *American people* wished that France should be treated.<sup>107</sup>

Public opinion and the use of print politics in foreign relations also interested Republicans, as the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania's formulation of their opposition to Federalist foreign policy illustrates. To go to war with France was to make war on liberty itself. Republicans pledged to concentrate their efforts against all attempts to alienate the United States from France and the French alliance, and to foster more intimate connections with Britain. Furthermore, “all persons who, directly or indirectly, from their unnatural suspicion, ought to be considered by every free American as enemies to republicanism and their country.” The society and its committee of correspondence aimed to counteract the spreading of “false and calumnious reports, by indecent strictures and newspaper publication” and whatever “unwarrantable” vilification of a foreign minister designed “to excite suspicion against him in the minds of the people, and a jealousy in their public officers, with a vein to render his cause unpopular and his situation amongst us irksome and disagreeable.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Edmond C. Genet to Thomas Jefferson, June 22, 1793 in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 26: 339-341; Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 65; George Gates Raddin, Jr., *Caritat and the Genet Episode* (New York: Dover, 1953), 28.

<sup>108</sup>Democratic Society of Pennsylvania Minutes, January 2, 1794, Am. 315, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



## *Conclusion*

Confirming Washington's neutrality policy, Congress after some debate passed the Neutrality Act of 1794 on June 5 of that year. It banned the outfitting of privateers, made it illegal to raise filibustering expeditions, and forbade U.S. citizens from enlisting in the foreign and naval services of a foreign power. Moreover, the act empowered the executive to use force to carry out its provisions.<sup>109</sup> While Washington had pressed for strict neutrality in the hopes of uninterrupted prosperity and happiness for Americans, the Genet Affair demonstrated how difficult this would be. It exemplified how foreign affairs could be divisive in domestic politics and how domestic politics and political culture were important battle grounds in foreign relations.

The Genet Affair would remain in the national memory and psyche throughout the 1790s as a shorthand for the dangers of foreign influence. Connecticut Federalist Chauncey Goodrich complained that “diplomatiques” like Genet “operate directly on the public mind, and that is the will of our government.” They were “an enemy in disguise of friends, who are come to corrupt with their gold, terrify by threats, cajole, and above all, *work through our public presses their own schemes.*”<sup>110</sup> In his essays supporting the Jay Treaty with the British two years later, Hamilton still referred to Genet and his exploits as anathema to good republican social order.<sup>111</sup> Genet may have been impulsive with much flair for the dramatic, but he was no impetuous bungler. He was in over his

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<sup>109</sup>Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, 169-170.

<sup>110</sup>Chauncey Goodrich to Oliver Wolcott, March 10, 1794, in *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, ed. George Gibbs, 2 vols. (New York: Privately Printed for the Subscribers, 1846), 1:131. Author's emphasis.

<sup>111</sup>Alexander Hamilton, proposed newspaper article, “Horatius No. II,” July, 1795 in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:74.

head amid forces beyond his control, not least because of the inability of Americans to agree on the nature of the relationship between the executive and the domestic public.

The public sphere and the formulation of American foreign policy during the 1790s were mutually constitutive. The Enlightenment's stress on openness and the importance of public opinion became manifest in the democratized politics of the new republic and in Genet's practice of the new diplomacy. Politics and diplomacy became closely intertwined. Print became a diplomatic tool—and a weapon. The people became potential diplomatic actors as public opinion became a viable objective of foreign policy. In the process, such actions had larger implications for the republic as a whole that raised fundamental questions about its existence. Federalists, Republicans, and Genet vied for the upper hand in supplying truthful information to the public. They set the overall tenor for political vernacular, and thus the types of lessons in diplomacy and foreign affairs that Americans learned. But the resulting political contest over sincerity, good faith, and “frank overtures” could not be divorced from print politics, secrecy, rumor, gossip, and “diplomatic subtleties.”

The Genet affair also demonstrated how the politics of print could become caught up in the politics of slavery. Connections to the rest of the Atlantic World brought the interruptions to American tranquility that Washington sought to avoid. Information and people got around through print, correspondence, and ships stopping at port. In the process, the French Revolution brought more than “*liberté, égalité et fraternité*” to Americans in an abstract, ideological sense. In addition to sweeping them up in a frenzy for all things French, it brought geopolitical turmoil to the Atlantic. As France declared war on European monarchy, the French Revolution brought slave revolts to the French

West Indies. As earlier political structures began to dissolve, people of color and then slaves took the French Revolution's ideals to their logical conclusions. Through the political and social upheaval on Saint Domingue forcing white planters to seek asylum in the United States, the French Revolution ironically brought *anti*-revolution to U.S. shores.

Genet's refugee problem illustrated how republican emphasis on candor in print politics allowed slavery to affect the larger problem of neutrality. From the very beginning, the neutrality crisis concerned itself with openness and the exposure of intrigue. Republicans complained of Washington's coyness, double-dealing, and monarchical pretenses. Genet, too, protested against monarchist sympathies when he could not obtain Jefferson's cooperation in arresting royalist white planters who were aggressively spreading intrigue in the United States through the press. The refugees, who felt betrayed by the French Revolution, formulated their public challenge of Genet's views of events in St. Domingue as an exposé, threatening to color neutrality with the politics of slavery. In an age of slave revolt as well as revolution, slave emancipation and their connection with Europe's revolutionary upheavals "tested the revolutionary self-image of the United States."<sup>112</sup> This matrix of foreign and domestic activity underscored the precariousness of neutrality in the Early American republic both from without and from within.

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<sup>112</sup>David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 54.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **“A BOLDER PARTY STROKE WAS NEVER STRUCK”: THE “BRITISH TREATY” AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICITY**

The Genet affair and its press battles demonstrated the scope of what made neutrality precarious, and what made Franco-American relations tenuous, if not volatile. Following closely upon its heels, the Jay Treaty debate, too, was highly publicized in the press. It threatened further to rip apart both American public opinion and the existing alliance between the two republics. The original wish of the United States to continue to trade with each belligerent power during the Anglo-French War proved quixotic: U.S. neutrality could not satisfy France without offending Great Britain. A neutrality which favored one power endangered relations with the other.

But the issue of which power would benefit from the United States' neutrality raised thorny internal questions about the relationship between national and local interests and identities. The Republican printer Philip Freneau alluded to the Jay Treaty as a knotty problem. Summing it up in poetic verse, Freneau saw it as a bad deal for America—a “wretched purchase” bought by “traitors” and the “sad result of base designs” perpetuated by secrecy: though “fraud, perjury, and guilt are seen,” he was certain that “a chosen few” had to know “the mysteries that lurk below. . .”<sup>1</sup>

The need for the Jay Treaty arose from the uncomfortable peace made between the United States and the British Crown. Tensions in Anglo-American relations during the Confederation period and after the adoption of the Constitution arose from mutual

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Lewis Patee, ed., *The Poems of Philip Freneau* 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1902-3), 3:132-33.

violations of the Treaty of Paris of 1783. Britain complained that mistreatment of loyalists returning to America to regain their estates and the refusal of many states to remove legal impediments to the collection of prewar debts constituted a breach of the peace. Americans retorted that British subjects “abducted” American property in slaves, and continued to occupy the northwestern posts. In sum, the United States demanded evacuation of the northwestern posts, but the Articles of Confederation could not compel obedience from the states over the British debts. In 1785 Prime Minister William Pitt had informed then U.S. minister in London John Adams that until America paid up, Great Britain would not evacuate the posts.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Britain aimed to exclude U.S. ships from the carrying trade to the British West Indies. The Orders in Council of July 2, 1783 forced American produce to enter the islands only in British or colonial bottoms, it turned the economic nationalism of the British mercantile system against the United States. Americans viewed British policy as deliberate hostility toward their ability to carry American goods in American bottoms to every port in the Empire. The British Orders in Council of November 6, 1793 ignored prior international practice by rejecting the rights of neutrals to carry peaceful cargo. Americans waxed lyrical about “free ships make free goods,” but more powerful nations only respected that right if they perceived it to be in their interest. On April 15, 1794, Washington appointed John Jay as envoy extraordinary to negotiate with Great Britain to resolve the crisis. Among the conditions that the American mission to London hoped to secure were the abandonment of British forts in North America, compensation

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<sup>2</sup>Charles R. Ritcheson, *The Aftermath of Revolution: British policy Toward the United States, 1783-1795* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1969), Chapters 4 and 5.

for spoliations, and compensation for slaves carried off by British forces during the War for Independence.

Jay succeeded in securing much of what he had been assigned, including the British surrender of frontier posts and compensation for spoliations. The treaty also guaranteed peace and friendship between the United States and Great Britain, and made provisions for commissions to resolve contentious issues, such as ascertaining debts to British merchants by U.S. citizens. It provided for reciprocal liberty of commerce and navigation between the United States and European nations. American vessels less than seventy tons received the right to trade with the British West Indies for a period of two years. It also guaranteed the right of American ships of all sizes to trade with the British East Indies.<sup>3</sup> Relations between Jay and his British counterpart had been most cordial. The Jay Treaty was signed on November 19, 1794. Satisfied that he had done his best, Jay wrote to Hamilton that the matter was now up to the president, senate, and public to decide. Washington would sign it on August 14, 1795.

But it took the American public until the spring of 1796 to accept the Jay Treaty. The prospect of closer relations with Britain made the atmosphere tense even before Jay left the United States. Crowds in Philadelphia had jeered him as he sailed for London. At the end of January 1795, rumors about the treaty's contents circulated in the press before any details had been released in full, heightening public anxiety. Rumors of Jay's return to the country began to circulate in March. Upon the leaking of the entire treaty in July, anger in U.S. port cities flared up among treaty opponents there, combining with other long-standing grievances against British activities among those in the West.

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<sup>3</sup>The Jay Treaty. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/jay.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jay.asp) [accessed August 23, 2013]

Whatever Jay's successes may have been, they were still limited in the eyes of many Americans. Vociferous public condemnation of the Jay Treaty followed well into 1796, leading to the development not only of rancorous partisanship, but political parties.

Historians traditionally see the Jay Treaty as the key moment in the making of the first-party system.<sup>4</sup> Federalists insisted, before, during, and after ratification of the treaty, that the American hand was weak; further, war with Great Britain was suicide. But treaty opponents feared that it yielded too much to Britain, gained little for the United States, and would provoke war with France. Republicans, who made up the overwhelming number of treaty opponents, especially felt that use of commercial retaliation would have gained a better settlement for America. Thomas Jefferson wondered whether with the Jay Treaty, the republic's neutrality would be "a fair neutrality," wherein the United States could keep its neutrality as well as the Franco-American alliance of 1778. If "a mere English neutrality," the United States would have offered its breeches for the British to kick yet again.<sup>5</sup> A treaty with Great Britain would also promote British-style government, and political economy of urban manufactures, luxury, aristocracy, and corruption, all of which were deadly to an agrarian republic.

The Jay Treaty was a mixed bag. Not even those who supported it were entirely pleased with it. It conceded too much to the British interpretation of neutral rights and also failed to resolve several controversial issues. The most notable of these were more

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<sup>4</sup>Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup>Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 18; Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. John Catanzaritti, 40 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1950-), 25:660-63.

favorable stipulations for American trade in the West Indies and compensation for slaves carried off by the British during the American Revolutionary War. Worse, the treaty had been negotiated and subsequently debated behind closed doors, and in secret, when the experience of the Genet affair had fueled demands for candor. Treaty opponents in particular complained that secrecy smacked of intrigue, and intrigue promoted a love of power—the root of all slavery—common in the Old World.

Previous examinations of the Jay Treaty such as those of Samuel Flagg Bemis and Jerald Combs have dealt with international great-power diplomacy and domestic politics. As a counterweight to interpretations centered on Federalist “realism” and Republican “idealism,” Combs observes that not only did the two emerging political parties have different views of the nation and the national interest, but that “Federalist and Republican leaders alike sought to balance goals with the power available.” Recently, Todd Estes, a historian of Early American politics has examined the internal dynamics of the debate in the press over the Jay Treaty itself. He argues that Federalists were ideologically elitist while remaining operationally democratic. Together with the insights of other Early American political historians such as Seth Cotlar, Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, and James Tagg, Estes's approach expands the framework of “the power available.”<sup>6</sup> The mutually constitutive relationship between foreign relations and the public sphere, however, allows newer approaches in political history to come full circle regarding foreign relations.

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<sup>6</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (1923; Revised edition New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), x; Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 9.



While building upon these earlier contributions and the argument I have made in the previous chapter, I argue that the Jay Treaty debate demonstrated how print publicity and public brawls over foreign relations heightened anxieties over federal power on the national and local levels. In the process, raucous public debate over foreign relations challenged the Early Republic's "meaningful silence" over slavery. Since Bemis addressed diplomacy to the neglect of domestic politics, Combs addressed foreign and domestic politics, and Estes addressed political culture to the neglect of diplomacy, I bring print publicity to bear on both foreign relations and domestic politics to recapture what a republican foreign policy contended with on the ground.

A focus on publicity demonstrates that differing views of the nation and the national interest also manifested themselves as differing views of the exercise of executive power and the people's role in republican government. Combs is right when he writes that, "party politics and ideology rarely superseded power considerations in the foreign policies of men like George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, party politics and ideology conveyed through the weapons of the Early Republic's political culture involved debates over the nature of federal power and republican government, all of which foreign policy had to balance.

Estes, Cotlar and other historians of Early American politics correctly identify the press battles of the 1790s as involving the place of the people in the governance of the new republic. But the Jay Treaty debate was also about the emancipatory role of the press: many printers with growing partisan affiliations actively competed to keep the

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<sup>7</sup>Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, x.

people well informed, lest they be “enslaved.” Distaste for secrecy, especially among a growing number of Republican artisan printers, stemmed from a radical understanding of publicity that took its cues from the thought of Thomas Paine. Elite Republicans like Thomas Jefferson were more reticent about print politics: while praising the press and recruiting printers, he preferred to act indirectly rather than enter the fray himself, as when he urged Madison to publicly cut down Hamilton’s “striking heresies.”<sup>8</sup>

Republicans with more democratic, Paineite sympathies concentrated on the dissemination of print because they aspired to a world where political ideas and decisions resulted from conversations between ordinary citizens instead of being filtered down through their leaders. “Radical publicity” implied that the people themselves were capable of understanding the proceedings of their government as well as participating in its affairs. Those affairs included foreign policy. When in a Republican newspaper a “speculator in certificates” told Pennsylvanians that common people could not comprehend diplomatic terminology, he met with the retort that truth and honesty should be plainly intelligible to all, even to rustics.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, both Federalists and Republicans had to prove adept at playing both sides of the publicity-secrecy coin in Early American politics.

We can extend the logic of a more democratized political culture further still: as print battles over the Jay Treaty became debates over the nature of republican

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, July 7, 1793, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: 1792-1794* (hereafter *TJ: Writings*), ed. Paul Leicester Ford, 12 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895), 6:338.

<sup>9</sup>Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 8; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 211.

government, they heightened awareness of regional differences. Most of the pro-treaty forces tended to be concentrated in New England with its merchant-based economy, whereas the largely agrarian South was mostly anti-treaty. Moreover, these print battles illustrated how international politics and the making of U.S. foreign policy presented the incipient nation with what David Waldstreicher calls a “Mansfieldian moment.”<sup>10</sup>

A Mansfieldian moment describes a situation where it becomes impossible to deal with key constitutional questions without engaging in the politics of slavery. During a runaway-slave incident in 1772 known as the Somerset Case, Virginia slave James Somerset ran away while traveling to London with his master, customs official James Steuart. Steuart attempted to have him seized and then taken to the West Indies to be sold. Lord Mansfield, chief justice of the Court of King's Bench, decided in favor of Somerset's personal rights under the British constitution: in the absence of positive, parliamentary law on slavery, Somerset could not be kidnapped and sent abroad. Mansfield's decision threatened slaveholder property by declaring Americans subject to Parliament, regardless of their local laws.

Within the union, clamoring for “frank overtures” involved “diplomatic subtleties”: the mutually constitutive relationship between the public sphere and foreign relations allowed international balances of power to trigger a heightened sense of national and local balances of power, also. Both a distinctly “Southern” interest among Republicans and the increasing tendency of Federalists to link “Southernness” to francophilia, and francophilia to Southern slaveholding emerged from the Jay Treaty

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<sup>10</sup>David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 39-41.

debate. Reinserting the politics of slavery into print politics, both regarding the Jay Treaty debate in particular and the larger struggle for neutrality, further enhances our understanding of how slavery became an issue when Americans re-fought the American Revolution in their public discourse. It also highlights the complex ways in which slavery affected the developing nationalist visions of the emerging parties.

As with the Genet Affair, the Jay Treaty's prompting of outcry over neutrality and which power it would benefit exposed and exacerbated existing fissures in the compound republic's precarious balance of power—over the role of public opinion, the relationship of the people to their government, and the tension between national and local promoted by international turmoil. A hyperbolic handbill from Virginia reprinted in a Republican newspaper stated: “*Your all is at Stake.*”<sup>11</sup> Melodrama aside, it was no exaggeration. Estes remarks that exclamations, capital letters, and italics filled Republican denunciations of the treaty, leaving no doubt about how much was at stake.

The negotiations and subsequent brouhaha over the Jay Treaty touched upon the structure and tectonics of the republic that either directly or indirectly rubbed up against the place of chattel slavery in the union. Discussions about foreign treaties that fueled ongoing debate about secrecy and publicity further involved the relationship of the people to their government and ultimately pointed to still larger ones about the public good or interest—the *res publica*. These larger issues echoed Patrick Henry's concerns about the ratification of the Constitution and the corporate understanding of “we, the people”: *which* people? What was conducive to the public interest, and what was not? What is more, which interests were definable as such, and who got to define them?

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<sup>11</sup>Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*, 106, 148-9.

Jay's Treaty—and its costs—would influence both Washington's denunciation of faction in his Farewell Address and Jefferson's Revolution of 1800. If Federalists and Republicans had different ideas of the national interest, seeking to balance their goals with the power available, the Jay Treaty debate pitted their alternative nationalisms and foreign policies against each other. Beyond any general consensus on neutrality, commercial, political, and ideological interests were not just national concerns, but subject to local conditions. Which foreign power would benefit from U.S. neutrality affected the direction of the emerging nation's political economy. It ultimately affected the nation's geographic orientation and the balance of power within the compound republic's federal union.

*“A Meteor Following a Comet”: Radical Publicity and Radical Diplomacy*

The activities of Genet's successors as ministers plenipotentiary to the United States continued to make publicity and the fight for American public opinion important to Franco-American relations. Like Genet, Jean Antoine Joseph Fauchet and Pierre Auguste Adet in the United States utilized communications networks and the publicizing of information. The Jay Treaty negotiations were of great interest to the French Republic and its ministers in the United States: if ratified, the treaty would effectively deprive France of its privileges under the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

The French ministers closely observed the public prints and public opinion, both of which they reported to their superiors in Paris. While the Genet Affair has garnered the lion's share of outrage over publicity and diplomacy, Genet's successors ultimately could not remain aloof of American political troubles, either. Genet, remarked Alexander

Hamilton, may not have come to the United States deliberately to provoke a war, but he certainly did all he could to indirectly drag Americans into it.<sup>12</sup> Genet was replaced by Jean Antoine Joseph Fauchet. The result “[was] a *Meteor* following a *Comet*.”<sup>13</sup>

Genet’s successors inspired excitement and anxiety that affected Americans on a level that was up close, personal, and public. Fauchet and his successor Adet, much like Genet, were skeptical of American relations with Britain and were apprehensive of both U.S. neutrality and British policy in the West Indies. Beginning with the Genet affair, the lessons that Americans were learning about the dangers of foreign entanglement stemmed from the connections they drew between radical publicity and the French Revolution. Radical publicity was cosmopolitan in scope and tended to involve the people as well as foreign diplomats in foreign affairs. Radical publicity came with the danger of radicalizing diplomacy. The interaction of the French ministers with American domestic politics only furthered the sense of danger from foreign influence (and “foreign disorganizers”) that inflamed Americans during the 1790s.<sup>14</sup>

In mid-February 1794, newspapers throughout the country published a short notice indicating that Citizen Fauchet would be replacing Citizen Genet as minister to the United States.<sup>15</sup> Fluent in English, the new French minister was a one-time

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<sup>12</sup>Alexander Hamilton, “American Jacobins” (1795-96), in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (hereafter *PAH*), ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-87), 19:519. This article was meant to have been published in the *American Minerva* (New York, NY), but Syrett finds no appearance of it in any newspaper.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Hamilton, “Relations with France” (1795-96) in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:526.

<sup>14</sup>Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 93.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), February 15, 1794; *New York Daily Gazette* (New York, NY), February 18, 1794; *Essex Journal and New-Hampshire Packet* (Newburyport, MA), February 19, 1794; *The Oracle of the Day* (Portsmouth, NH), February 19, 1794; *The United States*

correspondent of Benjamin Franklin on philosophical matters. Fauchet arrived in Philadelphia on February 20, 1794, with a letter informing Genet of his recall. He also carried instructions to procure a new commercial treaty with the United States and not to meddle in American domestic politics. Brissot de Warville and his associates had been executed on October 31, 1793, and the Jacobins had come to power. The Committee of Public Safety instructed the new French minister to procure a new commercial treaty with the United States.

More modest in scope than Brissot's visions of international liberty and exporting revolution, Jacobin policy aimed to extend French nationalism to the economic sphere: striking at British commerce would economically strangle that "isle of shopkeepers."<sup>16</sup> The goal was to make France a protector of neutral nations from British exploitation. The United States, while not powerful, was "the most useful" of neutral nations. Fauchet's superiors instructed him to frustrate British attempts to pursue similar ends: his superiors in the Committee of Public Safety wished to prevent Britain's "enslavement" of Americans through commercial treaties.<sup>17</sup> When Washington nominated Jay during April 15-19, 1794 to conclude a treaty with Britain, the French minister claimed that the

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*Chronicle: Political, Commercial, and Historical* (Providence, RI), February 20, 1794; *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), February 20, 1794.

<sup>16</sup>Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 132. See also the Navigation Act of September 21, 1793, translated in *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* (hereafter *ASP: FR*), ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, 6 vols. (Washington DC: Gales and Seaton, 1833), 1:316.

<sup>17</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 124, 130-131.

most fatal blow that could befall the United States in the future would be the success of the Jay mission.<sup>18</sup> Jay left Philadelphia for London on May 12, 1794.

To gain the confidence of the United States, the Jacobins needed to do some damage control: Fauchet complied with the American decision to have Genet removed. The Orders of the Committee of Public Safety stated that the new minister plenipotentiary “in the name of the Republic, formally disavowed the criminal conduct of Genet and his associates,” and demanded that the offending parties be put aboard a frigate to be transported to France. The Committee of Public Safety accused Brissot of being a counterrevolutionary in league with foreign powers, particularly Great Britain, and of “fomen[ting] disputes and quarrels.” Moreover, the Brissotins had “set free and armed all the negroes to destroy our colonies.”<sup>19</sup> Genet, however, escaped repatriation. He would have been guillotined had the Washington administration not granted him asylum. Citizen Genet married Governor George Clinton's daughter, Cornelia, settled in New York, and ended his days in the United States as a naturalized citizen.

The Committee of Public Safety condemned Frenchmen who violated the neutrality of the United States, stating that the forms of communication established between the government of the United States and foreign agents were to be observed

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<sup>18</sup>Fauchet to Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 17, 1794 in “Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903* (hereafter, *AHA Report 1903*), ed. Frederick Jackson Turner, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:343; Bowman, 150.

<sup>19</sup>*New York Daily Gazette* (New York, NY), February 18, 1794; *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), February 20, 1794. *The New York Daily Gazette* cites a report from Maximilien Robespierre denouncing Genet's activities in the United States as well as those of the Brissotins in general. The same notice appeared in the *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ) February 19, 1794.



“scrupulously,” so as to not give umbrage to free Americans.<sup>20</sup> A notice to this effect, with instructions to all newspaper editors for its reprinting throughout the country, appeared in *The Aurora and General Advertiser* and *The Gazette of the United States*.<sup>21</sup> Fauchet and the French consuls in the United States provided the French Minister for Foreign Affairs with a report on Genet’s conduct. They stated that he vigorously supported a party that acted contrary to the government of the United States. Genet had carelessly insulted every member of the Executive branch, and in some examples of his correspondence, exhibited more of a hatred for Washington than a love for France. In other instances, the commissioners observed a true enthusiasm for the love of liberty. But Genet’s audacious publication of part of his instructions in order to justify his Kentucky filibustering adventures hampered the French position in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, all was not lost. Though Genet had grievously erred, the commissioners observed that French soldiers, officers, sailors, and loyal Republicans publicly claimed that the American government was on the side of aristocracy and monarchy. In the conclusion to their report, they noted that the people were on the side of France and wanted war, and that their ill-prepared government wished to remain neutral. Furthermore, none of the many Democratic Republican societies in the United States,

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<sup>20</sup>Orders of the Committee of Public Safety. Verbal Process of the French Republic, 1792. Endorsed October 11, 1793, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:287, 294.

<sup>21</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), March 7, 1794; *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), March 7, 1794; *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA), March 8, 1794; *American Minerva* (New York, NY), March 10, 1794; *American Star/Étoile Américaine* (Philadelphia, PA), March 11, 1794; *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer* (Baltimore, MD), March 11, 1794; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, CT), March 13, 1794.

<sup>22</sup>French Commissioners in the United States to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 24, 1794, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:314-15.

they observed, could assemble without raising a toast to the French Republic: public fetes quickly followed news of French success.<sup>23</sup> Though the commissioners were to tread carefully, the nature of American politics encouraged their assessment that the American people backed the French cause.

Fauchet proved unable to stay out of trouble for long. As the Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania attest, he attended Republican meetings while declining Federalist ones due to supposedly ill health.<sup>24</sup> At a Philadelphia civic festival celebrating a French victory, he stressed to the crowd that “alliances between free peoples were like vows taken by men of virtue” and were not suited to evil doers and perverts, that free peoples would not accept as allies despots who war on nations which seek to break their chains.”<sup>25</sup>

Although first denouncing Genet, he soon criticized U.S. neutrality as a violation of France’s treaty rights. The policy did not allow French privateers to bring prizes in for adjudication, it refused to give French consuls jurisdiction over the French community in the United States, and it prevented French consuls from arresting French deserters. Furthermore, the French minister was perplexed at secretary of state Edmund Randolph’s assertion that he was not interpreting the stipulations of the Franco-American alliance correctly. He observed that the United States seemed continuously to ignore that British

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<sup>23</sup>French Commissioners in the United States to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 24, 1794, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:317.

<sup>24</sup>Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, May 1, 1794, Am. 315, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>25</sup>Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), 414.

conduct in American ports violated the peace treaties between France and the United States as well as America's precious neutrality.<sup>26</sup>

Fauchet suspected insincerity in the Washington administration's handling of the Jay Treaty negotiations and in its conduct toward France, even as Randolph protested to the contrary that the French treaties remained sacred. He knew from Randolph only that Jay had been instructed not to agree to anything that would endanger American obligations to France. While reassuring Fauchet of his intense support for France, Randolph stated that lovers of liberty supported France while "the partizans [sic] of slavery prefer an alliance with England."<sup>27</sup>

But the French minister remained unconvinced. Rumors persisted in the press that Jay had reached a treaty of navigation, friendship, and commerce with Britain—a veritable rapprochement. When the Jay Treaty arrived in the United States on March 7, 1795, Washington and Randolph kept its contents to themselves. The president immediately called a special session of the Senate to discuss it. Fauchet tried unsuccessfully to obtain a copy of the treaty. Assurance from Randolph that it contained nothing offensive to France aroused Fauchet's suspicions even further. If there was truly nothing in it unfavorable to France, why was there need for secrecy?

Fauchet attempted to ferret out the terms of the Jay Treaty. He established contact with Republican members of the House of Representatives and the Senate in an attempt to counteract British agents who had been "preparing public opinion for months"

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<sup>26</sup>Joseph Fauchet to Edmund Randolph, September 18, 1794 in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASP: FR*, 1:601-2.

<sup>27</sup>DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 408; *Translation of Citizen Fauchet's Intercepted Letter No. 10 (to which are added No. 3 and 6)* (Philadelphia: The Political Book Store, 1795). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 28699.

against France, and whom he suspected were bribing members of Congress.<sup>28</sup> As the Senate convened on June 8, 1795 to discuss the Jay Treaty, treaty opponents, having consulted with Fauchet, attempted to force public disclosure of the terms. While not nearly as brazen as Genet, his distrust of the Washington administration soon caused Federalists to place him in the same category as his predecessor. Upset at the Jay Treaty negotiations, Fauchet baldly recommended in a strongly worded letter to Randolph on June 8 that the treaty not be ratified until the arrival of his successor, Pierre Auguste Adet. He only succeeded in convincing ardent Federalists that the designing French minister had at last shown his true colors.<sup>29</sup>

Adet arrived in Philadelphia from his previous post in Geneva on June 13, 1795, at about the time the Senate had begun to debate the ratification of the Jay Treaty. Soon thereafter, he began to lobby against the treaty's approval. He knew that George Washington's prestige was more than enough to command American public support, even against a serious charge made by any foreign minister. Like Fauchet, Adet moved easily within Republican circles. A scientist—a chemist by personal interest—the new French minister also made good use of Republican information networks among the

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<sup>28</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 200-201.

<sup>29</sup>Joseph Fauchet to Edmund Randolph, June 8, 1795, *ASP: FR*, 1:614-18; William Bradford to Alexander Hamilton, May 21, 1795 in Syrett, *PAH*, 18:348-9. Bradford suspected that the “Franklin” essays against the Jay Treaty, which appeared in the *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia, PA) between March 11 and June 10, 1795 were written “under [Fauchet's] direction.” See for example John Murdock's 1798 play, *The Politicians; or a State of Things. A Dramatic Piece. Written by an American and a Citizen of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1798), Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 34160. *The Politicians* is a comedy about the Jay Treaty written during the Quasi-War, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

scientific community in Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> The American Philosophical Society, for example, was mostly dominated by Republicans.

Knowing the importance of public opinion in both international and domestic politics, Adet developed a close working relationship with Benjamin Franklin Bache (and through Bache, Irish radicals such as Wolf Tone and Napper Tandy). Bache's *Aurora* had become significant in Republican opposition to the Washington administration over the Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Rebellion. The *Aurora* was also at the forefront of the attack on the Jay Treaty.<sup>31</sup> This connection with Bache would be useful if French allies in Congress could not defeat the Jay Treaty. The revolutionary diplomacy of the French republic and radical publicity were meant to be mutually reinforcing.

An exposé in late 1795 added to worsening relations with France. On March 28, 1795, a British warship had captured a French corvette carrying dispatches from Fauchet to his government. William Wyndam, Lord Grenville, hastened to send a précis of the contents to the British minister to the United States, George Hammond. On June 5, he followed up with the entire contents, along with the instructions that the British minister “should communicate such Parts of them as you may deem expedient to well disposed Persons in America.”<sup>32</sup> Of special interest was Fauchet's dispatch “No. 10,” written by

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<sup>30</sup>Michael F. Conlin, “The American Mission of Citizen Pierre-Auguste Adet: Revolutionary Chemistry and Diplomacy in the Early Republic,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 124 (October, 2000): 495-8.

<sup>31</sup>Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*, 61.

<sup>32</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 208.

the minister on October 31, 1794. The dispatch suggested that in Fauchet's apparent close dealings with Randolph, the secretary of state had been indiscreet.

What proved sensational about old news was that Dispatch No. 10 discussed the Whiskey Rebellion—a tax revolt in Western Pennsylvania—which the Washington administration had put down in July, 1794. Fauchet had expected “a general explosion which has been building up in the public mind for a long time,” and revealed Randolph's intimation that “*under pretext of giving energy to the Government it was intended to introduce absolute power and lead the President astray into paths which would conduct him to unpopularity.*”<sup>33</sup> Upon the rebellion's suppression, Fauchet sought “collaborators with Republican credentials to influence public opinion in the government's favor”—like Thomas Mifflin and Alexander Dallas, the latter of whom was influential in the Democratic Republican societies.<sup>34</sup>

Secretary of War Timothy Pickering translated the Fauchet-Randolph correspondence with the aid of a French dictionary. It, together with Fauchet's Dispatch No. 10, was sold as a pamphlet at the Political Book Shop at South-Front Street in Philadelphia. Forced to resign in disgrace and publicly denounced as a traitor, Randolph also published his *Vindication* on December 18, 1795 as a pamphlet, which condemned the assault on his public and private character. Randolph's *Vindication* only invited more excoriation from the Federalist press. One of those proponents of anti-Randolph sentiment was the English émigré journalist William Cobbett (alias Peter Porcupine).

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<sup>33</sup>*Translation of Citizen Fauchet's Intercepted Letter No. 10 (to which are added No. 3 and 6)* (Philadelphia: The Political Book Store, 1795), 9. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 28699. Original emphasis.

<sup>34</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 209; Irving Brant, “Edmund Randolph, Not Guilty!” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 7 (April 1950): 179-98.

Porcupine ripped into Randolph, first demolishing the *Vindication* in a pamphlet and following up the initial effort with another entitled “A New Year's Gift to the Democrats.”

Hamilton later denounced Fauchet who, like Genet, “openly patronise[d] [political clubs]” and was “always a guest swallowing toasts full of sedition and hostility to the Government.”<sup>35</sup> But Hamilton was being disingenuous. He corresponded closely with Hammond, and he had also met with intelligence officer, Major George Beckwith in 1789 to discuss closer relations with Great Britain.<sup>36</sup> As Fauchet suspected, other high-ranking Federalists also had British connections which made them privy to sensitive information. On July 29, 1795, Hammond passed the Fauchet-Randolph correspondence onto secretary of the treasury Oliver Wolcott, who then shared it with Pickering. Both showed it to Hamilton, who deemed it “quite important to the public.”<sup>37</sup> When they showed it to Washington, it strengthened the president's resolve to sign the Jay Treaty. Whether or not Randolph actually conspired with Fauchet was immaterial. That he appeared to be involved in secret dealings with the French was enough to convince Hamilton and other high Federalists that the secretary of state was one of those “Frenchified slaves.”<sup>38</sup>

Historians of Early American politics are correct that the Jay Treaty debate changed the political playbook by its regularization of more democratic forms of political

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<sup>35</sup>Alexander Hamilton, “Relations with France” (1795-96), in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:526.

<sup>36</sup>Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 48.

<sup>37</sup>Timothy Pickering to Alexander Hamilton, November 17, 1795; Alexander Hamilton to Timothy Pickering, November 20, 1795 in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:435-441.

<sup>38</sup>Combs, 112.

activity. The debate was more than simply a prelude to the election of 1796.<sup>39</sup> But more specifically, the acceptability (or not) of political norms and forms during the Jay Treaty debate pointed, as they had during the Genet affair, to the impact of foreign influence on the national body politic and its effect on the domestic realm. By extension, the Jay Treaty debate and the democratization of political activity affected the ability of the United States to protect its neutrality. In light of both Adams's and Madison's stress on the importance of public opinion, the activities of Fauchet and Adet demonstrate that these concerns were reasonable, not merely a figment of Federalist paranoia and propaganda.

The attention of these French ministers to print publicity and the connections they made with local Republicans also illustrate that the mutually constitutive relationship between foreign relations and the public sphere potentially makes the artisan printer a diplomatic actor, and not just a professional politician. Artisan printers aided and abetted foreign and national diplomatic interests in the public sphere, contributing to the blurring between foreign and domestic. The cosmopolitanism of Thomas Paine and the French Revolution radicalized popular discussions of politics in the 1790s, fueling further debate on popular sovereignty and national interests. It added further dimensions to the two differing ideas of the national interest that emerged. In addition, two competing ideas of the national interest are a stark reminder that the first rule of nature is self-preservation: throughout the neutrality crisis, Americans struggled with and fought over who they were

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<sup>39</sup>Estes, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 212; Simon P. Newman, *Politics and Parades of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, Chapter 2; Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, 80-81.



and what they were preserving.<sup>40</sup> As with Genet before them, Federalists seized upon the colorful exploits and intrigues of Fauchet and Adet as a “foreign” influence that would unduly seek to bend the American people and the United States to the will of France. They may have been disingenuous and opportunistic, but they still had a point.

*“This Imp of Darkness”: Radical Publicity and “Despotic” Secrecy*

The French Revolution's diplomatic use of radical publicity found a highly charged atmosphere in the Early Republic. In the latter's increasingly democratized politics, drawing on an earlier Whig tradition, secrecy reeked of corruption, monarchy, and despotism. The secrecy surrounding the treaty's deliberation was itself important when it came to the press, the role of the people in republican government, and who determined the public good. Suspicion of secrecy also thereby segued into the larger question of which of the major belligerent powers—republican France or monarchical Great Britain (and the attendant moral questions about government and political economy they raised)—truly endangered U.S. neutrality. Secrecy was a potent theme in the Republican press's attacks on the Jay Treaty: it monarchical and despotic; how else would Federalists bend U.S. neutrality to British interests, except on the sly? Even before Jay left for London, the Republican press buzzed with rumor and speculation: the

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<sup>40</sup>On self-preservation being the first law of nature, see Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 15; see Jeffrey L. Pasley, *“The Tyranny of Printers”: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), for the rise of newspaper editors as a political actors in their own right.

“secret objective of the mission” was to recover “mercantile wealth” for the benefit of “the English faction.”<sup>41</sup>

Print and private letters circulated speculation of the treaty’s terms throughout the United States before Washington actually received it.<sup>42</sup> Rumor and speculation led to a buildup of anticipation and anxiety culminating in a crescendo of discontent. On January 31, 1795, Bache revealed that the treaty had been signed. “Franklin,” whose anti-ratification essays were reprinted all over the country indicated that “British newspapers and private letters received from abroad” had already divulged the treaty's main points.<sup>43</sup> In another typical example, “Sidney,” writing for the Boston *Independent Chronicle*, later described the treaty as having “originated in submission, progressed in *secrecy*, and is at last established by *fear*.” He also warned that warfare between the legislature and the people would mean that Americans “must either crouch to a will not their own, or wade thro' the blood of a civil war, to the horrors of anarchy or the gloom of despotism.”<sup>44</sup>

After deciding to keep the terms of the Jay Treaty between himself and his secretary of state, Randolph, Washington called for a special session of Senate to begin deliberations on June 8, 1795. When the treaty finally reached the Senate, Federalists secured a resolution to continue keeping the terms secret during the deliberation. The Philadelphia *Aurora* blasted “*the secrecy* of the Senate” over the treaty as being inimical

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<sup>41</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), April 28, 1794; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1969), 188-190; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 395; James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), Chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup>Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*, 33; Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 159.

<sup>43</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 194, 197-98.

<sup>44</sup>“Sidney,” *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), May 12, 1795. Original emphasis.

to “THE SOVEREIGNTY of the people.” While the Constitution gave the President and Senate treaty-making power, it did not communicate any power to “hatch those things *in darkness*.”<sup>45</sup> The Senate “substantially ratified” the Jay Treaty by June 25, but only its approval reached the public, not news of the treaty itself.<sup>46</sup> The *Aurora* condemned “The Treaty of Amity and Commerce (as it is called)” between “the *court* of Great Britain and the executive of the United States” as “this imp of darkness, illegitimately begotten,” which had been ratified only narrowly.<sup>47</sup>

Seizing upon secrecy and publicity as political weapons, Bache made the contents of the treaty public in the *Aurora* on June 29 without warning. The Philadelphia printer had only published an abstract of the treaty. Undeterred, the New York *Argus* ran a sarcastically worded petition directed at Jay. The *Argus* posited that given all Jay had pusillanimously surrendered to the British at least one of the treaty's provisions had to be favorable to American interests. The undersigned “THOUSANDS” requested and prayed that the American envoy divulge whatever it was.<sup>48</sup> The Senate decision to keep the treaty's deliberation behind closed doors infuriated Bache, who described the proceedings as “a secrecy in relation to a law which shall rival the darkness of a conclave of a seraglio.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>“Sidney” No. 3, *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 22, 1795. Italics and caps are original.

<sup>46</sup>*Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams* (hereafter *Memoirs*), ed. George Gibbs, 2 vols. (New York: Privately Printed for the Subscribers, 1846), 1:199.

<sup>47</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 26, 1795. Original emphasis.

<sup>48</sup>“The Petition of the Merchants, Manufacturers, and Others, to His Excellency, John Jay, Esq., Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James,” *Argus* (New York, NY), July 2, 1795.

<sup>49</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), August 22, 27, 1795; Everette E. Dennis, “Stolen Peace Treaties and the Press: Two Case Studies,” *Journalism History* 2 (Spring 1975): 7.

As its terms became known throughout the country, the Jay Treaty upset everyone to more or lesser degrees. Britain would not evacuate the Western posts until June 1796. There would be no reciprocity in trade along the Canadian border, which meant that the British could trade throughout the United States, but Americans were forbidden to trade within the limits of the area controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company. The provision referring the British debts to a mixed debt commission came under fire: under it, the commission could award interest accumulated on debts from the time of the Revolutionary War. British creditors were also not required to exhaust judicial resources open to them in the United States before referring them to the commission. The sequestration of debts was prohibited, and the United States was prohibited from raising tonnage duties on British vessels for twelve years, even as Britain could raise them on U.S. shipping. Republicans found themselves deprived of the weapon of commercial retaliation.

Article 12, which disappointed even those who favored the treaty, permitted U.S. ships of seventy tons or less to trade with the West Indies but prohibited the re-exportation from U.S. territory of molasses, sugar, coffee, cocoa, and cotton, whether or not they were the products of the British West Indies. Americans profited from a considerable re-export trade that brought these products to the United States, whereby they were then shipped to France and the rest of Europe. Article 12 would effectively kill the re-export trade and prematurely halt the growing export trade in cotton significant to Georgia and South Carolina. Southerners also complained that the treaty failed to

provide compensation for African American slaves carried off by the British during the Revolutionary War.

The Treaty also conceded too much to British interpretations of neutral rights: it did not explicitly abandon “free ships make free goods” but tacitly accepted that Britain could confiscate enemy property aboard U.S. ships by defining the treatment of ships detained on this account. While it did not explicitly acknowledge provisions as contraband, the treaty stipulated that if seized as contraband, they should be purchased, not confiscated. To the French and their American allies, the Jay Treaty betrayed the Franco-American alliance. It seemed to openly mock provisions respecting pre-existing treaties already binding on the signatory nations. To add further insult to injury, the Jay treaty did not prohibit the impressment of U.S. seaman by British warships.<sup>50</sup>

Hamilton thought the unnecessary veil of secrecy surrounding the treaty “ought to be waved for the satisfaction of the public mind,” and the Federalists aimed to publish it in full July 1.<sup>51</sup> But Bache beat them to it. Having obtained a copy from the French minister Adet, he leaked the entire treaty as a pamphlet that very day. Within days, Republicans roasted John Jay and his treaty. The handbill from Virginia cited earlier that informed citizens that “*Your all is at Stake*” further urged them to demonstrate against Washington signing the treaty, adding that it would be “the *Death Warrant* of your *TRADE*.”<sup>52</sup> The Democratic Societies held town-hall meetings, publicized their protests in newspapers, passed resolutions denouncing the treaty, and circulated anti-treaty

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<sup>50</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA) July 15, 20, 21, 24, 1795; August 8, 1795; Combs, *Jay Treaty*, 152.

<sup>51</sup>Alexander Hamilton to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., June 26, 1795 in Syrett, *PAH*, 18:388-9.

<sup>52</sup>Estes, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 106.

petitions.<sup>53</sup> Mobs declared Jay a traitor. There were riots in New York and Boston. A group of Philadelphians burned a copy of the treaty outside the residence of George Hammond, the British minister. Fourth of July celebrations turned into protests against the treaty, integrating discussions over U.S. foreign policy into Americans' ongoing efforts to grapple with the meaning of their revolution. "Philadelphia is alive," wrote an excited Margaret Hartman Bache to her husband. "They talk of burning Jay in effigy."<sup>54</sup>

Anti-British, anti-treaty sentiment ran high in the South. In Charleston, South Carolina, the treaty was "immediately thrown into the fire to purify it, and prevent the citizens of a free state from being poisoned by that venomous present of the British Cabinet."<sup>55</sup> Members of the French Society of Charleston joined with their Republican colleagues in publicly condemning the treaty, placing letters in newspapers haranguing the Federalists throughout the 1790s.<sup>56</sup> In general, Republicans continued to attack treaty supporters as moneyed interests claiming to speak for the popular will. A member of the House of Representatives, Robert R. Livingston of New York, committed his thoughts to the public prints as "Cato," with encouragement from Madison.<sup>57</sup> After a vindictive crowd did hang Jay in effigy, one second-rate wit in the *Richmond and Manchester Advertiser* crudely expressed how the treaty did not serve the national interest:

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<sup>53</sup>De Conde, *Entangling Alliance*, 254.

<sup>54</sup>Margaret Hartman Bache to Benjamin Franklin Bache, July 4, 1795. Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>55</sup>"Ça Ira," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), July 20, 1795; *Greenleaf's Journal and Patriotic Register* (New York, NY), March 12, 1794; Fauchet to Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 5, 1794, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:333.

<sup>56</sup>Michael L. Kennedy, "A French Jacobin Club in South Carolina, 1792-1795," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91 (January 1990): 19.

<sup>57</sup>Combs, *Jay Treaty*, 163.

I think J\_\_\_y's treaty is truly a farce  
fit to wipe the national \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>58</sup>

Federalists responded to the Republican onslaught by publishing essays in the newspapers supporting the treaty and organizing large pro-treaty counter-demonstrations in order to influence public opinion. Hamilton's "Defence" essays—thirty eight in all—appeared in newspapers under the name "Camillus" from July 1795 to January, 1796. "Camillus" was widely reprinted in newspapers around the country in the summer of 1795 with the following purpose: to defend the treaty and assert its constitutionality, to provide a detailed analysis of many of its specific articles, and to counter Republicans' anti-treaty arguments. New York printer Noah Webster submitted similar efforts under the name "Curtius" in his *Minerva*—a Federalist mouthpiece for nationalism and neutrality.

Building on earlier Federalist themes, Hamilton and Webster claimed impartiality. They praised the people's reason, decried the disordered passion of treaty opponents, and warned of the dangers of war with Britain to U.S. interests. "Camillus" reiterated that sentiment favorable to the French Revolution predisposed treaty opponents to a "jealousy so excessive" against the Jay Treaty that it "would give the fullest hope to insidious arts to perplex and mislead the public opinion." "It was well understood," Hamilton claimed, that "a numerous party among us," though it would never admit as much, was conspiring to drag the United States into the present European war by advocating all measures that would worsen relations with Great Britain.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>*Richmond and Manchester Advertiser* (Richmond, VA), July 30, 1795, quoted in Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 220.

<sup>59</sup>Hamilton (Camillus), "The Defence No. 1," July 22, 1795, in Syrett, *PAH*, 18:481.

“Curtius” reminded the people of New York that before Americans had agreed to the Constitution and to a government “to whom they had delegated certain powers *among which is the right to declare war, to make peace, and to regulate commerce,*” their prior unstable government (the Articles of Confederation) made them the laughing stock of Europe. Furthermore, risking war would harm American artisans, agriculture, and commerce. In short, it would affect *everybody*. Webster insisted that his appeal was “not the chimeras of a visionary or the artifice of political cowardice.” His words “[were] not the suggestions of a British *subject*, solicitous to aggrandize his country at the expense of Americans, but the result of a dispassionate survey of our national situation, by *one of yourselves!*”<sup>60</sup>

In the Jay Treaty debate's battle for public opinion, Republicans utilized the secrecy shrouding the negotiations to frame conflict over the treaty as a struggle between the popular will (“public opinion” or the people’s “immediate representatives” in the House of Representatives) and the president, implying the government was a monarchy in all but name. Secrecy as the incubator of monarchy also raised questions about the private character of public men. Washington himself indicated that the politics of publicity followed these rules when vindicating his own public and private conduct in upholding U.S. neutrality. Like all Federalists, he promoted his own impartiality. Whatever he thought of France, the president wrote in 1794 that:

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<sup>60</sup>“Curtius” *American Minerva* (New York, NY), March 4, 1794; *Ibid.*, “Vindication of the Treaty, No. 12,” August 6, 1795; *Ibid.*, July 11, 1795, and October 1, 1795. The *American Minerva* was the brainchild of a prominent group of Federalist politicians—among them Hamilton, Jay, Rufus King, James Watson, and James Greenleaf—and meant to rally support behind the Washington administration and its policy of neutrality, counteract the influence of Genet, counteract the Republican press (at the beginning, led by Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* before the rise of Bache's *Aurora*), and to make the French Revolution a touchstone of party identity. See Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 165.



having determined as far as lay within the power of the Executive, to keep this country in a state of neutrality, *I have made my public conduct accord with the system*, and whilst so acting as a public character, consistency, and propriety as a private man, forbid those intemperate expressions in favor of one Nation, or to the prejudice of another, which many have indulged themselves in, and I will venture to add, to the embarrassment of government, without producing any good to the Country.<sup>61</sup>

But if Washington's public and private conduct were so consistent and impartial, why the secrecy? Realizing that Washington's prestige was important to public acceptance of the treaty, some Republicans attacked the president directly, warning that the future fortunes of executive power lay with the acquiescence of the people: "Washington," Massachusetts Republican Nathaniel Ames observed, "now defies the whole Sovereign that made him what he is—and *can unmake him again*. Better his hand had been cut off when his glory was at its height, before he blasted all his Laurels."<sup>62</sup> Apparently, the president fancied himself "the grand lama of this country" who likened the people to Edmund Burke's "swinish multitude."<sup>63</sup> Ignoring the *vox populi*, the true sovereign power in a republic, was a costly mistake. Washington (or any pretender to monarchy or any form of rarefied power) would do well to watch his step.

Even after the president had signed the treaty on August 14, 1795, public opinion remained embroiled in the debate over its significance, particularly the implications for government if secrecy plagued important negotiations. "A Yeoman of the State of Delaware" expressed his disgust in *The Delaware Gazette* at the commendatory letter

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<sup>61</sup>Washington to Governor Henry Lee, August 26, 1794, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, 1931-44), 33:479. Original emphasis.

<sup>62</sup>Nathaniel Ames, August 14, 1795, quoted in Charles Warren, *Jacobin and Junto, or Early American Politics as Viewed in the Diary of Dr. Nathaniel Ames, 1758-1822* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 63. Author's emphasis.

<sup>63</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), August 12, 27, 1795; *Argus* (New York, NY), August 24, 1795; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), August 10, September 10, 1795.

sent to Washington by Philadelphia merchants following the signing: “A Yeoman” sneered that approval or disapproval were meaningless gestures following the act, but he nonetheless commended their “sublime forbearance” in having refrained from expressing their opinion prior to Washington's decision. Merchants, after all, were only drones sponging off the industry of others.<sup>64</sup>

Treaty opponents also reused old tropes about the origins of New World freedom that equated the Protestant Reformation with clarity, openness, and liberty— and Roman Catholicism with darkness, superstition, and obscurantism. Was the United States about to consecrate a political Pope with Washington's ratification of the treaty, despite public opposition? If so, “Atticus” promised to “preach up a reformation and dare to be a Luther in politics” as he strove to “unmask the idol we have set up and show him to be a man. . .” For, if the president were to receive “more reverence than the Constitution, and more devotion than liberty,” would freemen be treated with “marked contumely” reduced to laboring passively under the Constitution “like slaves”?<sup>65</sup>

### *The Jay Treaty and the Politics of Slavery*

A great deal turned on that very word. The neutrality debate generally agitated the closely related issues of constitutional power and property in persons. “Atticus” illustrated both the slippage involved with the word “slavery” in the eighteenth century

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<sup>64</sup>“A Yeoman of the State of Delaware,” *The Delaware Gazette*, reprinted in *The Columbian Chronicle* (Georgetown, DC), September 8, 1795.

<sup>65</sup>“Atticus,” *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), September 3, 1795, reprinted in the *Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), September 12, 1795. For a discussion of the connections between democratic politics, Protestant religious revivals and newspaper journalism in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early nineteenth-century America, see Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 154, 184-86, 268-69.

and its relationship to ongoing problems in the exercise of federal power. “Slavery” in the Age of Revolution was a term which referred to the subject of subjects—the result of unchecked political power. As Fauchet's earlier concerns about the Franco-American alliance and the damage wrought by the Jay Treaty reiterated, slavery was the very opposite of consent. It was the fate of those who inordinately succumbed to “foreign” influence. Secrecy bred despotism and monarchy resulting in “slavery.” Moreover, the ability to own property was also significant to Americans’ political independence.

In the Early Republic fear of foreign, Old World “enslavement” was never far removed from the reality of chattel slavery. During the imperial crisis that culminated in the American Revolution, Whigs—especially in Virginia—resented Dunmore's Proclamation, where British troops enticed their property in slaves away. They howled in protest that stealing their slaves enslaved *them*. That theme appeared constantly in Patriot propaganda. One widespread example was John Leacock's 1776 play, *The Fall of British Tyranny*. It recounted the military and political events of 1774 and 1775, framing slave liberation as an act of imposed aggression.<sup>66</sup> The Declaration of Independence recalled those “domestic insurrections,” making the ability to quell slave revolt part of the national creed. In addition, narratives that spoke of the British “stealing” and “seducing” slaves away from their masters during the American Revolution gained traction as ambivalence about slavery faded in the South beginning in the 1790s.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 197; Peter A. Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as Metaphor in Revolutionary America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), xvi; David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), Chapter 7. For an in-depth analysis of Leacock's play, see Sweet, 185-197.

<sup>67</sup>Frederick Austin Ogg, “Jay’s Treaty and the Slavery Interests of the United States” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1901* (hereafter *AHA 1901*), 2 vols.

The exercise of federal power within a colonial empire affected the holding of persons as property. Americans faced that quandary again over the proper exercise of power in the Constitution. And it readily confronted them in the Jay Treaty debate. For those reasons, mention of the word “slavery” in any rhetorical text was often isolated or used simply. Displaying more than facile hypocrisy, cynicism, or political convenience, however, the word’s appearance often marked the text’s emotional high points due to its interconnected chains of association with larger issues.<sup>68</sup>

Debate over the Jay Treaty and its pro-British interpretation of U.S. neutrality linked all of these concerns. Yet historians have rarely discussed slavery’s role in the Congressional debate and in the politics of publicity. Perhaps this is because slavery was not the primary reason why Republicans opposed the treaty, and because both treaty opponents and advocates objected to Article 12. Slavery arose over Southern economic interests. The politics of slavery entered into the debate over the Jay Treaty and the way the treaty was publicized and critiqued. All involved Republican foreign policy, partisanship toward the British and the animosity over favoring of Northern mercantile interests.<sup>69</sup> The politics of slavery was an important part of the way the Jay Treaty’s ratification allowed for the development of political parties. Attention to the politics of slavery within the interrelated contexts of foreign relations and nationalism demonstrates

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(Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 1:290; William Renwick Riddell, “Interesting Notes on Great Britain and Canada with Respect to the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History* 13 (April 1928): 189; Donald H. Stewart, *Opposition Press*, 213; Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*, 23; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>68</sup>Dorsey, *Common Bondage*, xvi.

<sup>69</sup>Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government’s Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 92.

shifts within both emerging parties themselves—over what constituted and endangered the national and public interest, and by extension, U.S. neutrality.

In contrast to present-day historians, Americans in the Early Republic were often aware of the ability of foreign relations to affect slavery and vice-versa. The issue arose in the adoption of the Constitution as a replacement for the Articles of Confederation, the latter of which was abandoned for more flexibility in foreign policy. “Publius” grappled with slavery also as he argued for the Constitution's adoption. Approximately a month before Jay signed the treaty, Edmund Randolph related that Jay had to know his negotiations would affect certain states. Jay wrote to Randolph: “We could not agree about the negroes. Was that a good reason for breaking up the negotiation?”<sup>70</sup> Randolph confessed his concern that the treaty would bypass slaves carried off by the British and arouse sectional anxiety. “If you omit mentioning them *at all*,” he inquired, “will not some quarters of the Union suppose themselves neglected?”<sup>71</sup>

When the details of the treaty began to circulate in the press, Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames observed that the success of John Jay would secure peace abroad, but print politics would fan the flames of faction and sectionalism at home. Upon seeing “a little cloud, as big as man’s head, in Bache’s paper, that indicates a storm,” Ames predicted that “[f]irst, before the event is known, to raise the expectation of the public, that we have everything granted, and nothing given in return; and secondly, that the treaty, when published, has surrendered everything. I think it probable that they will

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<sup>70</sup>John Jay to Edmund Randolph, September 13, 1794, February 6, 1795, in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASP: FR, I*: 485, 518.

<sup>71</sup>Edmund Randolph to John Jay, December 3, 1794, *Ibid.*, 509.

succeed in stirring up the fires of the south . . .” Sure enough, after Washington had signed the treaty, Ames noted that “the South glows with more than torrid heat, if we may believe their gazettes.”<sup>72</sup>

John Jay and his treaty suffered a significant handicap in the South and West from the beginning. One main objection that Southern Republicans raised to any passage of the Jay Treaty hinged on Article 7 of the Definitive Treaty of Peace of 1783. His Majesty, King George III had agreed “with all convenient speed and without causing any destruction or carrying away any Negroes or any other property of the American inhabitants (to) withdraw all his armies. . . .” Long memories persisted of Jay's attempted compromise of the interests of “the inhabitants of the Western waters” with the Jay-Gardoqui Treaty of 1786. Jay's 1786 report to Congress stressed reconciliation with Britain and justified British retention of the Western posts until the United States observed its part of the Treaty of Peace. It also acknowledged the justice of British refusal to return slaves captured during the American Revolution.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the issue of the Western posts also touched upon the British debts. Southerners, particularly Virginians, had incurred large sums of debt to British subjects at the time of the Revolutionary War: nearly half of all unsettled American

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<sup>72</sup>Fisher Ames to Thomas Dwight, February 3, 1795, in *The Works of Fisher Ames. With a Selection from His Speeches and Correspondence*, ed. Seth Ames, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), 1:166. Fisher Ames to Oliver Wolcott, September 2, 1795, in Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:299.

<sup>73</sup>Paul Finkelman, “The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron S. Ben Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 142; Combs, *Jay Treaty*, 14. The Jay-Gardoqui Treaty stipulated that Spain would help the U.S. force the British to leave the northwest ports in exchange for a liberal, but informal, trade agreement. In return, Jay was ready to compromise the Florida border, guarantee Spanish possessions in the Western hemisphere, and most importantly, to give up American navigation of the Mississippi for twenty-five or thirty years.

debts belonged to Virginians, who utilized their local courts to avoid paying them. The debts were also a sore point regarding the Western ports and navigation of the Mississippi. When George Hammond arrived in Philadelphia in 1791, he mentioned British retention of the northwestern posts, citing American violations of the peace. Then-Secretary of State Jefferson indicted Britain's retention of the posts (and consequent exclusion of Americans from the fur trade) and the abduction of slaves as proof as British violations of the Treaty of Paris.<sup>74</sup>

Article 12 threatened the Republican foreign-policy trump card of commercial retaliation as well as the ability of Southerners to repay their debts. British closure of its West Indian colonies to American shipping, conflicts over taxation, and the issue of paying off foreign loans had long pitted the states against each other as rivals for frontier lands and seaborne trade. Foreign treaties always raised the issue of the exercise of federal power. Southerners had bitterly opposed discriminatory tariffs while the Articles of Confederation were in force. Since congressional regulation of commerce could also regulate taxation on Southern property, Delaware, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia either refused to give Congress control or gave Congress only limited control over commerce. Also, given that the South had almost no shipping of its own, it opposed any navigation laws that would increase the price of exporting its agricultural products.

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<sup>74</sup>“William Willcocks” did not hesitate to condemn Southerners' luxurious lifestyles with their coaches, slaves, and their mountain of British debt: see *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), August 15, 1793; Combs, *Jay Treaty*, 13, 83. The *Aurora* warned all Republican printers to watch out for the “puny opinions” of conspiracy theorists like “William Willcocks”; *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA) September 5, 1795; Michael Schwarz, “The Great Divergence Reconsidered: Hamilton, Madison, and U.S.-British Relations, 1783-89,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Fall 2007): 414; Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:123.

Commercial interests that strained to look both East and West simultaneously indicated a widening geographical split between the Northern states and Southern slaveholding states. Resulting tension over the national interest directed attention to the balance of power within the union. Connecticut Federalist Chauncey Goodrich sniffed that New England would continue to attach itself to the federal government as long as it derived so many blessings from it. Southerners, however, would oppose the federal government “till it accommodates itself to a state of *negro-hood, debt, luxury, and gambling.*”<sup>75</sup>

While Federalist policies were hardly abolitionist, they nonetheless neglected slaveholders’ concerns. In addition to all of the Jay Treaty's other insults, dismissing the issue of compensation for slaves would mean subordinating American independence to British interests—and to a British-style political economy with its credits, its banks, its industry and manufactures, and its centralized government. In his plans to fund the national debt at par, take on the state debts, and create a national bank, Hamilton had concentrated great profits in the hands of northeastern merchants and speculators in Western lands—the primary holders of state bonds and major investors in the national bank. Augmentation of these enterprises, to Hamilton, was essential to national power. In contrast, capital concentrated in the hands of ordinary men would be invested in agriculture and slaves. Participation in national government ought instead to free these men from the corruption of private interests.

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<sup>75</sup>Chauncey Goodrich to Oliver Wolcott, March 24, 1793, in Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:91. Author's emphasis.



The Jay Treaty debate more closely related the politics of slavery with print publicity within the United States, and not only on the level of transatlantic connections as had occurred during the Genet affair. During the Senate debate over the Jay Treaty, Republicans first attempted to split the Southern Federalists by exploiting the slave-compensation issue. When they failed to defeat the treaty in the Senate, they resorted to public opinion. Stephens T. Mason, a Republican from Virginia, broke the Senate's practice of secrecy by selling a copy of the Jay Treaty to the French minister Adet. Adet subsequently leaked it to Benjamin Franklin Bache, proving instrumental to the Republican printer's "scoop" of the treaty that caught Federalists unawares.<sup>76</sup> A letter from Mason to Bache, dated June 29, 1795, prefaced the treaty's text: Mason wrote that "as this publication will probably excite a newspaper discussion, it is of importance that the People should possess a full and accurate knowledge of the subject to which their attention may be drawn, and which I think has already been improperly withheld from them . . ."<sup>77</sup>

Bache sold copies of the treaty at his office at low cost so that more people could afford to buy them. His "pirated copy" of the Jay Treaty even made it into all of the London newspapers. He traveled by stagecoach to Boston, New York and Hartford, distributing the treaty as a pamphlet, while another of his Philadelphia Republican

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<sup>76</sup>DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 112-113; Adet to the Committee of Public Safety, Philadelphia, July 3, 1795, in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:741-43; Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 204; Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*, 34; Everette E. Dennis, "Stolen Peace Treaties and the Press: Two Case Studies," *Journalism History*, 2 (1975), 6-14; Samuel Bayard to William Bradford, August 14, 1795, in "A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty: The Letters of Samuel Bayard," ed. David Sterling, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 18, (July 1961): 420.

<sup>77</sup>Ogg, *AHA Report 1901*, 1:287; *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser* (Fredericksburg, VA), July 7, 1795.

colleagues undertook a similar mission in the South.<sup>78</sup> Never far away from any question of government, slavery lurked in the background as the Republican press equated Federalist secrecy with anglophile treachery: breaking Senate secrecy rules was venial; monarchical designs endangered the people. The *Aurora* sneered that Mason had been so good as to “publicly [present the Jay Treaty] to the American people,” whereas Rufus King, who had not broken Senate regulations had “privately shewed [it] to the British minister.”<sup>79</sup>

The twin issues of publicity and secrecy that plagued the public sphere also affected the debate in the House of Representatives when it gathered to discuss the treaty in the spring of 1796. New York Republican Edward Livingston submitted a motion demanding that Washington provide all papers dealing with the Jay Treaty. A representative from Virginia suggested that releasing the papers might “allay the ferment in the public mind, that it might form an apology for the treaty.”<sup>80</sup> Federalists shot back that Congress was obligated to recognize the exclusive treaty-making power of the President and Senate. Moreover, William Loughton Smith of South Carolina remarked, diplomatic transactions were in all countries secret in nature for the sake of discretion. Washington replied that he would *consider* releasing the documents, and then declined, stating that it would set a dangerous precedent. For the *Aurora*, those were fighting words: Washington was adopting the habits of the kings of France, treating the House

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<sup>78</sup>Mentioned in Margaret Hartman Bache to Benjamin Franklin Bache, July 10, 1795, Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia PA; Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 92, 95.

<sup>79</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), August 8, 1795; December 19, 1795.

<sup>80</sup>House of Representatives, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, March 2, 1796, *Annals of Congress* (hereafter *Annals*), 42 vols. (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834-56), 5:400, 440-442.

like a parliament, and being a dictator like Cromwell. The Republican newspaper and its readership base saw Washington as depriving the House of Representatives—the true representative of the people—of its rights.<sup>81</sup>

When the debate over the treaty began on April 15, 1796, the greatest number of protests in the House concerned African Americans taken away by the British in 1783 and earlier. Debate over the role and rights of the House of Representatives also raised the three-fifths clause and Southern sensitivity to treaty-making power. Madison sounded off: he could discover no adequate reason for “the very extraordinary abandonment of the compensation due for the negroes.”<sup>82</sup> Southerners in general complained that this action violated the Treaty of Peace, which stipulated that the British were to evacuate the United States without carrying away slaves or other property. For Federalists such as Hamilton (who had defended the treaty as “Camillus”) to justify abandonment of the issue was little short of treasonous: until recently, Britain had recognized the American claim as just. Gains for commercial interests were not adequate compensation for the losses of agricultural interests, and the government of the United States was obliged to protect both.<sup>83</sup>

If the Jay Treaty debate was the pivotal moment in the making of the first-party system, it also revealed the terms of national and party consensus. Both incipient parties were broad coalitions. The long-term effect of ignoring the issue of compensation for the slaves was to aggravate Southern frustrations. Southern interests—and grievances—

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<sup>81</sup>Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 260.

<sup>82</sup>House of Representatives, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, April 15, 1796, *Annals*, 5:975.

<sup>83</sup>Ogg, “Jay’s Treaty and Slavery Interests,” *AHA Report 1901*, 1:291-292.

would challenge U.S. neutrality in the future. The anti-treaty coalition in the House of Representatives demonstrated the power of a Southern voting bloc. Marginalizing Southern interests greatly diminished Federalist support in the South as sectional lines began to sharpen. Hardly consisting only of anti-slavery northerners, Federalism also had pro-slavery Southern adherents, a sizable number of whom came from South Carolina. Aristocratic South Carolinians saw little contradiction between slavery and Hamiltonian Federalism: these advocates of law and order believed that Republican advocacy of the House's authority in foreign policy amounted to anarchy. Anarchy would endanger their slaveholding interests.<sup>84</sup>

Jefferson, who refused the Republican candidacy for president in the election of 1796, would characterize the growing political fallout from the Jay Treaty in sectional terms. In a letter to Madison, he used the word "Southern" to describe the Republican opposition. Indeed, Jefferson had written "Southern" in the original letter. James Roger Sharp notes that an unknown hand later crossed out the word, substituting it with "Republican." When Jefferson would later claim that "Republicans are the nation," the individual who made that conspicuous substitution knew how high the national stakes for Republicanism truly were: lack of national appeal would make Republicans a faction.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 157; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1971), 359-60; Estes, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 155; Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The First Presidential Contest: 1796 and the Founding of American Democracy* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 231-249.

<sup>85</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, April 27, 1795, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 28:339; James Roger Sharp, "Unraveling the Mystery of Jefferson's Letter of April 27, 1795," *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (Winter 1986), 411-18; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 144; Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams: The Collapse of Federalism, 1795-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 91; Pdraig Riley, "Slavery and the Problem of Democracy in Jeffersonian America" in *Contesting Slavery: The*

Public excitement over the Jay Treaty also evoked threats of separation between the Northern and Southern states. Virginians threatened secession if the treaty was ratified. Northerners threatened the same if Southerners did not behave more responsibly. Moreover, public discourse was gearing up for the heated fight that would explode near the end of the 1790s over which foreign power's "designing" interests (abetted by their American allies) endangered neutrality, the union, and the American Revolution. The national level bristled with deprecating talk of how dangerous local views *qua* private interests were when they prevailed over the public interest. In return, Southerners resented Northern accusations that they violated the national faith and had not done their fair share during the Revolutionary War.<sup>86</sup>

*"Faction [has] no right to complain . . .": The Jay Treaty, Print Politics, and "Artful Impolitic" Questions about Slavery*

Growing sectional divisions over slavery that appeared in Congressional debate over the Jay Treaty manifested themselves in print publicity, not simply in what information got printed, but whether the slavery issue tainted print politics. This made sense, given the emerging centrality of the newspaper to the formation of political parties. But the politics of publicity and the politics of slavery were becoming more closely aligned, also, because of the uneasy coexistence of localism and state autonomy with the

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*Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, ed. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011): 228-9; Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 262.

<sup>86</sup>*Columbian Herald* (Charleston, SC), May 16, 20, 1796; *Grafton Minerva* (Haverhill, NH), June 2, 1796, Quoted in Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Era*, 348; Marshall Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion," *American Quarterly* 10 (Winter 1958): 393.

centralizing forces of federal nationalism. After Independence, state autonomy in the short run allowed the new states to avoid resolving the issue of slavery collectively.

Furthermore, the variety, number, and geographical spread of the states had made it difficult for the British to capture them during the Revolutionary War, contributing to the belief that American liberty was the cause of American victory. The received narrative that American liberty had won the war undermined slavery in many places and in some minds while confirming it nationally.<sup>87</sup> Confirming slavery nationally meant that a revolutionary politics would shift accordingly: anything that questioned that confirmation threatened to break the national silence over slavery.

Republican newspapers at the beginning of the 1790s printed anti-slavery critiques based on a cosmopolitan view of the world. But by the time the Jay Treaty debate arose, those same newspapers began to chastise Northerners who fomented disunion with their insulting and “artful impolitic” questions about slavery. The *Aurora* complained: “a great deal of pains [had] been taken in Congress, by a few discontented partisans [sic], to incite an incurable breach between the Northern and Southern States, on account of the unhappy black men who are there.” Massachusetts was the source of the insult. While holding no slaves, its members of Congress reproached the Southern states and implicated the president. Moreover, Boston printers republished “factitious paragraphs from Guinea newspapers.”<sup>88</sup> By the late 1790s Republicans in the North would be defending the interests of Southern slaveholders. With Jefferson’s election in

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<sup>87</sup>Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, 56.

<sup>88</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), February 12, 1795. Reprint from the *Boston Chronicle* (Boston, MA).

1800, they either suppressed or transformed their anti-slavery sensibilities. As debate over the treaty in the House of Representatives during the spring of 1796 showed, a distinctly “Southern” interest was emerging that would affect the development of a Republican nationalism.<sup>89</sup>

In their print discourse, both emerging Federalists and Republicans were forming nationalist narratives that attempted to balance neutrality, the nature of republican government, and the place of slavery in the union. Republican newspapers protesting “the British treaty” reminded Americans that the British violated the 1783 treaty based on their refusal of compensation for “property in men.” The issue of slaves and property prompted discussions of impartiality, the ills of faction, and the public good.<sup>90</sup>

Whether for or against the ratification of the Jay Treaty, Americans could largely agree that compensation for African Americans slaves was a thorny source of potential national disturbance. Writing as “Juricola” Tench Coxe, a Pennsylvania leader and member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, published four articles in *The Philadelphia Gazette* on “an examination of the pending Treaty with Great Britain.” First a Federalist before switching sides and becoming a Republican, Coxe had written anonymous essays about slavery, the Constitution, and the national interest during the years of the Constitution's ratification. Along with depicting the Constitution's slave-trade clause as anti-slavery, he had assured the Virginia convention that Northerners

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<sup>89</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 12, 1795. Reprint from the *Boston Chronicle* (Boston, MA); Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 10, 64-65; Riley, “Slavery and the Problem of Democracy in Jeffersonian America,” 234.

<sup>90</sup>See “The Crisis” from the *Independent Chronicle* (Rutland, VT) reprinted in *Farmer's Library* (Fairhaven, VT), June 24, 1793, and also “Philo Solon” from *The Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, in *The Virginia Centinel* (Winchester, VA), August 3, 1795.

would ensure the internal security of the South by protecting it from invasions and slave rebellions<sup>91</sup> Now, Coxe wondered if his confidence had been misplaced.

“Juricola” was a public appeal to the president, urging Washington to suspend the Jay Treaty's ratification until it had been amended to allow for more liberal terms of trade between the United States and the West Indies, and to provide compensation for American slaves taken by the British during the Revolutionary War.<sup>92</sup> Coxe had begun “Juricola No. 1” with a lead-in discussion of the ills of “party spirit and party measures,” and its strong effect on the people, “disposing them to suspicions, jealousies, and fears.” He cautioned that even though Americans had been fortunate not to suffer the “unexampled conflict” of the Old World, “even the broad Atlantic has not interposed a sufficient distance to screen us from the wide and mighty fire, with which Europe is consumed: and upon this occasion the zealous agents of more than one nation have been led, by their passions and our own, into more than ordinary operations upon our private opinions and public councils.”<sup>93</sup>

Coxe cuts to the chase in the subsequent numbers of “Juricola.” Taking up its preceding number's appeal to the need for impartiality for the sake of the public good, “Juricola” No. 2 urged a “dispassionate” approach to the compensation issue, for slavery existed geographically in the eastern and middle as well as the Southern states, and that “were general manumission instantly to take place, the ablest friends of the treaty will candidly acknowledge, that *political order*, the best result of human wisdom and virtue

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<sup>91</sup>Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, 133.

<sup>92</sup>“Juricola” *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 31, August 4, 8, and 12, 1795. Referenced in Tench Coxe to Thomas Jefferson, October 30, 1795, in Catanzariti, *PTJ*, 28:516.

<sup>93</sup>“Juricola” No. 1, *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 31, 1795.



would, for a long time, be banished from our land.” Coxe observed that much had been said upon the point of compensation for the property of slaveholders carried off by the British, “because suggestions of a local aspect, and calculated to beget heat and to excite prejudices, (which though truly amiable, are unfavourable to fair discussion) have been occasionally made by writers on the treaty.”<sup>94</sup>

“Juricola” indicated that Coxe and other Northern Republicans sensed that nationalism, factionalism, and neutrality—for both emerging parties— would involve what was to be done about slavery. Building upon familiar arguments about manumission and abolishing the slave trade that existed before and after the American Revolution, Coxe argued that slavery was a national and collective responsibility, and not merely “Southern.” He also condemned as irresponsible the propensity of treaty commentators to excite passion by framing the compensation issue as a local one.

Federalists responded with nationally projected partisan anti-partisanship. The Genet affair demonstrated how they constructed an alternative to their Republican rivals' understanding of publicity and its role in governance. Federalist interpretations of Enlightenment rationality were part and parcel of the narratives they created about foreign interference and a distrust of radical publicity. They continued a practice that “Publius” (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay) had developed during the Constitutional Convention, where *The Federalist* achieved its veneer of rationality by construing criticisms of the Constitution (and hence itself) as incoherent and irrational.<sup>95</sup> Federalists

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<sup>94</sup>“Juricola” No. 2, *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), August 4, 1795. Original emphasis.

<sup>95</sup>Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, Chapter 1; Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Era of U.S. Nation Building, 1776-1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005),

during the 1790s applied this tactic to the radical publicity of Republicans with more democratic tendencies, which proposed that the ordinary American could, and ought to, have a stake in determining government policy.

Federalists condemned as “disorderly” and “hasty” the large, Republican, anti-treaty public meetings, fetes, and celebrations that appeared everywhere from the second week of July until the end of August, 1795. They also rebuked critics of the treaty for opposing it before they knew what it contained. To Hamilton, treaty opponents appealed to passion and provocation in order to persuade, instead of appealing to reason.<sup>96</sup>

Timothy Pickering sneered at popular town-hall meetings in his native Boston. Generally, Pickering found it unsettling that those involved had neither read the Jay Treaty nor had the expertise to discuss it. Even more suspicious was that Frenchmen—foreigners—were among the crowd, whom he claimed were responsible for swaying the emotions of those present. Noah Webster similarly asked why Americans had not left the treaty business to the constituted authorities instead of allowing the foes of government to lead them into “rash opinions and violent measures.”<sup>97</sup>

Federalists sought to unify the federal state with the nation and the people by pitting both state and nation against class and sectional others. In Number 54 of *The Federalist*, “Publius” rationalizes slavery and “Southernness” as another economic and geographical interest antithetical to the nation. Trish Loughran observes that Publius's

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124; Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 51; Robert A. Ferguson, “The Forgotten Publius” in *Reading the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 165, 167.

<sup>96</sup>Estes, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 87.

<sup>97</sup>Timothy Pickering to Stephen Higginson, esq. July 27, 1795, *Timothy Pickering Papers*, microfilm edition, 69 reels (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society), reel 6, No. 89; Estes, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 114.

narrative voice breaks down precisely over the three-fifths clause, with its “Southern” voice split between Madison the white American Creole and Hamilton, the product of a West Indian planter society. “Publius” ventriloquizes “Southernness” as what the nation cannot easily assimilate. Federalist condemnation of the existence and relevance of local majorities combined older and more recent strategy, the latter of which grew out of their attacks on the Democratic Republican societies at the beginning of the neutrality crisis. All for the national—and public—good.<sup>98</sup>

Strategies of nationalist marginalization supported the Federalist *idée-fixe* that Republican programs reflected Virginia and Southern policy. A case in point was Massachusetts Federalist Christopher Gore, who explicitly connected anarchy born of democratic violence to the dangers of Southern slaveholding. In late 1794, at the time that Jay was negotiating the treaty in London, Gore framed his “Manlius” essays as an exposé of Republican print politics, where their “anarchical Gazettes” aimed to “deceive and delude the people from their true interests.” Republican print politics enabled “foreign intrigue” to entangle the United States in foreign wars.

Taken together, the “Manlius” essays illustrate how Federalists applied Whig obsessions to foreign relations as a weapon to be wielded against their Republican rivals’ sympathy for the French Revolution. Republicans across the Eastern seaboard, Gore claimed, had conspired with Genet to outfit French privateers in American waters. They “insulted the good sense of Americans” by framing neutrality, which the people had publicly supported, into a contest between Washington and the French minister. The

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<sup>98</sup>David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 140; Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 127-29.

labels “Republican,” “Democratic,” and “Constitutional” were mere tools through which Republicans perpetrated sedition and anathemas against the president “in solemn divan and concealed from view by the darkness of night.”<sup>99</sup>

Republican secrecy and intrigue extended to the Southern states' refusal to pay their British debts, whereby their representatives attempted to deceive their Eastern brethren into war with Great Britain. Their opposition to the Jay Treaty was deceitful. “Faction had no right to complain” against the morally upright Washington for appointing Jay. Southern slaveholders were not true republicans, anyway. For “in that land whence you hear the greatest bellowings about liberty, a great proportion of the people are slaves.” Slaveholders also bellyached about Northern commerce and luxury while ignoring their own enjoyment of carriages and loaf sugar. Slaveholding reduced masters and slaves to savagery, which the former merely disguised as “over heated zeal” for the French Revolution.<sup>100</sup>

English émigré journalist William Cobbett, alias Peter Porcupine, likewise associated Republicans with the French Revolution and subsequently with disorder, and also linked the disorder of the French Revolution with slavery. Porcupine formerly made his living as an English teacher to St. Dominguan refugees, themselves “a hot-bed of anti-revolutionary sentiment” that reinforced his antipathy toward the French Revolution. He

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<sup>99</sup>Christopher Gore, *Manlius; with notes and references* (Boston, 1794), 5-7, 11-12, 26, 51, Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 27063. “Manlius” had appeared in the Federalist *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA) in late 1794 as part of the general Federalist attack on the Democratic Republican Societies and the Republican press's attacks on the Jay Treaty.

<sup>100</sup>Gore, *Manlius*, 32, 36, 49-51; Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 113.

had also written columns for John Ward Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*.<sup>101</sup> Cobbett is significant in the Early Republic's politics for his scurrilous journalism: as Peter Porcupine poked about in the private lives of public men for signs of corruption to expose, he pushed at the boundaries between public and private, and brought the politics of publicity into the domestic realm.

First published in January 1795, *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats* underwent several printings during the 1790s. Cobbett ridiculed the slave-holding Southern opponents of Britain and Washington's neutrality. He juxtaposes details of a Democratic fete—complete with its singing of the Marseillaise and its toasts to the joint efforts of France and America against tyranny—with an advertisement for the sale of “two young negro lads” and “a negro wench.”<sup>102</sup> His meaning: Republicans and their politics symbolized not only base disorder, but hypocrisy as well. Cobbett also charged that a Southern slaveholder kept his property “safe beneath his roof, yea, sometimes in his very arms.”<sup>103</sup> In the eighteenth century, discovering and exposing secrets—like those of sovereign rule and sexuality—involved inspecting intimate places and spaces, which is precisely what scurrilous journalism sought to do. Federalist and Republican denunciations of secrecy generally contained copious references to “the cover of darkness” or dark places.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 197; Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 289.

<sup>102</sup>William Cobbett, “A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats (1795),” in *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution*, ed. David A. Wilson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 107.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 95, 108, 113; Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 104.

<sup>104</sup>Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 470; Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*,

Peter Porcupine's exposés of Republicans and slavery targeted the secret, private lives of certain public men: their sexual habits showed a lack of virtue and potential for sedition. When the darker side of U.S. nationalism and federal power included fears of disorderly manumission, slave revolt, and African Americans existing in bondage or on the fringes of civil society in a state of undeclared war, Southern slaveholders were sleeping with the enemy. In the mid-to-late 1790s, as during the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s, the connections between metaphorical slavery and chattel slavery were becoming harder to ignore. Print politics, through its unmasking of dirty secrets and private interests, made that connection at the international, national, and local levels by linking them together with the larger questions of national interest.

Hamilton's "Camillus" essays, written concurrently with Tech Coxes's "Juricola," were significant in complementing Washington's prestige. Hamilton's efforts reconciled a majority of Americans to the treaty. They are also important for their relegation of slavery—and with it the interests of slave owners—to the sectional sidelines as minor, partisan, and inconsequential to the national interest. "Camillus" discusses slavery in numbers three and five. "To the conviction of *dispartionate* [sic] men," he argues that "the claim of compensation for the negroes, is in point of right, a very doubtful one." If under American law, slaves were property, slaves carried off by British troops became British property, just like any other seized during wartime. It would be "odious" for the British to return those slaves after promising them freedom.

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100; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 186; David Waldstreicher, "Two Cheers for the Public Sphere... One for Historians' Skepticism" *WMQ*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 62 (January 2005): 110; Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), Chapter 3.

Also, the United States had actually violated the Treaty of 1783 first over the British debts. Compensation for slaves in terms of interests “certainly falls under the description of *partial and inconsiderable*; affecting in no respect, the honor or security of the *nation*, and incapable of having a sensible influence upon its prosperity. The pecuniary value of the object is, in a national scale, trifling.”<sup>105</sup> Where *national* prosperity was concerned, slavery had and could have no place. All of the noise over compensation came from certain “hot-heads” who would have found any excuse at all to oppose the treaty.

Though Hamilton claimed that the pecuniary value of compensation for slaves carried off by the British was “trifling,” the issues at stake at the local level—and ultimately at the national also—were not. Republicans strongly asserted that the terms of the 1783 peace treaty intended the slaves to be left behind. This stipulation meant that *Britain* had violated the terms of the treaty first. In the House, James Madison argued that until the Jay mission, Britain had openly recognized the justice of American demands. The *Aurora* claimed that if Southern slaves had not been carried off, they could have been used to repay British debts—an argument Jefferson also made in 1792. But to Northeastern Federalists, demonstrations against the Jay Treaty amounted to “uncivilized Southerners guillotining effigies in order to protect their property in slaves.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Alexander Hamilton (writing as “Camillus”), “The Defense No. 5,” August 5, 1795 in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:93 and *The [New York] Argus, or Greenleaf’s New Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), August 5, 1795. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>106</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), September 5, 1795; December 19, 1795, April 23, 1796; Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 255; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 92; Ritcheson, *Aftermath of Revolution*, 236; Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 113.

Riotous opposition to the Jay Treaty over the lack of British compensation for slaves sealed the connection in Federalist eyes between the Republicans' pro-slavery associations and anti-treaty violence. Connecticut Federalist Uriah Tracy sounded the alarm on disunion: if the House should decide that "France and her worshipers" were right and the American government wrong, the time will have come for the Eastern states to separate from a South which constantly attempts to dominate them. Tracy feared the course that Southern politics had taken: would the rest of the nation look on if a slave insurrection resulted from French political heresies favorable in the South?<sup>107</sup> The South was the union's potential Achilles' heel, and a threat to national security.

Since the colonial period, public "meaningful silence" over slavery amounted to tacit and public acquiescence that it was a slaveholder's private matter where the public agreed not to interfere.<sup>108</sup> But as Genet's St. Dominguan refugee problem earlier suggested (and threatened), the neutrality crisis's open discussion about the national interest and the public good challenged that silence on the federal level. Ironically, the Constitutional Convention had allowed for a certain frankness and openness about slavery and its place in the union, because meetings took place behind closed doors. In debates over politics and foreign relations during the 1790s, print publicity reduced the slavery issue to the level of "diplomatic subtleties" and conflated it with "private interests." The checks and balances so revered in Americans' understanding of their

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<sup>107</sup>Uriah Tracy to Alexander Hamilton, April 6, 1796. Quoted in Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 51.

<sup>108</sup>Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 63-69.



national political heritage were not merely brilliant political theory, but testimony to the intricacies of the Early Republic's multi-layered (and multi-level) power politics.

*Conclusion: Public Opinion and Neutrality at Home and Abroad*

In July, 1795, Jay had remarked that “the Treaty is as it is; and the time will come when it will receive exactly that degree of commendation or censure, which to candid and enlightened minds, it shall appear to deserve.”<sup>109</sup> He further noted that it was vain to lament that the United States was not free of the evils of depravity and ignorance, and that differences in opinion inevitably produced parties. Parties, he asserted, could be beneficial to good government. But they were not the same as faction, which was unequivocally detrimental.

Jerald Combs observes that the Jay Treaty preserved peace between the United States and Great Britain for a while, but in the end did not bring peace between rival political factions. After all, the signing of the treaty did not alleviate or eliminate difficulties in Anglo-American and Franco-American relations. Consequently, these factional quarrels became institutionalized into political parties.<sup>110</sup> But the Jay Treaty debate had other consequences that resonated on far deeper levels. It demonstrated that these factional quarrels and emergent political parties also meant the emergence of a more visible sectionalism that neutrality had to address.

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<sup>109</sup>John Jay to General Henry Lee, July 11, 1795 in *The Papers and Public Correspondence of John Jay*, ed. Henry P. Johnston, A.M., 4 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890-93), 4:178.

<sup>110</sup>Combs, *Jay Treaty Debate*, 187.

Jefferson wrote of the treaty that “a bolder party-stroke was never struck.” Federalists who identified the nation's political economy with warmer Anglo-American relations, or who related their control of government with opposing the “disorder” or “disorganizing principles” of the French Revolution, made the treaty a staple of both foreign and domestic policy. Realizing that the battle for public opinion was a high-stakes game, Jefferson urged Madison to give “a fundamental reply to Curtius [Noah Webster] and Camillus [Hamilton].”<sup>111</sup> Washington's signing of “the British Treaty” into law also cemented partisan division by clearly establishing the Federalist interpretation of executive power. In April 1796, Republicans contemplated their strategy for the upcoming election. Jefferson dug through the papers in his study, attempting to find every valuable note he had taken as Secretary of State concerning Washington's views on public participation in the treaty process. Believing that he could accuse the president of inconsistency, he mailed his findings to Madison.<sup>112</sup>

The national fallout from the Jay Treaty debate would greatly contribute to the growth of the Republican newspaper network and the creation of a Republican majority by the late 1790s. Republicans also learned to more artfully exploit public opinion and opportunities afforded by later Federalist incompetence and overstretch, beating their rivals at their own game.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, they would discover how to more effectively appropriate accusations that Federalists wielded, knowing that they cut both ways. But until that time, the Republicans had to retreat as the Federalists successfully rallied public

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<sup>111</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 21, 1795, *PTJ*, 28: 475-76.

<sup>112</sup>Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 44.

<sup>113</sup>Bowman, *Struggle for Neutrality*, 226; Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, 105-6.

opinion around the Jay Treaty and Washington's character, thus consolidating their domination of the public press. As their opposition to the treaty collapsed, Republicans turned against public opinion—or at least public opinion favorable to the Federalists.

Public support for the Washington and his administration, railed the *Aurora*, was the work of “banks, British agents, old tories &c.,” all of which were alien and foreign to the Republican national vision and concept of the common good. Washington’s popularity was “despotic”: anything bordering on hero-worship could only be from “childish minds” who, like impressionable, sentimental women, had been seduced by the president's popularity. Moreover, the Washington administration had enabled Great Britain to “re-colonize [the United States] anew.”<sup>114</sup>

Public opinion mattered to both Federalists and Republicans, elite and non-elite. But the Jay Treaty’s impact on the formation of parties and rival nationalisms also illustrated that of increasing concern to all sides was what sort of public opinion and print politics constituted the “wrong” kind: the spread of information and keeping the people well informed was one thing. But *misinformation* was something else entirely. Fear of secrecy as a breeding ground for foreign intrigue illustrated how foreign relations emphasized the question of whether the public interest—and the public sphere—could be national. Encouraged by the French Revolution Republican radicals challenged Federalist efforts to form and defend a “unitary public sphere” modeled on that of

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<sup>114</sup>*Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), April 7, 19, 22, 23, 26, 28, 29, May 5, July 4, 1796; Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 144; Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 377.

Augustan England and the Moderate Enlightenment, where there would be “but one opinion formed of all.”<sup>115</sup>

The issue of publicity involved the relationship of the people to the government. International crises agitated the tangled threads with which the fabric of the republic's national consensus had been woven. Questions about foreign policy and foreign alliances involved larger issues of political economy, themselves increasingly divided along sectional lines. In turn, public discussions of these matters tended to reverberate throughout the Early Republic's politics: at stake were the hearts and minds of the people, and indeed the very political notion and role of the people. With these discussions came recourse to the politics of slavery, because they segued often into ongoing questions of the exercise of federal power. The Jay Treaty—its terms, what Jay had done and failed to do, and the debate that ensued—threatened to make more explicit, therefore, what Genet's radical diplomacy and its attendant St. Dominguan refugee problem had only broadly hinted at. Neutrality abroad would depend also upon neutrality at home.

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<sup>115</sup>John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic” in *Launching the “Extended Republic”: The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 309.

## CHAPTER 4

### “DISINTERESTED WARNINGS OF A PARTING FRIEND”: THE FAREWELL ADDRESS

If neutrality abroad also depended upon neutrality at home, a question of the terms remained. The divisiveness of the Jay Treaty debate and attacks on his character made George Washington weary. When he planned to retire from public life in 1796, it was the second time that he had done so since retiring as commander in chief of the army. But on this particular occasion, Washington decided to publish an address to the nation on his impending departure, offering some advice to his countrymen on politics and foreign relations. He entrusted the document’s printing to David Claypoole, a Philadelphia printer with a long history of publishing patriotic documents.

Presented as “the disinterested warnings of a parting friend,” Washington’s Farewell Address appeared on September 19, 1796 in *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*. The public posture of the address mattered. The president was an avid reader of newspapers, and he knew the importance of public opinion and print politics. First criticized for the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793, Washington had come under increasing fire from the Republican press over the Jay Treaty and his “monarchical” tendencies. By October 1, 1796, Americans as far north as Portland, Maine and as far south as Charleston, South Carolina, had access to the entire text.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 7. Eagerly read upon its initial publication, the Farewell Address would reach the status of a civic text, as print networks became saturated with it.

Never delivered orally, the address circulated via an expanding network of printers across the country, and republished in newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, and books well into the nineteenth century. No one in 1796 recognized the Farewell Address as a mere *ave atque vale*. In addressing union, geographical division, political faction, and meddling by foreign powers, it discussed what the United States was up against in a way no other document had.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, historians have interpreted the Farewell Address as a document of either “conflict” or “consensus.” Much like their Early American counterparts, they have differed over what was most important: domestic or foreign policy, idealism or pragmatism, isolationism or internationalism. Moreover, depending on different Americans’ concepts of the national and public interest, these aspects fit together differently and in different combinations. Joseph Ellis notes its “transcendental status,” given its “plasticity” and demonstrated capacity to “assume different shapes in different eras.”<sup>3</sup> Consensus historians such as Felix Gilbert see the Farewell Address combining “realism” and “idealism” in early U.S. foreign policy. Samuel Flagg Bemis has depicted it as a foreign-policy document that preserved American independence and kept both adversaries and condescending allies at bay. But Alexander DeConde deems the address a partisan document concerned mostly with domestic policy, the dangers of faction, and hardly foreign-policy prescription meant for posterity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 2-3, 6-7.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 122.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, “Washington's Farewell Address: A Foreign Policy of Independence,” *American Historical Review* 39 (January 1934): 250-268; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935; Bloomington: Indiana

Historians of the address in general—and diplomatic historians in particular—have also “all but destroyed the myth that Washington intended the United States perpetually to pursue an isolationist foreign policy.”<sup>5</sup> Michael Dunne, as well as Stanley Elkins and Erick McKittrick have interpreted the Farewell Address as an instrument of both diplomacy and politics. For Americans at the time, “foreign relations were essentially a domestic problem, and they related to the dangers of geographical separation and party faction.”<sup>6</sup> The document’s layers of foreign-domestic interconnectivity made isolation all but impossible. America was truly *in* the world, and not apart from it.

Few historians of the Early Republic of late, let alone diplomatic historians, have explored the role of the public in the Farewell Address’s foreign and domestic concerns, much less in its immediate context. Despite the publicizing of diplomatic events and diplomatic documents during the 1790s, historians have not discussed the role of print publicity in the eighteenth century, either: François Furstenberg’s recent account on the

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University Press); Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Samuel Flagg Bemis, “American Foreign Policy and the Blessings of Liberty” *American Historical Review* 67 (January 1962): 291-305; Dexter Perkins, *The Evolution of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); Dexter Perkins, *The American Approach to Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968); Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham, 1958); Paul A. Varg, *The Foreign Policy of the Founding Fathers* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1963); Burton Ira Kaufman, ed., *Washington's Farewell Address: The View from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

<sup>5</sup>Kaufman, *Washington's Farewell Address*, 114; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 493.

<sup>6</sup>John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era, 1789-1801* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the Great Constitutional Discussion, 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992): 841-73; Elkins and McKittrick, 494; Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 11-12; Michael Dunne, “Farewell to the Farewell Address? Or a Discourse on the Permanent and Transient in American Politics” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 77 (Spring 2001): 211-230; Jeffrey Malanson, *Addressing America: Washington's Farewell and the Making of National Culture, Politics, and Diplomacy, 1796-1852* (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2010); Malanson, “Foreign Policy in the Presidential Era” in *A Companion to George Washington*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishers, 2012), 506-523.

making of Washington's valedictory as a "civic text" is more about the nineteenth century than the eighteenth. It is also more concerned with domestic politics in an Atlantic context than it is with foreign policy or diplomatic paradigms.

In this chapter, I argue that the Farewell Address was a paradigm and style of foreign policy. Through print publicity and the concept of national character, it imparted partisan anti-partisan political and diplomatic prescriptions for how Americans were to behave in a neutral manner.<sup>7</sup> I further suggest that the Farewell Address's lessons in how to behave neutrally tied foreign attachments and faction to the politics of slavery in ever more personal ways. With the event of Washington's valedictory, print publicity became a communicator of national character, and national character became the ordering principle of print publicity. Republican attacks on the document and its denunciation of foreign attachments were a continuation of earlier criticisms of Washington's character and popularity. Attacks on Washington were not merely attacks on the man (and his party), but an attack on a whole set of cultural expectations.<sup>8</sup> Now, attacks on those cultural expectations extended also to foreign policy.

The document discusses both public opinion and public character for good reason. As Felix Gilbert, the most notable student of the address writes, "permeating" the text

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<sup>7</sup>David Waldstreicher, "Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style" in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron S. Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998). See Martha Elena Rojas, "Diplomatic letters: The conduct and culture of United States foreign affairs in the early republic" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2003), 9-10, for the notion of "diplomatic pedagogy." See also Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 12, 34-46, for discussion on the Farewell Address as a "civic text" teaching Americans how to behave politically, and the emulation of Washington. Since the Farewell Address concerned foreign policy as well as politics, it arguably taught Americans how to behave diplomatically, also.

<sup>8</sup>Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 5.



was a “fundamental concern” for “the attitude of American citizens towards foreign policy and the need for overcoming party spirit in decisions on foreign policy.”<sup>9</sup> More than merely partisan, the Farewell Address was the product of a politics where print publicity played an important role in exposing vices inimical to the public good. If neutrality was a foreign policy of “independence,” it begged the question of what independence meant. To American Whigs, it meant freedom from corruption, of which included, but was not exclusive to, foreign influence.

Misinformation was a problem, as was bad character. Both made Americans vulnerable to faction and foreign influence. The Farewell Address attempted to reconcile national unity with popular consent.<sup>10</sup> Consent made candor crucial. Candor protected public opinion and Americans’ consent against the Old World secrecy, intrigue, and corruption that killed governments everywhere in Europe. While party spirit was a “less dangerous” threat to the union, Americans needed “jealously” to guard against those “indiscreet and intemperate” enough to “excite” and “vent” that different parts of the union were “ill assorted” and could not remain together. Washington had more to say about “the petulance of party differences of opinion” and its dangers to the union in earlier drafts of the address than in its final form.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address*, 123.

<sup>10</sup>Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 10.

<sup>11</sup>George Washington, “Farewell Address,” *Writings of George Washington* [hereafter *WGW*], ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, 14 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892), 13:290-91. Washington’s original text reads: “beside the more serious causes already hinted as threatening our Union, there is one less dangerous, but sufficiently dangerous to make it prudent to be upon our guard against it. I allude to the petulance [sic] of party differences of opinion. It is not uncommon to hear the irritations which these excite vent themselves in declarations that the different parts of the *United States* are ill affected to each other, in menaces that the *Union* will be dissolved by this or that measure. Intimations like these are as indiscreet as they are intemperate.” Italics are the author’s. Hamilton’s editing reads “It is not uncommon to hear the irritations which these excite, vent themselves in declarations that the different parts of the Union are ill

Washington's valediction also claimed that unity at home and staying out of trouble abroad was contingent upon a neutral national character. It also contained the president's public claim about his own: as early as 1794, he claimed to embody the very impartiality in private and in public that he advised his fellow Americans to adopt.<sup>12</sup> National character was a way of understanding the relationship between the citizen (or national subject), and the state (or national government). It allowed individuals to be understood in the light of national culture. In the first president's case, national culture could be understood in the light of an individual. The state had a body, a psychology, and a reputation in the world—all attuned to that of George Washington.

The American Revolution and the young republic's emergence in a turbulent Atlantic World made national character imperative: who were Americans, anyway?<sup>13</sup> The search for a truly American character emphasized the role of sentiment in politics. Emphasis on sentiment prompted ongoing debate over what constituted the "wrong" kind of public opinion. Legitimizing revolution through vigilant adherence to virtue emphasized sincerity. Washington issued his Proclamation of Neutrality "with sincerity and good faith." The Genet Affair and the Jay Treaty debate had earlier raised concerns that the wrong kind of public opinion separated the people from their government,

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assorted and cannot remain together . . ." Hamilton leaves no ambiguity between "Union" and "United States," suggesting that they are one and the same.

<sup>12</sup>Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address*, 123; Washington to Governor Henry Lee, August 26, 1794, *The Writings of George Washington* (hereafter *GW: Writings*), ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 33:479. Original emphasis.

<sup>13</sup>Roberto Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Finn Pollard, *The Literary Quest for an American National Character* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

adversely affecting the ability of the United States to remain neutral. Washington referred to these disordered attachments as “slavery.”

The Farewell Address’s oblique, metaphorical, and political reference to slavery is conspicuous as the document's emotional high point. It had connections with other issues, including what ought to be done about chattel slavery. It continued to resonate while Whig rhetoric remained an important reference point for Americans who sensed that their revolution was at stake.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, chattel slavery is present in the immediate circumstances and context that gave rise to the Farewell Address— both in the very structure of the union that Washington claimed was becoming more closely integrated and in the ongoing public debates over federal power and foreign relations with Britain and France.

Taken together, they contributed to the growth of two nascent political parties, both of whose nationalisms were developing sectional fissures over slavery. The politics of slavery threatened U.S. neutrality through Genet's public clashes with refugees from St. Domingue and exposures of their intrigue. Support of and opposition to the Jay Treaty resulted in the sharpening of regional interests, emphasizing geographical division (and difference) and political faction. The ability to trade in the West Indies was important to both Franco-American and Anglo-American relations. Related to union and government, the politics of slavery could not fail to influence how Americans conceived of the national interest and U.S. foreign policy, to say nothing of national character.

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<sup>14</sup>Peter A. Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as Metaphor in Revolutionary America* (Knoxville, 2009), 213.

When Federalists attacked Southern slave-holding Republicans for opposing their policies, they publicly implied that the latter endangered the union and the national—and public— interest. Condemnation of “feudalism” over “a thousand negroes” or for secret, seditious, sexual relations with their slaves implied that Southerners were bad republicans because they subordinated the public and national interest to private and local ones.<sup>15</sup>

When Republicans attacked George Washington and his address in print, they likewise attacked his republican credentials through his character, particularly his publicly vaunted humility and impartiality. Some in the North took aim at the Federalist's greatest political asset by drawing attention to his slave-holding as further evidence of his corruption. But this position was precarious: at a time when a “Southern” interest was emerging, attacking Washington’s slaveholding came dangerously close to the Northern Federalist contention that slavery and slaveholders would compromise U.S. neutrality.

Promoting neutrality in the public sphere required the performance of impartiality to encourage the people’s assent. Of great importance were the Farewell Address' content and also the way it was publicized. No less significant was the relationship of publicized content to the public and national character of George Washington. Treaties with both France and Great Britain aligned neutrality more readily with support of the administration. But the Farewell Address also made the Federalist understanding of union and Federalist conflation of support of neutrality with support of the administration all the more explicit.

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<sup>15</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), reprinted from *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), January 15, 1796.

That, for Republicans, was precisely the problem. Federalists disregarded Republican interests while exploiting Washington's character to legitimize their policies. While Federalism's opponents came from all over the country, Federalist policies especially affected the interests of Southern slaveholders. Federalists used the president's prestige as a weapon in the partisan warfare they waged via the press and their patriotic celebrations. Foreign relations gave them ready political ammunition whenever they did battle in the public sphere. The urgency of steering clear of the Anglo-French War allowed Federalists to more closely link Revolution, nation, and state in their defense of union, heightening Republican fears of centralized federal power.<sup>16</sup> Centralized power forced confrontation over what could be assimilated into the national character and the relationship between the people and their government regarding control over persons and property.

A heightened sense of insecurity also heightened an implied need for Federalist policies. The Washington administration's success in getting the Jay Treaty approved was a key turning point: when the French attacked U.S. shipping on July 2, 1796, as payback for the Jay Treaty, Federalists accused Republicans of false patriotism. A focus on publicity therefore foregrounds the ironic effects of the Farewell Address's notable plasticity.<sup>17</sup> Its call to union promoted all that Washington claimed endangered it: plasticity has the potential to absorb many disparate elements. But as the breakdown of "Publius's" narrative voice between Hamilton and Madison earlier indicated, absorbing

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<sup>16</sup>Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Nations, Markets and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup>Michael Dunne, "Farewell to the Farewell Address?" 229.

disparate elements can sow the seeds of discord whenever partisans increasingly define those very elements as mutually antithetical.

*“Union and Brotherly Affection”*

The Farewell Address was a treatise on national unity and how to achieve it. “The clearest and most detailed call to national union in the early national period,”<sup>18</sup> it structurally interrelated the local, national, and international as well as public and private. Its presentation was a study in “conspicuous austerity” and a performance of “ostentatious moderation.”<sup>19</sup> Addressed to “the PEOPLE of the United States” just prior to the upcoming 1796 election, it contained a statement that Washington would not seek a third term.

Combining the efforts of himself, Madison, and Hamilton, the address communicated as the president had hoped, “a plain style” to be “handed to the public in an honest, unaffected, simple part.”<sup>20</sup> Sacredly maintaining the Constitution ensured that its administration in every department would be “stamped with wisdom and virtue.” Prudent preservation would complete the happiness of “the people of these States” under the auspices of liberty “recommending [the Constitution] to the applause, the affection,

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<sup>18</sup>Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1971), 173-4, 492.

<sup>19</sup>Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 121.

<sup>20</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, May 15, 1796 in Ford, *WGW*, 13:191; Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 132.

and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.”<sup>21</sup> There, he said, perhaps he ought to stop.

It was a pregnant pause: the president had only just begun. Washington expounded upon the nature of the union and foreign relations. The address was an expression of the interrelationship between parts and the whole-- what bound the union together, and what endangered it. By extension, the document was a statement of what the American Revolution had been about, and what it meant. Concern for the nation's welfare prompted him to stress that the union was paramount; it guaranteed the United States its independence, and yet, “from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the convictions of this truth.” The name of “AMERICAN” superseded “local discriminations.”

Those were common Federalist themes. The Farewell Address collapsed regional differences and interests into “slight shades of difference,” where Americans throughout the country had “the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles,” and all had fought and triumphed in a common cause. The various parts of the union were in fact knitting themselves closer together via inter-state and trans-regional trade. North and South had a mutually beneficial “unrestrained intercourse” that was “protected by the equal laws of a common government.” East and West likewise engaged in such trade, facilitated by “the progressive improvement of interior communications by land and water.”<sup>22</sup> Alluding to the recently defunct Articles of Confederation, Washington

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<sup>21</sup>George Washington, “The Farewell Address,” September 19, 1796, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp) [accessed May 14, 2013]

<sup>22</sup>Donald L. Robinson makes the connection between the Farewell Address as “the clearest and most detailed call to national union in the early national period” and the problem of representation at the

stressed that government for the whole union was imperative; “no alliance, however strict, between the parts” would be adequate.

The retiring president warned that responsible citizenship, political leadership, and national cohesion were impossible without religion and public virtue. The latter two were “the firmest props of the duties of men and citizens.” “Private and public felicity” were closely linked; the “national morality” needed to sustain independence and unity were not possible without them. It was all the more reason to promote “as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge.” Here, public opinion was significant, for “in proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.” Morality affected foreign relations: it enjoined the conduct of “good faith and justice towards all nations,” and the cultivation of “peace and harmony with all.”

Washington prescribed “the Great Rule of Conduct” in defense of his foreign policy as president. The United States should extend commercial relations to all foreign powers while having as little political connections to any of them as possible. Those political connections that already existed, however, should be fulfilled in good faith. The Neutrality Proclamation of April 22, 1793, was the “index” of his plan, “sanctioned” by his fellow Americans’ “approving voice,” and by that of both houses of Congress. He proclaimed that “the spirit of that measure” continually governed *him*, and that it was “uninfluenced by any attempts to deter or divert [him] from it.”

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Constitutional Convention in 1787. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, 492, n 10. See Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Chapter 4.



The Farewell Address proposed Federalism as the national creed and as the condition for neutrality. In the vein of “Publius” and the *Federalist Papers*, the address was part of the Federalist attempt to fashion “a unitary public sphere,” which admitted the presence of specific social groups, while denying the legitimacy of their interests. During previous diplomatic flashpoints, the likes of “No Jacobin” and “Camillus” acted as mouthpieces for “Publius.” With the Farewell Address’s pronouncements on the problem of union, “Publius” now spoke through George Washington. François Furstenberg aptly dubbed the Farewell Address “the last—and certainly most influential—Federalist Paper.”<sup>23</sup> During a foreign-relations crisis such as the struggle over neutrality, “local differences” could be delegitimized as threats to national security and harbingers of disunion. Moreover, Washington would smooth over the potential breakdown of “Publius’s” narrative voice.

*“A Magic in His Name”: The National Character of George Washington*

The Farewell Address' prescriptions for foreign policy viewed from within the context of the Early Republic's political culture illuminates how integral publicity was to U.S. neutrality. On one level, the address is an expression of union and the centralization of federal power. On another, it is an expression of national character. Washington as his nation's first character symbolized all that was redemptive in it. According to his public image, he was “a sacred possession” and personified “public virtue,

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<sup>23</sup>DeConde, “Washington’s Farewell,” 650; Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 6; John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic” in *Launching the “Extended Republic”: The Federalist Era*, eds., Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 309.

disinterestedness, moderation, resoluteness, private virtue, and piety.”<sup>24</sup> All of those qualities actively checked any abuse of power leading to Old World despotism, both at home and abroad.

Washington's character extended its cultural reach into American hearts and homes, connecting public and private. He was a favorite subject of poem and song, and his image was everywhere in the 1790s—on paintings, prints, lockets, coins, silverware, plates, and other miscellaneous household items. In the late eighteenth century, portraiture testified to a person's character and appearance, since it was the common belief that a face revealed mental and emotional characteristics.<sup>25</sup> John Adams presciently remarked upon the president's larger-than-life character at the beginning of the 1790s: “the history of our Revolution will be that Dr. Franklin's electric rod smote the earth and out sprung General Washington. Then Franklin electrised [sic] him with his rod, and thence-forward these two conducted all the policy, negotiations, legislatures, and war.”<sup>26</sup> Robert Liston, who had replaced George Hammond as the British minister at Philadelphia, remarked that there was “a Magic in his name more powerful in this Country than the Abilities of any other man.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Barry Schwartz, “The Character of Washington: A Study in Republican Culture,” *American Quarterly* 38 (Summer 1986): 202, 214.

<sup>25</sup>Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 121; Schwartz, 202-5; Don Higginbotham, *George Washington: Uniting a Nation* (New York, 2002), Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup>John Adams to Benjamin Rush, April 4, 1790, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 1:1207.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Liston to Lord Grenville, October 16, 1796. Quoted in Alexander DeConde, “Washington's Farewell, the French Alliance, and the Election of 1796,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43 (March, 1957): 645.

The symbol of national unity, the president commanded allegiances in both the North and the South. Examples of these exchanges of national sentiment were his tours of the East and South in 1789-1791, and celebrations of his birthday. Drawing cheering crowds wherever he went, his departure left most public men afraid that the federal government and the Constitution were vulnerable.<sup>28</sup> The Washington cult smoothed over inherent tensions between deferential participants and nationalist politics. Uniting both leaders and followers in exchanges of sentiment, he confirmed his own stature while ratifying the judgment of all who lauded his unparalleled virtue. The “father of the nation” cultivated the image of a president who engaged in a dialogue with his fellow citizens and cared what the people thought. When John Adams similarly received and exchanged addresses of support of his foreign policy during the Quasi-War, Washington's approval accompanying their appearance was an endorsement.<sup>29</sup>

Conflating Washington's popularity with “attachment” to the federal state and seeking general individual and collective conformism to “respectability” put a great burden on national unity and its representation. The partisan battles of the 1790s linked the issue of participation in public life with questions of individual and national integrity. As public sphere and foreign relations were mutually constitutive, national character allowed allegories of the Jay Treaty, or published stories about seduction, to have implications for national politics. By extension, national character had implications not

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<sup>28</sup>James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 150.

<sup>29</sup>“General Washington’s Letter to President Adams, on his appointment to the office of Commander in Chief of all the Armies of the United States,” in *A Selection of Patriotic Addresses, to the President of the United States. Together with the President’s Answers*, ed. William Austin (Boston: John W. Folsom, 1798), 349-52. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 33345.

only for politics, but foreign policy: George Washington was U.S. neutrality personified. U.S. citizens, individually and collectively, should learn to behave neutrally.

Washington consistently made these connections. Neutrality ruled his public conduct; his propriety as a private man forbade any intemperate behavior. When “steering clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world,” he understood that maxim to be “no less applicable to public than to private affairs.”<sup>30</sup> He also wished Americans “to establish a national character of [their] own, independent, as far as [their] obligations and justice would permit, of every nation of the earth . . . .” The discussion over a separate, independent national character took place within a letter to Jefferson about the latter’s potential indiscretion. Washington asked if Jefferson was the cause for Benjamin Franklin Bache’s publishing one of his cabinet memoranda in full. The implication was that Jefferson was using the public prints to foster intrigue against the federal government, and that the president had caught him in the act.<sup>31</sup>

The Farewell Address grounded itself in an earlier, familiar—and humble—style: Washington was a master of departures, particularly from power. His seeming lack of ambition was meant to be noticed in a Whiggish political culture wary of conspiracies and abuses of power. Since 1783 he already had a reputation for shunning despotism by defusing the 1783 Newburgh Conspiracy. Would-be rebels in the Continental Army encamped in Newburgh, NY, were moved to tears by the sacrifices of a war hero who had not only grown gray but also needed a pair of glasses to read his address to them:

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<sup>30</sup>George Washington to Governor Henry Lee, August 26, 1794, in Fitzpatrick, *GW: Writings*, 33:479; George Washington, “The Farewell Address,” [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp) [accessed: May 14, 2013]

<sup>31</sup>George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, July 6, 1796; George Washington to James Monroe, August 25, 1796; “Farewell Address” in Ford, *WGW*, 13:227, 309; Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 144.

Washington had become almost blind in the service of his country. The president had thought about retiring even before his inauguration in 1789, and again in 1792, when he had asked Madison to write a draft of a valedictory address.<sup>32</sup>

But Washington's use of coach and sixes on his national tours, the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793, and the Jay Treaty debate challenged this benevolent, unassuming image. For Republican critics, both he and his wife Martha represented the corruption of the "court." For those whose "country" sensibilities disdained luxury, Martha's drawing room—meant to unify the nation in its combination of the salon with republican simplicity—was little more than a seedbed of aristocracy.<sup>33</sup> That the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 was *proclaimed* provoked anger in the public prints. The proclamation was a "double-dealing" monarchical fiat that made the people subjects, and not citizens. Both proclamation and turning the people into subjects undermined the republic, the union, and the union's ongoing endeavor to be "more perfect," and by extension, U.S. neutrality.<sup>34</sup> Secret Senate proceedings over the Jay Treaty and Washington's refusal to release relevant documentation to the House upon demand furthered the accusations of "monarchy."<sup>35</sup>

Washington was strategic when it came to publicity. While drafting the address's final version, he knew that timing was as important as tone: he wished the address to be

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<sup>32</sup>George Washington, "To the Officers of the Army," March 15, 1783 in Fitzpatrick, *GW: Writings*, 26:222-27; Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 124.

<sup>33</sup>David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 320-21; Higginbotham, *George Washington*, 62.

<sup>34</sup>Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 35.

<sup>35</sup>Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 149.

written and published, and “*known also to one or two* of those characters, who are now strongest and foremost in the opposition to the government.”<sup>36</sup> Federalists knew that “Bache’s paper” aimed to “prepare the public mind, to expect a new course of conduct by the French, contrary to our Treaty, & distressing to our Commerce.”<sup>37</sup> Washington, disinclined to be “buffeted in the public prints by a set of infamous scribblers,” wished that he had published his address the day after the adjournment of Congress. With an election coming, it would have preceded canvassing for electors. It would have also announced *publicly* what was being rumored *privately* about his retirement.<sup>38</sup>

The president hoped his address would “serve to lessen, in the public estimation, the pretensions of that party to patriotic zeal and watchfulness, on which they endeavor to build their own consequence, at the expense of others who have differed from them in sentiment.”<sup>39</sup> The Farewell Address crystallized Federalist strategy of using the president's great prestige for patriotic appeal against “foreign intrigue.” It made ‘Federalist’ and ‘patriot’ synonyms in the minds of the electorate.<sup>40</sup>

### “*The Loathings of a Sick Mind*”: *Republicans Respond*

Washington’s Farewell and its prescriptions for neutral conduct provoked more questions than it answered in a partisan atmosphere wary of threats to republicanism. If

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<sup>36</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, May 15, 1796, in Ford, *WGW*, 13:191-92.

<sup>37</sup>Oliver Wolcott, Jr. to Alexander Hamilton, June 17, 1796 in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (hereafter *PAH*), ed., Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-87), 20:231.

<sup>38</sup>Washington to Hamilton, June 26, 1796 in Ford, *WGW*, 13:215. Italics are original.

<sup>39</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, May 15, 1796 in Ford, *WGW*, 13:191-92.

<sup>40</sup>DeConde, “Washington’s Farewell,” 649.

conflating Washington's popularity with “attachment” to the federal state put a great burden on national unity and its representation, then Americans wanted to know what or whom Washington represented. Soon after the Farewell Address's publication in every major newspaper in the country, they engaged in lively debate over who had written it and the nature of its purpose. Were these Washington’s words, or was Hamilton using the president as a mouthpiece for his monarchical (and Anglophile) machinations? Was Washington really as impartial as he claimed to be (and if not, what would that mean for neutrality—union at home and independence abroad)?<sup>41</sup>

Republican critics commonly suspected Washington’s virtue as partisanship in disguise. Upon receiving word that the president meant to retire, John Garland Jefferson, a Jefferson cousin wrote: “I rejoice at the news; because I consider him as a man dangerous to the liberties of this country. Misled himself, he lends his influence to others, and by his name gives a sanction to the most dangerous measures. For this reason I am glad he means to decline.”<sup>42</sup> Jefferson’s writings are silent on Washington’s valediction, but in a letter to Monroe, he earlier decried the president’s popularity, influence, and hold on the people’s affections. Another Republican, Virginian Henry Tazewell, observed the following reactions among Americans to the Farewell Address:

Some suppose, that to lessen the American attachment to France, & to strengthen that towards Gt. Britain produced that perplexed posture of Affairs which occasioned the suppression of the first Address, because they know of no other great Events that have brightened the political Hemisphere of America. *Others are not willing to become disciples of that moral Teacher who while he instructs*

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<sup>41</sup>Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 121-22. The *Courier of New Hampshire* coined the term “Farewell Address.”

<sup>42</sup>John Garland Jefferson to Thomas Jefferson, September 21, 1796, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. Barbara B. Oberg, 40 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 29:185; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 517.

*them to forgive their enemies, enjoins them to forget their Friends, for they profess not to understand that impartiality which requires them to put friends and Foes upon the same footing.* Others again read with jealousy that recommendation which seems to make a national established Religion a prerequisite to a fixed System of national morality.<sup>43</sup>

The noticeable ambiguity heightened alarm over larger issues that foreign relations had thrust at the center of public discussion: of centralization, the relationship between the people and their government, and enlightened republican candor.<sup>44</sup> The Republican press skewered the address as “the loathings of a sick mind;” nothing more than “aggravating recollections of wounded pride” discharged under the form of sage advice to the president's beloved country.<sup>45</sup> Editors attempted to undermine its impact. When it appeared in its entirety in the Boston *Independent Chronicle* on September 26, 1796, Thomas Adams juxtaposed it with descriptions of pro-French toasts and gatherings. Notable also was the presence at those gatherings of French minister Pierre Auguste Adet, who had succeeded Joseph Fauchet.<sup>46</sup>

Republicans answered the Farewell Address with further attacks on the president's character that complemented earlier ones from the Jay Treaty debate. Benjamin Franklin Bache, whose Philadelphia *Aurora* had become the most influential Republican

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<sup>43</sup>Jefferson to Monroe, June 12, 1796, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 124; Jefferson to Madison, March 27, 1796, *Ibid.*, 51; Henry Tazewell to James Madison, October 3, 1796, *The Papers of James Madison, Congressional Series* (hereafter *PJM.*), ed. J. C. A. Stagg, Thomas A. Mason, and Jeanne K. Sisson, 17 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1962-), 16: 405-408. Author's emphasis.

<sup>44</sup>Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 242.

<sup>45</sup>William Duane, *A Letter to George Washington . . . Containing Strictures of His Address* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin Bache, 1796), 26 (Dated November 12, 1796). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 31315.

<sup>46</sup>*Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), September 22, 26, 1796; Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism* (Charlottesville, 2011), 97.



newspaper, published and sold Thomas Paine's *Letter to George Washington* as a pamphlet.<sup>47</sup> Paine, who had for some time languished in prison for having fallen afoul of Robespierre's government, had expected Washington to intervene on his behalf: the president of the United States, like himself, had been given the honorary title “*citoyen*.” Paine sent bitter letters to Washington, the majority of them indirectly through Bache, but received no reply.<sup>48</sup>

When Gouveneur Morris, then U.S. minister in Paris, could not secure his release, Paine complained bitterly that Washington was “treacherous in private friendship . . . and a hypocrite in public life.” As for the president's republicanism, “the world will be puzzled to decide, whether you are an apostate or an impostor; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any.”<sup>49</sup> Paine had felt the need to speak out, since “the American character is so much sunk in Europe that it is necessary to distinguish between the Government and the Country.”<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, Washington was hardly impartial when it came to foreign policy. Bache also sold *A View of the Conduct of the Executive* in 1797, a book-length account of James Monroe's experiences as U.S. minister to France. Washington had nominated Monroe as minister to replace Morris on May 28, 1794 in the hope that the latter's French

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<sup>47</sup>Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 128. By early 1794, Bache's *Aurora and General Advertiser* had replaced Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* as the leading voice of Republican opposition.

<sup>48</sup>James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 282.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas Paine, *Letter to George Washington, President of the United States of America. On Affairs Public and Private* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin Bache, 1796). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 30951.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas Paine to Benjamin Franklin Bache, August 7, 1796, quoted in Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 283.

sympathies would gain him a favorable audience and smooth over tensions in Franco-American relations. Monroe's enthusiastic reception and unabashed Republicanism delighted the French but displeased Federalists at home, leading to his recall in 1796. Moreover, he proposed to communicate his pro-French views through the Philadelphia *Aurora*.

Monroe's official instructions were to strengthen Franco-American relations, negotiate a lifting of French restrictions on U.S. commerce at the outbreak of the Anglo-French War in 1793, and to insist on compensation for capture and spoliation of U.S. property and injure of U.S. citizens by French cruisers. Rather than foster French acceptance of the Jay Treaty, he redefined his mission to favor the French cause, threatening to embarrass the United States and endanger Anglo-American relations. Federalists Oliver Wolcott and Timothy Pickering showed Washington a letter that Monroe had written to Philadelphia Republican George Logan. Monroe offered to provide Logan with a regular series of letters about affairs in France from "a gentleman in France to his friend in Philadelphia," for possible communication to the public through Bache's newspaper. Washington and his cabinet subsequently decided to recall Monroe.<sup>51</sup>

Monroe's defense of his conduct, "illustrated by his Instructions and Correspondence and other authentic documents," questioned Washington's competence as the country's executive in foreign relations. He meant to expose for the benefit of

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<sup>51</sup>James Monroe, *A View of the Conduct of the Executive in the Foreign Affairs of the United States, Connected with the Mission to the French Republic, During the Years 1794, 5, & 6* (Philadelphia, 1797). Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Temple University Libraries. [accessed May 16 2013] Gale Document Number: CW104746061; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 498-513.

“every dispassionate mind” that the president had reprimanded him for warmth toward France, since “we were likely to give offense to other countries, *particularly England, with whom we were in treaty.*”<sup>52</sup> It was not the president’s heroic character that had secured the independence of the United States, but French intervention.<sup>53</sup>

William Duane’s *A Letter to George Washington*, however, went further than attacking the president’s character by directly attacking the Farewell Address. Duane, an American journalist and Republican, had recently returned to the United States from England. He would later take the helm of the *Aurora* from Bache upon the latter’s death. Duane denounced the address and the Washington personality cult. His letter also targeted the political and ideological conformity—the “idolatry”—needed to sustain it.<sup>54</sup>

Published under the pseudonym “Jasper Dwight,” *A Letter to George Washington* connected Washington’s lack of candor and susceptibility to foreign seduction and intrigue. The address was “fraught with incalculable evils to your country!” As “a most serious lesson indeed to the people of America, and to every other nation who *may yet have to adopt a model* in realizing their Liberties,” it imperiled republican government as well as the American Revolution.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the “dismal, sullen” and “uniform” public silence greeting the Farewell Address in a union otherwise teeming with discord that should have “told the [president’s] apprehensions *there is something wrong!*”

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<sup>52</sup>Monroe, *View of the Conduct of the Executive*, xviii, xxiii. Original emphasis.

<sup>53</sup>Washington possessed a copy of Monroe’s book in his library in Mount Vernon, and heavily annotated it with his comments in the margin. Washington’s comments answer Monroe’s criticisms, and also suggest that the latter was duped by French flattery. See Ford, *WGW*, 13:452-490.

<sup>54</sup>Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 246-7; Richard S. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 33-34.

<sup>55</sup>William Duane, *A Letter to George Washington*, 6. Original emphasis.

*A Letter to George Washington* strongly objected to three points: 1) what relates to the permanency and indivisibility of the Union. 2) On Party, Civil Liberty, and Religion. 3) The best policy with regard to foreign nations. Moreover, he objected to the “spirit of ambiguity and recrimination, blended with maxims good and evil, that are at variance with each other and that magnanimity and openness which would bespeak conscious virtue and become the true friend of freedom.”<sup>56</sup> If Washington wished to “[dictate] *lessons professedly for the advantage of his fellow citizens, and calculated to make a strong and lasting impression—to moderate the fury of party rage—to warn against the mischief of foreign intrigues—to guard against the impostures of pretended Patriotism,*” then he ought to be candid. “Duplicity and reserve, self-sufficiency and secrecy, have been heretofore the cloaks which covered the wily mischiefs of politicians in all the governments of the old world,” and thoroughly at odds with Washington's public and private conduct as well as his advice to Americans.<sup>57</sup> The secrecy surrounding the Jay Treaty showed that the president had “listened to the seductions of [his] deadliest enemies, in opposition to the voice of Freedom which hates disguise.” Secrecy had “discolored” and “jaundiced” American politics with “despotism and cabinet cunning,” thereby rendering “*pure republicanism*” a “*fiction*.”<sup>58</sup>

Washington's lack of candor, Duane contended, created an opening for a British faction to take the reins of government by stealth and seduction. Furthermore, the president's “violent adulators” would “disparage the cause of Liberty by attempting under

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<sup>56</sup>Duane, *Letter to George Washington*, 9.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

the cloak of *literary dictatorship* to persuade *unlettered* men, that our constitution is not a *democracy*.”<sup>59</sup> The subsistence of an organized faction, secretly financed by British gold, proved that Washington, for all his advice about disinterestedness, had let his passions get the better of him. Sermons against “[entangling]” the peace and prosperity of the United States “in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice” notwithstanding, Washington had signed the *British Treaty*.<sup>60</sup> Worse, he had done so against the “*delegated will* of the nation,” disregarding it as “either unfit, incapable, or unworthy of previous counsel or subsequent deliberation on the subject of the treaty.” Moreover, who did the Constitution designate to determine where freedom of opinion and association became sedition?

Likewise, Benjamin Franklin Bache believed that only enemies of popular freedom could find the Farewell Address acceptable. Washington’s “improper influence” and “designs against the public liberty” had “debauched” and “deceived” the people out of their enlightened republicanism. His example demonstrated that “the masque of patriotism may be worn to conceal the foulest designs against the liberties of a people.”<sup>61</sup> The Farewell Address confirmed Republican suspicions about secrecy. The day after John Adams’s inauguration on March 5, 1797, Bache’s Philadelphia *Aurora* kept up its attack on Washington. Quoting the *Nunc Dimittis* from St. Luke’s Gospel, the *Aurora* claimed that salvation of the country came not from the Messiah’s presentation in the Temple, but in the form of the president’s departure. Washington’s departure meant that

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<sup>59</sup>Duane, *Letter to George Washington*, 15.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 19. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>61</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), December 21, 23, 1796; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1696), 532.

the people could rejoice: public measures were now forced to “stand upon their own merits, and nefarious projects can no longer be supported by a name.”<sup>62</sup>

But political iniquity, corruption, and any single individual canceling the principles of republicanism via designs against public liberty further fixated Americans on issue that they were unwilling to be candid about. If national character made the personal nationally political and vice versa, then whatever tainted Washington’s own neutral behavior also called into question his prescriptions for neutral behavior regarding everybody else.

*Habitual Fondness and Habitual Hatred: The Farewell Address, Diplomatic Lessons, and the Politics of Slavery*

The Farewell Address and Washington himself provided Americans not only with an example of republican virtue but also a diplomatic role model to emulate. One of the lessons that the address imparted was the danger of foreign influence on public opinion. Slavery emerges out of the textual dynamics of the Farewell Address in the very question of susceptibility to foreign seduction. It also emerges in the document’s ambiguity over the identity of the real perpetrators of intrigue and their American accomplices.

Although diplomatic and political historians do not usually mention slavery and neutrality together before the nineteenth century, the Farewell Address's slight reference to it deserves mention. Washington’s critics zeroed in on it with some emotional vehemence, with frequent use of italics and capital letters. Chattel slavery pointed to the intertwined issues of consent of the governed and republican national character. While

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<sup>62</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), March 6, 1797; “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation” [Luke 2:29-32].

Washington spoke privately against chattel slavery, he was largely silent on the issue as president and a national leader, despite calls for him to address it.<sup>63</sup> Historians of slavery have noted how “meaningful silences” over its existence—certainly in the Constitution itself—can speak volumes.<sup>64</sup> The Farewell Address more explicitly connected that meaningful silence to the nation, its body politic, and its foreign policy through Washington's character. Moreover, Washington's character lent credence to the Federalist interpretation of constitutional power, which the Jay Treaty debate demonstrated, triggered recourse to the politics of slavery.

Both Republicans and Federalists would read their Francophile or Anglophile opponents into Washington's counsels against “party spirit” born of and exacerbated by foreign affairs. As discussed in Chapter 3, Senate Republicans' orchestrated leak of the Jay Treaty provided context for the pressing of the slavery issue. Through their attacks on Washington's character, Northern Republicans active in the Early Republic's print politics turned “artful, impolitic” questions about the relationship between foreign subservience and slave-holding back on the Federalists. If that relationship applied to Washington himself, it suggested alternative diplomatic lessons about what could endanger U.S. neutrality.

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<sup>63</sup>L. Scott Philyaw, “Washington and Slavery” in Lengel, *A Companion to George Washington*, 105; Fritz Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery: A Documentary Portrayal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997); Dorothy Twohig, “‘That Species of Property’: Washington's Role in the Controversy over Slavery” in *George Washington Reconsidered*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Charlottesville: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 114-138; Henry Wiencek, *Imperfect God: George Washington, his Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 351-353.

<sup>64</sup>See John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); George Van Cleeve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: from Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 3-56.

The Farewell Address reinforced familiar Whig rhetoric of avoiding metaphorical enslavement.<sup>65</sup> A nation is enslaved by its animosity or affection, both of which are “sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest.”<sup>66</sup> But before, during, and after the American Revolution, metaphorical slavery segued easily into discussions of actual, chattel slavery. The existence of chattel slavery “undermined both republican consent and the very unity post-Revolutionary nationalism sought to enact.”<sup>67</sup> It also undermined the disinterestedness and public virtue that Washington claimed were crucial for neutrality in the “index” of his plan.<sup>68</sup>

The document does not directly mention chattel slavery in its portrait of union, nation, and the ties that bound one section to the other in its portrait of sameness over difference. But that national portrait heightened Republican fears of centralized federal power, particularly in the South. Washington’s Northern opponents and critics in the public sphere seized upon his mention of foreign enslavement, read into it his silence on chattel slavery, and connected it to his conduct in ways that had implications for publicity and correct morality in foreign relations. While the Jay Treaty debate was on the horizon, editorials in Republican newspapers complaining about some Northerners’ “artful impolitic” and “insulting” questions about slavery also admonished those

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<sup>65</sup>Dorsey, *Common Bondage*, xi.

<sup>66</sup>George Washington, The Farewell Address, September 19, 1796.  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp) [accessed: April 10, 2013]

<sup>67</sup>Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 17.

<sup>68</sup>Schwartz, “The Character of George Washington,” 4; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).



Northerners' rudeness for implicating the president by association.<sup>69</sup> When the Farewell Address followed the passage of a treaty that raised questions at the national level about whether Northerners would protect Southern interests, however, the mood changed.

Northern Republican attacks mentioning Washington's slaveholding built on earlier attacks on the president's "monarchical" character and his "British" sympathies. Bache's *Aurora* had published editorials that criticized Washington's slave-holding in late 1795 and early 1796. Federalist hacks like the increasingly widely read Peter Porcupine, whom Republicans accused of being a paid British stooge, were well known for their scurrility. For Bache, there was no reason to exempt "the father of the nation" from intense criticism when his support of Congressional secrecy foisted "the British Treaty" on the people. While Republican critics of Washington were not as scurrilous as Cobbett, the private conduct of public men was fair game, and turnabout was fair play.

Washington's letters concerning the Farewell Address display a keen sense—and dislike—of the rise of newspapermen and their politics of publicity. Washington detested scurrility as well as what it potentially dredged up. Jefferson later noted that one of the *Aurora's* pieces on the president's slaveholding caused the latter to slam the newspaper on the ground, uttering "damn."<sup>70</sup> One such editorial used slavery to attack both Federalist idolatry and the president's vaunted impartiality:

the writers in the *Gazette of the United States*, who are so very liberal of their reflections upon *slave-holders*, like all zealots have marked themselves as victims of their own denunciations. In *their* estimation, the president is

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<sup>69</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), February 12, 1795. Reprint from the *Boston Chronicle* (Boston, MA)

<sup>70</sup>Benjamin Rush to John Adams, June 4, 1812, quoted in Rosenfeld, *American Aurora*, 28.

everything great, virtuous, and disinterested. Such is his infallibility with them that he can do no wrong, how then will they reconcile his being a *slave-holder*!<sup>71</sup>

Another read: “while the faction pretend adoration for the President; because they conceive his name alone can now prop their sinking cause, they cannot get over their real antipathy for him as a Southern man and whenever they can do it slyly, throw in his teeth his being a *slave-holder*.”<sup>72</sup> Translation: Federalists were hypocrites for denouncing Southern slaveholders when their paragon of virtue and disinterestedness was one, himself. In addition, Bache published and sold a pamphlet entitled “An Expostulatory letter, TO GEN. WASHINGTON (Late President of the United States) ON THE SUBJECT OF HIS CONTINUING A PROPRIETOR OF SLAVES. Written by a citizen of Liverpool,” its author, Edward Rushton, said, “Shame! Shame! That man should be deemed the property of man or that the name of Washington should be found among the lists of such proprietors.”<sup>73</sup>

William Duane's aforementioned direct attack on the Farewell Address and Federalist idolatry of Washington directly suggested that slaveholding undermined his virtue and morals, and therefore neutrality. The president's defense of Christian virtue was “blind temerity” when his slave-holding was in “violation of its *most sacred obligations*, of the *dearest ties of humanity*, and in *defiance of the sovereign calls of*

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<sup>71</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA) December 29, 1795 (original emphasis); See also April 11, 12, 16, 1796; January 23, 1797. The last one is a reprint of Jasper Dwight's (William Duane's) passionate remarks in his *Letter to George Washington*, on the Farewell Address, published in 1796

<sup>72</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA) October 21, 1795. All emphasis original. The piece continues, citing some lines of verse from the *Gazette of the United States* that extolled Washington's bravery as a righteous war hero. Moreover, Washington was a great public figure, though he would have been “*greater far, were slavery exiled from his rural home.*”

<sup>73</sup>For the “Expostulatory Letter,” see related advertisement in *Aurora*, March 9, 1798; Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 192.

*morality and liberty.*”<sup>74</sup> Duane also linked Washington's slaveholding with his lack of candor: who was the president to lecture his countrymen and tutor them on disinterestedness when he “[dealt] in HUMAN SLAVES!”? Releasing his slaves from “their unchristian bondage and ignorance” would provide a true example of disinterestedness: “virtue—that morality—of the sincerity of your love of liberty—of benevolence—of charity—of the love of God and most benign religion, to your country, which you *declare* to be the main springs of every government, 'the great pillars of human happiness, and the firmest props of the duties of men and citizen.’”<sup>75</sup>

In addition, defining “slavery” as either habitual hatred or habitual fondness for any particular nation was “a new mode of reasoning hatred of slavery into love of oppressors.”<sup>76</sup> If this “new political sophism” were generalized and “reduced to the standard of common sense,” it meant that virtue and vices distinguish nations in various degrees. Habitual fondness of nation’s vices rendered one to some degree a slave to them. But if a nation were conspicuously virtuous, a habitual love for those virtues would not amount to slavery, for virtue and slavery could not coexist. So which nation endangered the United States more by infecting them with its vices? For Duane, this was a moral question, connected with the actual form and character of government—monarchy or republic.

Washington’s lack of virtue threatened neutrality, the nation, and the American Revolution because he linked Revolutionary past to national future. Posterity would

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<sup>74</sup>Duane, *Letter to George Washington*, 34. Original emphasis.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., Italics and caps are original.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 36-7.

discover that the humble war hero of the Revolution and of Newburgh fame had fought against the British during the Revolutionary War due to disappointed ambition: if he had obtained promotion after General Braddock's defeat, he would have turned against his country. Furthermore, “the great champion of American Freedom, the rival of Timoleon and Cincinnatus, twenty years after the establishment of the Republic, was possessed of FIVE HUNDRED of the HUMAN SPECIES IN SLAVERY, enjoying THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOR WITHOUT RENUMERATION, OR EVEN THE CONSOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.”<sup>77</sup>

Bondage deprived black slaves of the very props of union and republic that the Farewell Address argued made neutrality and detachment from other nations possible. That Washington “retained the barbarous usages of the feudal system, and kept men in LIVERY” hardly befitted the conduct—and character—of a “disinterested, virtuous, liberal, and unassuming man.”<sup>78</sup> Human bondage, in depriving slaves of the virtues that supported neutrality deprived their owners of the same. Chattel slavery's existence also suggested that the union's balance of power was no better than the Old World kind, and neither “more perfect” nor enlightened.

Republican journalist Philip Freneau, whom Washington called “that rascal Freneau,” lamented the compromise of the American Revolution's anti-slavery future. His Philadelphia *National Gazette* having folded, Freneau founded the New York *Time*

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<sup>77</sup>Duane, *Letter to George Washington*, 48. Caps are original; in Duane's pamphlet, the words referring to Washington's five-hundred slaves are in greater caps, and those referring to said slaves not being able to enjoy the fruits of their labor or the consolations of religious instruction are in lesser caps.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

*Piece* in 1797.<sup>79</sup> He exhorted Washington to address a pressing “moral sentiment of the world on the injustice and cruelty of man holding man in bondage; and in a country, too, that prides itself in having given the first spring to a universal emancipation from the fangs of tyrants.” For:

There are not a few in these States who, notwithstanding all that has been said to the contrary, are still of the opinion that the patriotic Washington, who headed the Americans at a crisis that tried the heart of man, in sublime cause of liberty and virtue, will come forward before the ingress of the approaching century (big with the most tremendous events) and shew [sic] an example to the world, that the people of republican America will not be the last to advance this grand object, the emancipation of slaves, by such means as the legislative wisdom of the Union shall deem it advisable to adopt. To suppose the continuance of the old *servile system* in this country, would be to suppose a halt in the progress of man towards that political perfect, which Plato of old and Condorcet in our own times, have given the world reason to believe is not wholly ideal.<sup>80</sup>

As Northern Republican criticisms of Washington indicated, chattel slavery threatened the republic's federal union from within. But the rise of powerful “Southern” interests that demanded reconciliation within Republican nationalism and its foreign-policy outlook would force Northern Republicans to make uneasy compromises with slaveholding.<sup>81</sup> The Farewell Address’s references to habitual affection or hatred for foreign nations as “slavery” provided partisans in both parties with ways to connect metaphorical slavery with *actual* chattel slavery as they attacked each other’s foreign-policy objectives. But those opportunities turned out to be double-edged. Northern

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<sup>79</sup>Jacob Axelrad, *Philip Freneau: Champion of Democracy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 283-85.

<sup>80</sup>*The Time Piece* (New York, NY) May 26, 1797. Italics are original; see Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 157, for references to the Farewell Address's “silence” on slavery; Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 532; for reference to “that rascal Freneau,” see Everett Emerson, ed., *American Literature, 1764-1789: The Revolutionary Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 137.

<sup>81</sup>Padraig Riley, “Slavery and the Problem of Democracy in Jeffersonian America,” in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, ed. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 234.

Republicans used slavery to attack Federalists' Washingtonian codification of the national character and expose the Farewell Address's double-speak. But publicized proof of French treachery as Franco-American relations worsened emboldened Federalists to step up their game.

Throughout the mid-1790s up until the end of the decade, Federalists explicitly linked French revolutionary intrigue with Republicans, in particular Southern slaveholders, identifying the latter as threats to neutrality and national security. In addition, the reciprocal relationship between foreign relations and the public sphere ensured that the ideology of national character was also reciprocal. Attacks on Washington's slaveholding within the context of the Farewell Address projected the local onto the national level: if the private lives of public men could endanger the union and its neutrality, tainting the national character, it followed that certain quarters of the union, whose inhabitants harbored certain "peculiar" iniquities, could endanger it, also.<sup>82</sup>

National character placing a heavy burden of conformity in representation individually and collectively meant that criticism of a collective did not exempt individuals. Not even prestigious ones. Exposés of dirty secrets held in common by direct participation or indirect association could cut both ways simultaneously. But how those dirty secrets could—or would—be repressed or employed as political weapons also depended greatly upon whose nationalism and national interest were involved. The Farewell Address and the controversy it provoked were allowing slavery to calibrate national consensus.

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<sup>82</sup>See William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1795), discussed in Chapter 3; Riley, "Slavery and the Problem of Democracy in Jeffersonian America," 227-246.

Nationalism and national interest were themselves contingent upon international balances of power that in turn affected ones within the union. Slavery was becoming more of a source of vulnerability for Republican nationalism. Republicans had to command allegiances both North and South in order to project their interests nationally, lest they become reducible to a faction. Federalist power began to wane South of the Potomac in the aftermath of the Jay Treaty. As Tench Coxe (“Juricola”) and Hamilton (“Camillus”) had alluded earlier, either slavery was a national issue or it was not. Take a stab at Washington's slaveholding though they might, Northern Republicans found themselves squeezed both by Northern Federalist condemnation of Southern slaveholding in response to Republican attacks, and an increasing identification of Republican interests with Southern ones.

*With Friends like These...: Adet, “Foreign Influence,” and the Election of 1796*

The Farewell Address turned the tug-of-war in Franco-American relations, public opinion, and national character into one over national security. The anxiety that the address wrought in some quarters made the election of 1796 (November 4 to December 7) the stage for a form of political debate that was dangerous for national unity. Two differing political visions were offered to the public, making the election critical. Seizing upon the vigilance in public opinion recommended by Washington, Federalists and Republicans accused each other of colluding with the enemy, thereby denying the other any kind of legitimacy.<sup>83</sup> In keeping with earlier attacks, Republicans recognized the

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<sup>83</sup>Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment: The Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1792-1812*, trans. Lillian A. Parrott (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 56.

Farewell Address as a Federalist campaign document and far from “impartial.”

Federalists employed the electoral tactic of capturing the center by shifting the terms of the Republican equation between the French cause and majority rule at home. They cast the French as intriguers who plotted against the American people and their government.<sup>84</sup>

What aided the Federalists immensely was that they were not entirely wrong. The French minister, Pierre Auguste Adet, played into their hands as if on cue: he—and his predecessors, Genet and Fauchet—became a prominent example of everything the Farewell Address had warned against. Undoubtedly, the Jay Treaty displeased Adet. The Senate had approved the treaty eleven days after his arrival in the United States on June 5, 1795. He had lobbied vigorously against the Jay Treaty, repeatedly attempting to kill it for two months thereafter until the Senate ratified it and Washington signed it into law.<sup>85</sup> By late 1795 the Directory had seen the Jay Treaty as nullifying the treaties of 1778, defining American neutrality as pro-English and as hostile to France. James Monroe, then U.S. minister in Paris, reported that France regarded the United States as “a perfidious friend.”<sup>86</sup>

Upon learning that the House of Representatives was unable to block passage of the treaty, Adet acted on the Directory's permission to intervene directly in the upcoming election of 1796. Moreover, he knew that the French cause in the United States was up against the “sharp calumnies” unleashed by “libelers in pay of Great Britain” like Peter

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<sup>84</sup>Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 155.

<sup>85</sup>Alexander DeConde, “Washington’s Farewell, the French Alliance, and the Election of 1796,” 643. See Chapter 3 for details of Adet’s role in Benjamin Franklin Bache’s orchestrated public leak of the Jay Treaty.

<sup>86</sup>Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams: The Collapse of Federalism, 1795-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 77.



Porcupine.<sup>87</sup> In the wake of the Farewell Address, the Adet brouhaha provided Federalists with a basis to craft for public consumption a master narrative about foreign intrigue, misinformation, public sentiment, and diplomatic (mis)conduct.

As was the case with Genet and Fauchet, Adet's activities in the United States are a study in the wielding of publicity and sentiment as diplomatic weapons. He informed his superiors in Paris how he in fact involved himself in U.S. electoral politics: in his trip to Boston in late August of 1796, Adet found Republicans interpreting the apparent silence from France as a sign of abandonment. Disheartened, they were about to forfeit the election to the Federalists. In response, he “lifted their beaten courage once more and reanimated their spirits” by reassuring them that the French Republic stood with them. Adet conveyed to them that France harbored a lively indignation at the news of the Jay Treaty, prized the efforts made by the friends of liberty, and would not abandon its American allies to the mercies of Great Britain. The result of his encouragement was a promise from those Republicans that they would agitate anew in order to turn out an electoral victory for Jefferson.

France needed to capitalize on the situation. Adet reported to his superiors that the American people favored France; they thought Adams an Anglophile and would not vote for him. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Massachusetts and New Hampshire (both Federalist stomping grounds) were not “sufficiently enlightened” in their opinions and conduct. They could readily be guided by “perfidious men” whose aim was to get Adams

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<sup>87</sup>Pierre Auguste Adet to the Minister of Foreign Relations, June 4, 1796, in “Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903* (hereafter *AHA Report 1903*), ed. Frederick Jackson Turner, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:915-917. Adet's dispatch actually mentions Porcupine by name, and with emphasis (the AHA Report uses italics).

elected, and who worked to establish a long-term monarchical aristocracy.<sup>88</sup> Republicans in New England were operating in enemy territory, and needed French help.

Federalists of course noticed the French minister's efforts among Republicans and the popular response to them. George Cabot of Massachusetts noted some of his fellow Bostonians feting and entertaining Adet at Concert Hall. The French minister himself relayed to his superiors that these francophile Bostonians had seized the opportunity to fete him, and many toasts were drunk (Adet enclosed these toasts with his missive). Cabot was "extremely mortified to see this sort of testimonial in favor of French politics given by the best citizens when it is known that the undue influence of that nation among the people already endangers the union and government of the U.S." Mr. Adet was entitled to as courteous a welcome as Americans could muster, but "Ox Feasts" tended to "confirm in the minds of the people opinions which are extremely insidious."<sup>89</sup>

The uproar came when Adet involved himself in a newspaper brawl with Secretary of State Timothy Pickering beginning on October 27, 1796. Adet addressed a series of diplomatic notes to the Washington administration (dated October 27 and November 15), which he subsequently published in Bache's *Aurora*. The *Aurora* produced in summary his direct appeal to the people and sharply worded critique of U.S. neutrality. In effect, Adet announced the suspension of diplomatic relations between

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<sup>88</sup>Pierre Auguste Adet to Minister of Foreign Relations, September 24, 1796 in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:947-49; Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment*, 58.

<sup>89</sup>Adet to Minister of Foreign Relations, September 24, 1796 in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:947-49; George Cabot to Rufus King, September 24, 1796, Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York NY.

France and the United States and implied that only Jefferson's election might prevent war between the two countries.<sup>90</sup>

But both the American government and *the American people*, he pointed out, could be assured that these measures did not amount to a declaration of *war*. A declaration of *discontent* only, it would last until the United States came to its senses and restored the friendship sworn by the two nations. In the meantime, he would, for the benefit of “all of the American friends of liberty,” publicly contrast the conduct of the French Republic with that of the United States. Furthermore, he would reflect on the “strange change” that had produced a union with the latter and Great Britain, when the former had so vehemently fought for American independence.<sup>91</sup>

In his note, Adet reviewed French complaints against alleged American violations of the French treaties that dated back to 1793. Not surprisingly, the Jay Treaty was among them. Its abrogation of the 1778 alliance constituted the primary grievance of France against the United States. Not only did it deprive France of its previous exclusive privileges under the 1778 treaty by now sharing it with Britain, but also the negotiation was “covered with a veil of dissimulation.”<sup>92</sup> A marked contrast—and challenge—to

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<sup>90</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), November 16, 1796; DeConde, “Washington’s Farewell,” 653-54; Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 131; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 151.

<sup>91</sup>Charles-François Delacroix to Pierre Auguste Adet, August 24, 28, 1796, quoted in Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 255. Here, Bowman quotes Adet's original italics found in letters from Charles Delacroix, the Directory's first minister of external affairs, available in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondence Politique, Etats-Unis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, with copies at the Library of Congress. Adet's letter is printed in full in *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* (hereafter *ASP:FR*), ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, 6 vols., Washington, 1833, 1:579-667.

<sup>92</sup>Instructions to the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic to the United States of America (Adet), October 23, 1794 in Turner, *AHA Report 1903*, 2:721; Pierre Auguste Adet, October 27, 1796 in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASP: FR*, 1:583; Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 127; Bowman, 265.

Washington's Farewell, Adet's public critique of U.S. neutrality ended with an appeal to the "ancient friendship" between the two peoples and an appeal to gratitude. Echoing Genet's exhortation to "return to true principles" and discuss matters as republicans, Adet admonished, "let your government *return to itself* and you will still find in Frenchmen faithful friends and generous allies."<sup>93</sup>

Since the United States had abandoned strict neutrality by "sacrificing to England the modern maxims of public law," France would treat the United States the same way it had allowed itself to be treated by the British.<sup>94</sup> "[N]eutral Governments, or allies of the republic, [have] nothing to fear as to the treatment of their flag by the French, since, if, keeping within the bounds of their neutrality, they cause the rights of that neutrality to be respected by the English, the republic will respect them." But he warned that "if, through weakness, partiality, or other motives, they should suffer the English to sport with that neutrality, and turn it to their advantage, could they then complain when France, to restore the balance of neutrality to its equilibrium, shall act in the same manner as the English?"<sup>95</sup> The 1778 alliance was always dear to Frenchmen; it was the United States who wished to weaken it.

Washington wondered if Adet's arrangement to have his note published in the *Aurora* was by order of the Directory or the minister's own initiative. In any case, the

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<sup>93</sup>*Claypoole's Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), November 21, 1796. Author's italics.

<sup>94</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle For Neutrality*, 243, 255; Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 10.

<sup>95</sup>Pierre Auguste Adet, October 27, November 15, 1796 in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASP: FR*, 1:577, 583.

president believed the letter could prove poisonous if not promptly answered: in the absence of a reply, the public might think that Adet's charges were just. He was equally concerned that the dignity of the Government was being challenged by participation in “a Newspaper dispute” with the minister of a foreign nation, and his apparent appeal to the people. What if the people thought, Washington pondered, “that we can bear *everything* from one of the Belligerent Powers, but *nothing* from another of them?”<sup>96</sup>

Bache had only provided summaries of Adet's note, tantalizing the public with “other parts promised to be eked out.” Not to be caught off guard by Bache yet again, Washington deemed it best “to give the *entire* letter to the public from authority.”<sup>97</sup> The president once more relied upon David Claypoole, who published the note in response to Bache's *Aurora*. Adet's critique, in the form of a letter to Pickering, took up ninety-four columns of *Claypoole's Gazette* on November 21, 1796. By early 1797, Adet's notes had been printed and sold as a pamphlet, in French, with a translation facing each page.<sup>98</sup>

Madison lamented the timing of Adet's dispatches, noting that it was “working all the evil with which it was pregnant.”<sup>99</sup> The Federalists reaped advantages from his indiscretions and wasted no time in baldly calling them a “political maneuver” to which the opponents of the Jay Treaty had led the French. Madison warned: “unless the

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<sup>96</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, November 2, 1796 in Ford, *WGW*, 13:325. Original emphasis.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, November 21, 1796, *Ibid.*, 13:336. Original emphasis. The pamphlet was entitled “Notes addressed by Citizen Adet, Minister Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to the United States, to the Secretary of State of the United States.” See Washington to David Stuart, January 8, 1797, *Ibid.*, 13:358.

<sup>99</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 267.

unhappy effect of [Adet's dispatches] here & cause of it in France, be speedily obviated by wise councils & healing measures, the crisis will unquestionably be perverted into a perpetual alienation of the two Countries by the secret enemies of both.”<sup>100</sup> Bache's *Aurora* had openly accused New York *Minerva* editor, Noah Webster, of being “a *jackall* [sic] of a British faction,” who sought to undermine republicanism by pursuing “nothing less than a rupture with the French Republic.”<sup>101</sup> The *Gazette of the United States* called Adet’s actions more egregious than Genet’s “appeal to the people.” William Cobbett accused Adet and France of intrigue in their relations with the United States. He published the minister's notes to Pickering with commentary as Federalist propaganda, and took care to note that Adet had published them “*without the approbation of consent of the American government.*”<sup>102</sup>

Federalist leaders such as Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr. and Alexander Hamilton feared that if Jefferson were elected, it would be owing to the French minister’s efforts. They viewed his activities, which addressed the people directly “in a declamatory rhapsody” and appealed “to their passions,” as “by far the most bold

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<sup>100</sup>James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, December 5, 1796 in *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition* (hereafter *PJM, Digital Ed.*), ed. J. C. A. Stagg, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2010. <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-01-16-02-0280> [accessed May 15, 2013]

<sup>101</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA) December 2, 1796, referenced in the notes to James Monroe to James Madison, September 26, 1796 in Stagg et al., *PJM*, 16: 400-401.

<sup>102</sup>Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 294. See William Cobbett, *The Gros Mousequeton Diplomatique; Or Diplomatic Blunderbuss: Containing Citizen Adet's Notes to the Secretary of State. As Also His Cockade Proclamation. With a Preface, by Peter Porcupine* (Philadelphia: William Cobbett, 1796). Author’s emphasis.

attempt to govern this country which has been made.” In the circumstances, “measures to prevent any panick or depression of the public opinion are necessary.”<sup>103</sup>

Federalist connections between French intrigue and the South that had steadily emerged since the beginning of the neutrality crisis were further crystallizing as well. Wolcott, who subscribed to the ongoing Federalist *idée fixe* that Southerners (and “Southernness”) endangered the union, wrote: “if the impressions be yielded to by the southern states, and produce the alteration in the system of national administration, which the Directory wish, it will celebrate an event which our southern people above all others ought to dread.”<sup>104</sup>

Hamilton’s “The Answer” appeared in Noah Webster’s New York *Minerva* on December 8, 1796. “Americanus” noted that the “tone of reproach”—and timing—of the French minister’s appeal. The French intended to “influence timid minds to vote agreeably to their wishes in the election of President and Vice-President, and probably with this view, the memorial was published in the newspapers.” Observing how much domestic politics and foreign relations affected each other, he alluded to the danger of democracy in foreign relations: “this is certainly a practice that must not be permitted. If one foreign minister is permitted to publish what he pleases to the people, in the name of his government, every other foreign minister must be indulged the same right.” What would then become of freedom in U.S. electoral politics if the election were “menaced by

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<sup>103</sup>Oliver Wolcott, Jr. to Alexander Hamilton, November 17, 1796 in Syrett, *PAH*, 20:398; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 157.

<sup>104</sup>Oliver Wolcott, Sr. to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., November 28, 1796 in *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and Adams* (hereafter *Memoirs*), ed. George Gibbs, 2 vols. (New York: Privately Printed for the Subscribers, 1846), 1:403.

public addresses from these intriguing agents”? And would the United States go the way of Poland, which had ceased to be a country, due to foreign influence?<sup>105</sup>

Webster also wrote newspaper articles denouncing the French alliance, all of which were reprinted and widely circulated. Addressing “The People of the United States,” his articles supplied a narrative of the Genet affair. They detailed the minister's treacherous undermining of Franco-American relations in trying to separate the people from their government. “You have heard often that France is *terrible* to her enemies, but *generous* to her allies,” he wrote. “Perhaps it will appear that France is *more terrible to her allies*, than to her enemies.” “An *open* enemy” was “less dangerous than an *insidious friend*.”<sup>106</sup> Genet that “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” sailed to Charleston, interacting with the American people as he went — much like Washington's national tours. He should have sailed directly to Philadelphia to present his credentials and be “recognized in his public character.” When clashes with the U.S. government forced Genet to publish his instructions, there was ample evidence that his superiors directed him to use all his influence to entangle the United States with the French cause despite earlier claiming that the latter did not wish the former to take part in a war.

Instead, Genet's intended appeal to the people was “unmasked,” and “the balefulness of his errand . . . aroused a just and manly spirit of indignation.” The people sent petitions to Washington, assuring him of their support for neutrality. In contrast, Britain had injured the United States, but the latter was in no danger from the former: the

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<sup>105</sup>“The Answer,” *Minerva* (New York, NY), December 8, 1796.

<sup>106</sup>“To the People of the United States,” *Minerva* (New York, NY), December 14, 1796. Original emphasis; DeConde, “Washington’s Farewell,” 657.



alliance with Great Britain was one of *interest only*, the only true basis for foreign relations. No British minister on American soil had ever “attempted to excite division between the government and the people, or dared to foment sedition. . .” It was only “right” and “necessary” that the “insidious designs” and such “*sly, intriguing*, but *ambitious* and *domineering allies* should be unmasked.” Friends like France were “more dangerous than an army of foes.”<sup>107</sup>

French intrigue should remind Americans of the fates of Greece, Poland, and Batavia: “NO FOREIGN INFLUENCE,” wrote “Wm. WILCOCKS,” also in Webster's *Minerva*. Prefiguring the Alien and Sedition Acts, he exhorted: “let it be a *maxim* with us” that “any American making common cause with a foreign minister, and supports him against the honor and the interest of his own country, let him pretend what he may—he *must be, politically*, a bad and dangerous man.” He recommended that “*the first words our children should see in the primer, after, WORSHIP thy CREATOR*, ought to be NO FOREIGN INFLUENCE.”<sup>108</sup>

Washington also intimated that in meeting with the U.S. government's defiant refusal to give up its neutrality, France used print politics to appeal to the people. France employed “several presses and many scribblers” to “emblazon the improper acts of the British government and its officers and to place them in all the most exaggerated and odious points of view they were susceptible.” Having found that particular tactic

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<sup>107</sup>“To the People of the United States,” *Minerva* (New York, NY), December 27, 1796. Noah Webster's articles were entitled “To the People of the United States,” and ran from December, 1796, through February, 1797. See *Minerva*, December 14, 17, 27, 1796; January 4, 20, 1797; February 16, 21, 27. They were also reprinted in the *Herald* (New York, NY).

<sup>108</sup>Wm. WILCOCKS, “To the People of the United States, with some interesting questions, to P.A. Adet,” *Minerva* (New York, NY), December 20, 26, 1796. Original italics and caps.

ineffective, France—and the “scribblers” under its sway— had resolved to attack the president and his policies with falsehood. How far the French Directory would ultimately go, Washington could not determine, but he had no doubt that “they have been led to the present point *by our own people*.”<sup>109</sup>

Those political maneuvers and the issue of French intrigue further affected existing sectional tensions that had emerged in the wake of the Genet affair and the Jay Treaty debate. The latter had already given rise to an identifiable and growing “Southern” interest among Republicans, which combined with the interests of aggrieved Westerners. Knowing that they were losing power in the South, Federalists preparing for the election of 1796 needed a second candidate from the region to defeat Jefferson, knowing they no longer had the Washington option.

Hamilton and his colleagues decided on diplomat and statesman Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina, brother of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and negotiator of the Treaty of San Lorenzo with Spain in 1795 (“Pinckney’s Treaty”) as an alternative.<sup>110</sup> The New York Federalist believed Adams to be a liability to the Federalist cause because he would not carry the South. Pinckney would have “greater southern and western support than any other man.”<sup>111</sup> Sectional feeling ran as high in New England as in the

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<sup>109</sup>George Washington to David Stuart, January 8, 1797 in Ford, *WGW*, 13:357-9. Author’s emphasis. Washington then enclosed in his letter “a production of *Peter Porcupine*, alias William Cobbett.” Italics in the latter are original.

<sup>110</sup>The Treaty of San Lorenzo (October 27, 1795) defined the boundaries between the Spanish colonies and the United States and guaranteed U.S. navigation rights on the Mississippi. Elkins and McKittrick write that the only ones favoring Pinckney’s candidacy included supporters of the Pinckney-Rutledge interest in South Carolina and a few Northern Federalists who surrounded Hamilton. Pinckney supporters worked “more or less under cover, and never did come out in the open.” Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 516; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 147.

<sup>111</sup>Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton, May 2, 1796 in Syrett, *PAH*, 20:152.

South, exposing a growing fissure in Federalist nationalism.<sup>112</sup> For Southern Federalists it was a matter of Pinckney or Jefferson. For Connecticut Federalist Oliver Wolcott Jr., Jefferson's election would be “fatal to our independence,” but as Vice President, he would be even more dangerous as “the rallying point of faction and French influence.”<sup>113</sup> So it was significant that John Adams remarked regarding Adet’s note that “even the southern States,” mostly Republican territory and staunch supporters of the French Revolution, “appear to resent it.”<sup>114</sup>

Hamilton commented with some satisfaction to the newly appointed U.S. minister to London, Rufus King, that Federalist efforts in the public sphere were largely successful. “Public opinion” was continuing to travel “in the right direction.” He noted that King would have received Adet’s communication, and he conjectured that its timing was meant to influence the election. In addition, it was meant to give support to pro-French Americans in the country, creating a situation where France would be free to “slide easily either into a renewal of cordiality or an *actual* or *virtual* war with the U States.” At stake during the election were the national interest and also the national character. For that reason, Federalists were “laboring hard to establish in this country principles more and more *national* and free from all *foreign ingredients*—so that we may

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<sup>112</sup>Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 100, 106.

<sup>113</sup>Oliver Wolcott Jr. to Oliver Wolcott Sr., October 17, 1796; November 19, 27, 1796 in Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:386-88, 396-97, 400-403; Oliver Wolcott Jr. to Alexander Hamilton, November 6, 1796, *Ibid.*, 375-6.

<sup>114</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, December 12, 1796, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, Sara Martin, Hobson Woodward, Sara B. Sikes, Gregg L. Lint, Sara Georgini, 11 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963-), 11:443. See also the electronic version, *Adams Family Papers: A Digital Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

be neither ‘*Greeks nor Trojans*’ but truly Americans.”<sup>115</sup> Hamilton's efforts against Adet echoed his earlier concerns about deteriorating Franco-American relations: “if our Government could not without the permission of France terminate its controversies & settle with it a Treaty of Commerce to endure three or four years, our boasted independence is a name. We have only transferred our allegiances! We are *slaves!*”<sup>116</sup>

### *Conclusion*

John Adams was elected President of the United States in the election of 1796. Jefferson was elected Vice President as the result of Federalist schemes to deliver more electoral votes for Pinckney than Adams. Pinckney received the third highest number of votes. Apparently, Adams wrote to his wife Abigail, he was “not enough of an Englishman, nor little enough of a Frenchman, for some people.”<sup>117</sup> With John Adams came the possibility of bi-partisan consensus—precisely because in the eyes of “some people,” he was not partisan enough. The president-elect's “*feelings [would] not enslave him to the example of his predecessor.*” He was at least no friend of the high-Federalist “British faction”: he had condemned their Western speculation schemes and New-York-based intrigues to secure the presidency for Pinckney.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Alexander Hamilton to Rufus King, December 16, 1796, in Syrett, *PAH*, 20:444-446.

<sup>116</sup>Alexander Hamilton, “Relations with France” in Syrett, *PAH*, 19:528. Author's emphasis. Hamilton would further publish his “Warning” against French designs on the United States in the *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), January 27, 1797; February 7, 21, 27; March 13, 27, 1797.

<sup>117</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, December 12, 1796, in Taylor et al. *Adams Family Correspondence*, 11:443-445. See also the electronic version, *Adams Family Papers: A Digital Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

<sup>118</sup>James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, December 19, 1796, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 29:26-227. Italics denote words encoded by Madison and deciphered by Jefferson according to a cipher devised by the latter.

The election revealed the extent of the sectional fissures and the shifting balance of power that the Jay Treaty, Federalist policies, and print publicity had fostered. Made more conspicuous by Washington's absence, those sectional fissures would challenge the centralized national vision of the Farewell Address and its neutrality. The Republicans were weak in New England, New York, and New Jersey. Those fissures also revealed the extent to which the Jay Treaty had hurt the Federalists in the South. Adams claimed that the Southern states displayed more affection for him during the election than he had thought. In reality, the Federalists were unable to penetrate the deep South and Southwest.

Southern Federalists suffered a loss for being associated with the Jay Treaty and with Federalist speculation schemes in the West, and felt discomfort at enlisting Adams's name in the campaign. Since Washington's retirement, no Southerner could command his "unlimited confidence." Pinckney would not satisfy Northerners wary of "a President appointed contrary to our wishes, *by a negro representation only.*"<sup>119</sup> In general the Federalist campaign had been far more interested in denying Jefferson the election than in electing Adams.

These tensions affected Washington's hopes that "our citizens would advocate their own cause"—"that instead of being Frenchmen or Englishmen in politics, they would be Americans, indignant at every attempt of either, or any other power, to establish an influence in our councils, or presume to sow the seeds of discord or disunion among

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<sup>119</sup>Oliver Wolcott, Sr. to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., December 12, 1796 in Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:409. Italics are the author's. Wolcott, Sr. continues: "this last circumstance is perhaps a vulgar prejudice, as the constitution fixed this matter, but still it is a mortifying one." Kurtz, *Presidency of John Adams*, 201; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 147, 155; Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 291.

us.”<sup>120</sup> Other Federalists concurred, echoing the larger themes of the Farewell Address, regarding union, the people, and the public. A very great proportion of the country's troubles had been “brought upon us by the imprudence and indiscretion of the people of our own country. If we mean to preserve to ourselves the rights and benefits of neutrality, we ought to be perfectly impartial in all our conduct towards the belligerent nations.”<sup>121</sup> To Washington, it remained to be seen whether the United States would “stand upon independent ground, or be directed in its political concerns by any other nation.”<sup>122</sup>

In *To the Farewell Address*, Felix Gilbert wrote that Hamilton “based the discussion of foreign affairs in the Farewell Address on a realistic evaluation of America's situation and interests.” Since Hamilton opposed the United States entering into European wars to which attachment to France could easily lead, he emphasized neutrality and peace. The Farewell Address could therefore “repeat and absorb those views and concepts which expressed the mood of a more idealistic approach to foreign policy.”<sup>123</sup>

Gilbert accurately recognized the tension between idealism and realism inherent in the document. But viewing diplomacy and foreign policy through the lens of the Early Republic's politics illustrates that as two competing ideas of the national interest emerged, at best, one man's realism was often another man's idealism. As the debate over

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<sup>120</sup>George Washington to William Heath, May 20, 1797, in Ford, *GW*, 13:384.

<sup>121</sup>James Hillhouse to Oliver Wolcott, Sr., March 4, 1797, in Gibbs, *Memoirs*, 1:444.

<sup>122</sup>George Washington to Thomas Pinckney, May 28, 1797 in Ford, *GW*, 13:384.

<sup>123</sup>Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address*, 136.

national interest and national character emerged within the partisan warfare of the 1790s over foreign relations, moreover, the focus on publicity and exposés suggested that one man's pragmatism could be another man's perfidy. Taking Washington at his word that the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 is the “index” of the Farewell Address reminds us that foreign policy was not divorced from the issue of publicity for the sake of the public good in a popular government wary of the deleterious effects of corruption.

How partisans on both sides defined realism and idealism, pragmatism and perfidy, were calibrated by the politics of slavery to an extent previously unrecognized by historians. The reason for this was Federalist proposals for a unitary public sphere, which met with immediate challenge from its rivals for its attempts to contain and silence what it could not easily absorb and assimilate. The Whig discourse that had shaped hearts and minds before, during, and after the American Revolution made Americans sensitive to any efforts to enslave them. It provided the framework for their liberties and the endangerment thereof, and remained relevant when discourse combined with the exercise of federal power caused them to fear that their revolution was at stake.

Foreign relations crises were a constant source of that fear. The Genet Affair and the Jay Treaty implicated actual chattel slavery in national politics and foreign relations on various levels. The Farewell Address' double-sidedness encouraged constant slippage from metaphorical and political enslavement by foreign nations into concern about the institution's existence in the United States. When the address alluded to excessive partiality or dislike for any particular foreign nation as an opening for intrigue, it suggested how “frank overtures” could easily devolve into “diplomatic subtleties”:

excessive partiality for one foreign nation and excessive dislike of another cause those whom they actuate to see danger only on one side, and serve to veil and even second the arts of influence on the other. Real patriots who may resist the intrigues of the favorite are liable to become suspected and odious, while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people, to surrender their interests.<sup>124</sup>

Who were the “real” patriots? What were truly the interests of the people? What kind of “applause”—and for whom—would usurp the people's confidence to make them surrender their interests?

Those particular observations would prove prescient in the undeclared “Quasi-War” with France in the closing years of the decade. By then, Americans found themselves with their country on the brink of war. Amid mass hysteria, they strove to identify and root out foreign intrigue and other dangers to national security. They were forced to confront both the question of what a “true” American was as well as the precarious nature of national consensus.

The Farewell Address—the textual expression of U.S. neutrality—and reactions to it in the press aptly encapsulate the problematic relationship between publicity and foreign relations, as well as the way it affected the relationship between the nation state and its domestic public. It is therefore an outward expression of how foreign relations could be connected to, and were being calibrated by, the politics of slavery through print publicity.

Slavery—chattel, political, and metaphorical—deeply affected candor, virtue, and disinterestedness, all of which were crucial for the consent needed for republican survival, which in turn affected national cohesion and the existence of the union.

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<sup>124</sup>George Washington “Farewell Address,” September 19, 1796.  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp) [accessed: April 15, 2013]



Wariness of “monarchical” executive power and centralized federal power provoked fears regarding state control over persons and property. Americans may have wanted to reassure themselves that slavery was a domestic issue, subject to national silence. But ongoing difficulties in foreign relations reminded them that it was an international one as well that affected them nationally, even through the local.

Ongoing difficulties in foreign relations also challenged how much Americans could have commercial relations with all while having with them as little political connection as possible. French and British harassment of U.S. shipping in the West Indies, slave revolt on St. Domingue, and the emerging Haitian Revolution combined to threaten U.S. neutrality on all these levels. U.S. relations with the major belligerents had to consider the commercial ties to the Caribbean that were significant for Northern mercantile interests and the Early Republic's carrying trade. Those Caribbean connections reminded Americans that political economy since the colonial period—in both New England and in Virginia, and at home as well as abroad—involved slaves and the products of slave labor.

While Washington's Farewell Address described habitual affection or hatred for any foreign nation as “slavery,” that affection or hatred was not easily separate or separable from the commercial relations that afforded Americans a profitable way of life. Ambivalent as Americans were about slavery, they were not about to give up that profitable way of life without a fight. Questions of union and nation focused Americans on the issue of whether the Constitution would protect that profitable way of life. And whenever some among their number discussed or celebrated the nation in public, others still became increasingly fearful of America's relationship to that captive nation within a

nation that Washington's fellow Virginia slaveholder, Thomas Jefferson, believed existed in a perpetual state of war.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. David Waldstreicher (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2002), 14; Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 148-9. Waldstreicher observes: "Dunmore's invitation to Africans made slaves national allies of the English. It made Americans a different nation: English no longer and now enemies of the English, the Africans, and the Indians."

## CHAPTER 5

### “A UNION OF SENTIMENTS”? PUBLICITY, NEUTRALITY, SLAVERY, AND THE QUASI-WAR

The Quasi-War’s undeclared hostilities made Washington’s “Great Rule of Conduct” easier said than done. European interests were not “remote”; they intimately affected Americans. The French Directory intended its naval decree of March 2, 1797 to punish the United States for its abandonment of “free ships, free goods” and for the Jay Treaty’s broad definition of contraband. The Jay Treaty, the Directory explained, modified the pre-existing Franco-American treaty guaranteeing reciprocity. Now, all enemy property found on U.S. ships would be confiscated, though the ships themselves would be immediately released.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry, the U.S. envoys to Paris soon linked to the XYZ Affair, noted to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering that “free ships, free goods” would no longer be acceptable neutral policy.<sup>1</sup> In addition, any American holding a commission from an enemy of France or found serving on any enemy vessel would be treated as a pirate. The March naval decree also authorized French maritime tribunals to deal severely with and treat as a prize any U.S. or neutral vessel found guilty of fraud by such means as blank sea-papers and blank passports.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry to Timothy Pickering, January 8, 1798, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* (hereafter *ASP:FR*) ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke (6 vols., Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1833), 2:150-151. Pinckney, Marshall, and Gerry sent Pickering a copy of the journal, the *Redacteur*, containing that information, originally communicated as an address by the Directory to the Council of Five Hundred. On the XYZ affair see below.

The Directory's decree unleashed more widespread anti-French sentiment than in previous years. It was designed to inflict the greatest possible harm on U.S. commerce without a formal declaration of hostilities. Massachusetts merchant and former senator George Cabot wrote that "the feelings of our merchants are greatly irritated and their fears not a little excited by the depredations committed by the French."<sup>2</sup> Citing Hamilton's printed piece, *The Warning*, Cabot evaluated American relations with France to be at "a critical point." Emerging out of the partisan debates over foreign relations during this period was a larger discussion: what constituted an unwelcome foreign intrusion into the young republic's body politic? Why were unwelcome intrusions more important than before?

Worsening relations with France heightened Americans' sense of insecurity at home and abroad. The Quasi-War also marked the apogee of anti-Jacobin sentiment. The Farewell Address's prescriptions for the national character made demands for individual and collective "neutral" behavior, but Americans fought over what those demands meant. South Carolina Federalist William Loughton Smith observed that relations with France and the latter's treatment of the United States involved the activities of French agents and their impact upon public opinion. Any French action that would drive the people—"that multitude" which had shown "so little reason" since 1793—into the arms of "that insidious nation" was a problem.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>George Cabot to Rufus King, March 15, 1797. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York NY. *The Warning* appeared in the *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), January 27, February 7, 21, 27, March 13, 27, 1797.

<sup>3</sup>William Loughton Smith to Rufus King, April 3, 1797. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York, NY.

Both Federalists and Republicans actively endeavored to “preoccupy the popular mind.” George Cabot saw that Federalists, “the friends of order and good government,” needed to “rouse the country as much as possible without inflaming it, and by exciting a due attention to the public dangers it is expected that we the people shall be reconciled to some new burthens [sic] which may become necessary and shall be disposed to strengthen the government by a ready support of the measures it shall adopt.”<sup>4</sup>

But in rousing the country as much as possible without inflaming it, how much was *too* much? Historians generally describe the 1790s as an “age of passion” full of accusations of conspiracy, vituperative print politics, and international unrest that ratcheted up American fears of foreign influence. Few, however, have examined the details of how and why the situation escalated. Passion arose from widespread fear of conspiracy and corruption, both of which undermined the consent that enabled American self-government. From 1793-1798, the confluence of print publicity and foreign relations created growing fissures over the exercise of federal power in both emerging parties and their national coalitions. Those fissures were sectional, because federal power over persons and property affected different parts of the union and their interests differently.

Historians have also identified the Quasi-War as repressive: Federalist attempts to silence Republican dissent against their policies marked a crystallization of national consensus on foreign and domestic issues. That consensus marked a closing of the deliberative public sphere because Federalists capitalized on the foreign-relations crisis to emphasize the leadership role of elites over the political participation of ordinary

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<sup>4</sup>George Cabot to Rufus King, April 10, 1797. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York, NY). Underlining is original. “Burthen” = burden.

Americans. Culture and language can shape how people discuss politics. By 1798, the Federalists reconfigured the French Revolution as an undesirable, disruptive, and illegitimate alien import, setting the American experiment distinctly apart from the European example. The Federalists, who capitalized on the diplomatic crisis, were fairly successful in undermining radical democratic ideas. Jeffersonian Republicans assumed more moderate positions and ultimately distanced themselves from more radical, democratic persuasions.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the mutually constitutive relationship between the public sphere and foreign relations reveals evidence of political adaptability and contingency. The silencing of certain voices is only half the story. Capitalizing on diplomatic crises had far-reaching consequences within the body politic. On the one hand certain voices—namely radical ones—were being silenced as Republicans repeatedly found themselves defensively responding to Federalist charges of fostering sedition. On the other hand, self-preservation often prompts the need for silence.

Northern voices, both Federalist and Republican, taking the enlightened republican ideals of the American Revolution to their logical conclusions raised unsettling questions about the place of slavery in the union. While Federalists and

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<sup>5</sup>Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 206; John L. Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic" and Seth Cotlar, "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 207-250, 276-7; Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 328; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 162; William Stinchcombe, *The XYZ Affair (Contributions in American History, 89)* (Westport: Praeger, 1981), 130.

Republicans disagreed on how central or diffuse power should be in the union, fears of disunion were real and fully appreciated by both. Fears of disunion also affected and involved both parties' disagreement over the relationship of the state to the domestic public.<sup>6</sup>

Defensiveness emphasizes vulnerability. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, slavery was emerging as a major vulnerability for both parties that could either define national consensus or break it. Historians have not situated the relationship between the silencing of radical voices and the politics of slavery within the overlapping contexts of diplomatic and political culture during the 1790s. Public debates demanding candor in the republic's national politics and foreign relations were contests over the exercise of federal power. Those contests reminded Americans of slavery's importance to the union's integrity, to the seizure of political opportunities, and to the intricacies of resultant political calibration.

Building on these earlier insights, I argue that any bounding, policing, or closing of the public sphere involved not just anti-Jacobinism but the politics of slavery. Because of the very way the latter combined with print publicity, the politics of slavery became more openly, directly, and closely intertwined with neutrality's rhetoric of denouncing foreign attachments as the 1790s drew to a close. Undeclared hostilities in Franco-American relations fostered never-ending crisis and political agitation, heightening threats of disunion and ambiguity in the nation's identity.

A series of factors complicated the Quasi-War from the beginning. The Directory's naval decree simultaneously affected U.S. trade in the Caribbean, where most

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<sup>6</sup>Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1-4.

of the Quasi-War was fought. The West Indies represented a confluence of American concerns about both the European balance of power and the balance of power between the states in the union over slavery.

British and French seizures of U.S. shipping in the Caribbean affected ongoing trade with St. Domingue.<sup>7</sup> In 1796, British inability to control the French colony allowed slave insurgents to split into two factions—one led by the mulatto Benoît Joseph André Rigaud and the other led by François-Dominique Toussaint L'Overture. French hope of retaining their colonial possessions and harassing British shipping in the Caribbean in part rested on U.S. obligations of support under the 1778 treaties of alliance and commerce. France did not strictly enforce those obligations; it only expected the United States to remain a friendly neutral.

America's official policy of neutrality frustrated French aims: it allowed U.S. merchants to bring supplies, arms, and ammunition to all belligerents in the Caribbean—be they Toussaint L'Overture, the British, or the French—depending on which could pay the highest price. Toussaint was emerging as the dominant leader and America's man in St. Domingue, and therefore possibly useful when it came to securing trade with the island.<sup>8</sup> Some Frenchmen thus believed that U.S. aid to slave insurgents contributed to the success of the St. Dominguan slave revolt. The French Revolution generally raised the intertwined issues of national identity, sectionalism, and internal security in the Early

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<sup>7</sup>Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2-5; Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World System* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 101; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 426-437.

<sup>8</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 10, 130-31; Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1971), 363.



Republic's politics. But its colonial realities more directly and intimately suggested the alarming possibility that the two republics with their slavery issues might have a shared future.<sup>9</sup>

Amid concerns over neutrality abroad, print publicity only emphasized the urgency of rooting out foreign influence that would endanger neutrality at home. In July 1798, George Cabot thought it apparent from the public papers that the general mood was one of growing “indigestion” toward France. America, he observed, might “in a fair way get rid of every tie which *bound* us to that *seductive* and *perfidious* nation.”<sup>10</sup> Wariness of French intrigues transformed easily into fears of French dominion and imperial designs. Success of French ambitions promised “a feudal system worse than the old would be established over the whole face of the civilized world.” Consequently, there would exist “only two sorts of people: soldiers and slaves.”<sup>11</sup>

Use of the slavery metaphor added to the general anxiety. Americans knew that independence made possible the process of joining a modern community of nations. They also feared what would befall them if they failed: a loss of political autonomy, and thence a return to a state of war and slavery.<sup>12</sup> Neutrality involved every level of the

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Samuel Stanhope Smith's *An Oration Upon the Death of George Washington* (Trenton: G. Craft, 1800), Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 38524, which explicitly makes that connection in its praise of Washington and his character.

<sup>10</sup>George Cabot to Rufus King, May 9, 1797 and July 2, 1798. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York, NY. Italics are the author's

<sup>11</sup>George Cabot to Rufus King, August 18, 1798. Original emphasis. Rufus King Papers, MS 1660, New York Historical Society, New York, NY.

<sup>12</sup>David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolutions, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 283; Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 129; François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 88.

body politic due to the French Revolution's impact on public sentiment: the Farewell Address related Early American political culture's preoccupation with right public sentiment and national character to republican governance and foreign policy. Whatever "seduced" public sentiment, leading to disordered attachments, amounted to "slavery."

Federalists and Republicans fought their partisan wars with the weapons of a democratized political culture, ever more cognizant that regional differences mattered and that disunion threatened the United States and its independence. Were some sections of the union more likely to be seduced by a foreign power through foreign agents, undermining the national interest, national character, and national security? Uriah Tracy, a Federalist from Connecticut, opined that the Northern States were superior to the Southern ones: for a number of years, the former had carried the latter "on their backs." The Southern states were too susceptible to French influence. Too much French influence would make the United States a French colony.

Tracy alluded to the interconnectedness of these issues. He expressed alarm that "*The Southern part of the Union is increasing by frequent importations of foreign scoundrels as well as by those of home manufacture, their country is large & capable of such increase both in population & number of States.*" The Northern states would then be "swallowed up" and "the name & real character of an American soon be known only as a thing of tradition." What was more, slave revolt would "sooner or later" arise from the human "property" of Southern slaveholders. The Connecticut Federalist opined that in those circumstances, disunion might be the most viable course of action, however

lamentable it would be: “a separation” was “absolutely necessary to preserve an independence in a part, which could not be done united.”<sup>13</sup>

Direct taxes needed to pay for the war reinforced sectional differences, because they fed into the highly sensitive national-level discussions about consent, chattel slavery, and federal power. The Jay Treaty debate reinforced what Southerners learned about federal encroachment from the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Already defensive over Federalists’ public marginalization of slaveholding interests, Republicans opposed Adams’s proposal for a stronger navy. They resented direct taxation to help pay for defense expenses in part because they feared an emergent, and dangerously imbalanced, national political economy where Southern interests would have no place.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1790s, Federalist nationalism conflated Revolution, nation, and state. Republicans identified the nation with the union of states and its constitutional charter. Republican nationalism pitted Revolution against the nation and the nation against the state.<sup>15</sup> Preventing disunion depended on the ability to silence (or at least utilize for partisan gain) foreign disturbances that fostered “party” and “faction.” Involving more than anti-French sentiment, the Quasi-War illustrated that the mechanics of fostering common consensus yielded ambiguous results that proved politically exploitable and dangerous to both emerging political parties.

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<sup>13</sup>Uriah Tracy to Alexander Hamilton, April 6, 1797, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (hereafter *PAH*), ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York, 1961-1979), 21:24-26. Author's emphasis.

<sup>14</sup>Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 174; Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Nations, Markets and War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 80-81.

<sup>15</sup>Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 105; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 252.

Recourse to the politics of slavery drew upon old political tropes shared by both sides, allowing for political malleability, albeit within certain boundaries. Slavery meant not only the loss of international political autonomy, but also the lack of republican consent of the governed. Consensus is built by sentiment as much as by governmental structure. It is built upon the nation's affirmations, and also the nation's silence. While Federalists linked Southern slaveholders to French intrigue, mainstream Republican newspapers went to great lengths to support Southern slaveholding interests by the late 1790s. Historians such as Edmund Morgan, François Furstenberg, and Eliga Gould observe that freedom for some was contingent upon others' lack of freedom.<sup>16</sup> "Consent of the governed" in the Early Republic was likewise contingent on a consensus built on others' lack of consent.

*"One Sentiment Pervades Our Land": The XYZ Affair and Public Consensus*

While an irritated Directory sought to make the United States pay for the Jay Treaty, the XYZ Affair exploded in an environment already agitated by partisan passions over international, national and sectional interests. Accusations and exposure of foreign influence served as the immediate backdrop for an increased sense of crisis in Franco-American relations. Adams's subsequent release of the XYZ dispatches for public consumption was diplomacy on both an international level as well as within the union. Publicizing the dispatches, however, made the issue of national character urgent. The

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<sup>16</sup>Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 10; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1975; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), ix; François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 13-23; Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2-4.

press raised a hue and cry against the nation's external and internal enemies. Americans publicly debated who those enemies were and what it meant to be a "true" American.

John Adams's inaugural address of March 4, 1797, praised the Constitution and republican government, denouncing partisanship and foreign meddling in American affairs. If so, it would be foreign nations who governed Americans and not "we, the people, who govern ourselves."<sup>17</sup> Neutral and presidential behavior involved public performance and attention to style. Neither the example of George Washington nor the necessity of hitting the right emotional notes was lost on Adams.

For once, the Republican press was hopeful and conciliatory, joining Federalists in praise of the newly elected president. "Mr. Adams," heralded the *Aurora*, "was a man of incorruptible integrity. His measures, at least, will be guided by prudence. No party will find in him a head. No man will use him as a tool. Already he has declared himself to be a friend of Republicanism and peace."<sup>18</sup> But secretary of state Timothy Pickering knew that Adams faced challenges on two fronts: as president and statesman, Adams was "desirous to preserve *the just rights of sovereignty of the states* as well as to afford to the French no real ground of complaint that we have not maintained an impartial neutrality."<sup>19</sup> The recent election reminded him that U.S. neutrality would have to be squared with the union's balance of power, and with local interests.

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<sup>17</sup>John Adams, "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1797.  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/adams.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/adams.asp) [accessed: December 4, 2012]

<sup>18</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), March 14, 1797.

<sup>19</sup>Timothy Pickering to the Governor of Virginia, June 6, 1797, *Timothy Pickering Papers*, microfilm edition, 69 reels (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society), reel 6, No. 331-2. Author's emphasis.

Pickering's assessment was accurate. Foreign-affairs issues that led to accusations of foreign influence on both sides developed in rapid succession. The Directory issued its March 2 decree only two days before Adams's swearing in as president. On March 14, the president learned of France's refusal to receive Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, whom Washington had sent to Paris to replace James Monroe as ambassador. Adams did not want war: he recoiled at the possibility of leading a disunited country into one. Both Federalists and Republicans urged him to reach an agreement with France.<sup>20</sup> Throughout March and April, Adams sought his cabinet's advice on the French crisis, and called a special session of Congress. The French Consul General at Philadelphia, Joseph Philippe Letombe, informed Adams and Jefferson that France did not desire a rupture; all would be well if the United States would send a minister that France could trust.

Then, Noah Webster dropped a bombshell. On May 2, he published a translation of a letter from Jefferson to Philip Mazzei in his New York *Minerva*. Mazzei was an Italian physician, promoter of liberty, and close friend of Jefferson. Jefferson's letter circulated in Mazzei's communications network before its translation appeared with commentary in France in the Directory's official newspaper *Le Moniteur*. The "Mazzei Letter" caused a sensation. Jefferson had written it in the spring of 1796 as a private citizen discouraged with both the Jay Treaty and the direction of American politics. Now, he was vice president and the leader of a recognized opposition. The letter had been made public without his knowledge.

Jefferson's missive described Federalist foreign policy as "Anglican, monarchical, and aristocratical [sic]," whose purpose was to move the United States closer to Great

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<sup>20</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 20, 24.

Britain. Newspapers, among them the *Gazette of the United States*, *Porcupine's Gazette*, and the *Columbian Centinel*, reprinted the Mazzei Letter.<sup>21</sup> Federalists viewed Jefferson's criticism as a veiled attack on Washington, the latest in a succession of Republican attacks since the Jay Treaty. They referred to the letter whenever they accused Jefferson and the Republicans of being more loyal to France than to the United States.

The Mazzei brouhaha provided the backdrop for Adams's May 16, 1797, address to both houses of Congress. The president condemned French efforts to separate the people from their government as having produced "divisions fatal to our peace."<sup>22</sup> Republicans in Congress denounced the speech as a belligerent affront to France. The Republican press claimed that the president was a tool of the British and the Hamiltonian war-hawks.<sup>23</sup> When Adams sent papers to Congress in July 1797 that stirred up talk of the Blount Conspiracy, Republicans fired back that Robert Liston, the British minister, was involved—a clear example of Britain meddling in American domestic affairs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Philip Mazzei, June 24, 1796 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. Barbara B. Oberg, 40 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 29: 73-88; Oberg notes the letter's appearance in the *Minerva* (New York, NY) May 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 19, 1797; *Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA) May 4, 5, 9, 20, 22, June 2, 1797; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA) May 10, 13, 31, 1797. Republican responses appeared in the *Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA) May 8, 12, June 7, 1797; *Argus* (New York NY) May 6, 1797; *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* (Boston, MA) May 22, 1797; *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ) May 17, 1797; Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 165-7.

<sup>22</sup>"President's Speech," House of Representatives, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, May 16, 1797 in *Annals of Congress* (hereafter *Annals*), 7:56.

<sup>23</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 25, 27.

<sup>24</sup>Frederick Jackson Turner, "Documents on the Blount Conspiracy," *American Historical Review* 10.3 (April 1905), 574-606; Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 44; Andrew R.L. Cayton, "'When Shall We Cease to Have Judases?' The Blount Conspiracy and the Limits of the 'Extended Republic,'" in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, 1996), 156-189.

The Blount Conspiracy was a filibustering incident in the trans-Appalachian West, where William Blount, a Republican senator and land speculator from Tennessee, sought to allow British occupation of the Louisiana territory in exchange for U.S.-merchant access to New Orleans and the Mississippi River. A letter that he had written to one of his agents fell into the hands of the administration. Blount was later impeached. Anglo-American relations, seemingly on the mend after the Jay Treaty, grew tense once more.

Adams sent a peace mission to Paris on May 31. He named John Marshall, Elbridge Gerry, and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney as special envoys. The Adams administration sought surrender of the privileges granted the French in the 1778 treaties and acceptance of the Jay Treaty. Cognizant of English designs on American public opinion and perceiving hostility in the overt Federalism of the mission, the French ignored and slighted the Americans. The envoys first got a fifteen-minute audience with Talleyrand before Jean Conrad Hottinguer, Pierre Bellamy, and Lucien Hauteval, all of whom claimed to be close to the foreign minister. Talleyrand threatened the Americans. He then attempted to bribe them, assuming their openness to backdoor diplomacy.<sup>25</sup>

Hottinguer (X), Bellamy (Y), and Hauteval (Z) informed the envoys that the Directory would consider beginning negotiations only under certain conditions: the United States government would assume all unpaid debts contracted by France with American suppliers. The United States would also pay all indemnities for spoliations

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<sup>25</sup>Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 287; DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 46-50; Stinchcombe, *XYZ Affair*, 46; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Chapter 14.



committed on U.S. commerce which future claims commissions might find France liable. Finally, the envoys could only meet with Talleyrand if they agreed to finance a war loan, which included a hefty bribe to be paid to the minister himself. The French also demanded a declaration that Adams's May 16 message to Congress about French efforts to create "a division between the government and people of the United States" designated neither France nor its agents. Increasingly, Talleyrand and his associates threatened the envoys, repeating their demands for the bribe. The Directory would take the following position toward neutrals: *all* nations must aid France or be treated as enemies. Outraged, Pinckney replied, "No, no, not a sixpence!"<sup>26</sup>

Awaiting highly anticipated news from France that did not arrive, passions back home ran high. Jefferson and Madison wondered if news of the negotiations was being hushed up. The Directory's decree of January 18, 1798, sealed the fate of the U.S. mission: it permitted the seizure of all ships carrying British goods, regardless of their ownership. Rumors of the mission's failure and the possibility of war reached Philadelphia in early 1798. Within the context of William Blount's impeachment hearing, a brawl broke out in the House of Representatives on January 30 between Republican Matthew Lyon of Vermont and Federalist Roger Griswold of Connecticut. Griswold supported Adams's diplomacy toward France. Lyon countered that undue preparation for war would provoke one. Griswold insulted Lyon. Lyon spat in his face, earning the name "the Spitting Lyon." Griswold attacked Lyon with a hickory cane as Lyon defended himself with a pair of tongs.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 572-3.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 709-10.

The president received coded dispatches from his envoys on March 5. They related their ill-treatment and expressed their collective judgment that official reception was hopeless. On the cusp of Adams publicizing the dispatches, Federalists and Republicans could agree on one thing: the country was at stake. For Republicans, the danger lay in the Federalist desire for war and a “British faction” in the United States.<sup>28</sup> For Federalists, the danger was French aggression toward the United States abetted by subversive Americans.

Following increased pressure for release of the XYZ dispatches, the Adams administration laid everything before Congress on April 3, 1798. New York Federalist Robert Troup saw the president's action as “a novel and extraordinary act in diplomatic concerns,” for the Senate had bypassed all earlier precedent and directed the publication of the dispatches.<sup>29</sup> Adams had exhausted the obvious diplomatic alternatives: after weighing the full contents of the dispatches, he advised Congress that settlement with France seemed unlikely, and quickly called for defense measures. Based on information that he received through both personal and official channels, Adams concluded that if the Directory privileged French “interest” in its diplomacy, the United States should do the same.<sup>30</sup> The president's correspondents all shared the widespread belief that internal

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<sup>28</sup>See for example HUMPHREY in the *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), January 8, 1798, decrying the existence of a “British party” and Federalist use of the epithet “Jacobin,” whereby it and also “Democrat” and “Disorganizer” designate anyone who criticizes high-Federalist foreign policy, be it the Jay Treaty (that even Adams called “pregnant with evils”), or the preparation for hostilities with France.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Troup to Rufus King, June 3, 1798, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, Comprising his Letters, private and Official, his Public Documents and his Speeches*, ed. Charles R. King, 6 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 2:329.

<sup>30</sup>Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, “Private Letters, Public Diplomacy,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Summer 2011): 299.

divisions encouraged by foreign powers constituted the greatest threat to the nation's independence.

The Federalists wasted no time in capitalizing on the XYZ Affair. Once made public, the dispatches appeared in Federalist newspapers in their entirety. Congressmen received many copies published with a Federalist nationalist theme. Prominent Federalists also disseminated the dispatches: Pickering personally distributed ten-thousand printed copies through his personal communication network. The *Aurora* reprinted them from April 10-12. In general, the Republican press printed the incriminating documents without comment. A wave of patriotic sentiment followed. Federalists converted Pinckney's "No, no, not a sixpence!" to "millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" New patriotic songs such as "Adams and Liberty" and "Hail Columbia" became popular. Ardent Federalists adopted the black cockade, a symbol worn by American soldiers during the Revolutionary War, claiming it would cement the union (Republicans observed that the English cockade was also black).<sup>31</sup>

The most popular instrument of Federalist support for the Adams administration was the patriotic address. After the dispatches were published, addresses supporting the president and his policies filled Federalist newspapers. These patriotic exchanges illustrated a highly polarized American public forming a consensus on foreign and domestic affairs to an unprecedented degree. Imparting political and diplomatic lessons, the addresses followed the Washingtonian trend of public interaction between the president and the people. Adams sought to reassure the people that he stood with them

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<sup>31</sup>Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment: The Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1792-1812* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 101; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 293-4; DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 82.

and with U.S. neutrality. Numbering in the hundreds and pouring in from all sections of the country, the addresses consisted of a substantial portion of American public opinion.

Historian Thomas M. Ray notes that Republican areas of the Mid-Atlantic and Southern states outstripped Federalist areas in issuing these anti-French petitions. The majority come from the back-country regions in a few key states, cutting across state boundaries, economic interests, and party lines. Americans, remarked Jefferson, could not expect a foreign nation to respond to this practice with apathy.<sup>32</sup>

In general, historians reading these addresses have paid insufficient attention to the nature and content of the consensus that ardent Federalists (and the president) sought to build. The petitions and their responses were a collective pep rally for neutrality. Effectively an attempt to implement Washington's "Great Rule of Conduct," they condemned any foreign agitation of the "public mind," identified threats to the peace, and cast neutrality as prudent and wise. Highly repetitive, the addresses emphasized loyalty to the Constitution and the union. They were also collectively an exposé aimed at repudiating French efforts to manipulate the United States and separate the people from their government.

An address from the Legislature of Massachusetts identified France as the enemy to every neutral people for having forsaken liberty for dominion. In an address to the Inhabitants of Hartford, Connecticut, Adams identified his political opponents with the French enemy, linking "foreign hostility" with "domestic treachery."<sup>33</sup> Other addresses

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas M. Ray, "Not One Cent For Tribute': The Public Addresses and American Popular Reaction to the XYZ Affair, 1798-99" *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Winter 1983): 6, 13; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 3, 1798, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30:322.

<sup>33</sup>"Massachusetts to the President of the United States" in *A Selection of the patriotic addresses, to the president of the United States. Together with the president's answers*, ed. William Austin (Boston: John

lamented “rash or designing men assembled without the necessary information”— a clear repudiation of the radical notion that the people were capable of deliberating on treaties and foreign policy. Furthermore, the petitions expressed determined support of the Adams administration and its policy of cool defiance, voicing a firm resolve to support any measure defending American honor and independence, including war.

Taking their cues from the Farewell Address, the petitions’ common patriotic narrative called for “security from bondage.” The addresses linked metaphorical “slavery” with internal division of the union fostered by foreign and domestic intrigue. The students of Dartmouth College pledged that if the field of negotiation changed from cabinet to battlefield, they would offer “our zeal, our activity and our lives, to repel the foe that would make us slaves.”<sup>34</sup> Another address declared that “we will not be a divided people, the miserable slaves of a foreign power, or the despicable tools of foreign influence.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the French Revolution’s hope and promise had proven a great “disappointment”: the French themselves had at first risen out of enslavement. Now they trampled on the rights of Americans.<sup>36</sup> A group of young men from Richmond, Virginia, lamented possibly being “dragged into a contest” with France. The nation that had “once aided our forefathers” would now extinguish liberty with its grasping ambition

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W. Folsom, 1798), 29, 61-63. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 33345; DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 81, citing John Adams, Adams to the Inhabitants of the Town of Hartford, CN, May 10, 1798, in *Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1856), 10 vols. 9:192-193.

<sup>34</sup>“Students of Dartmouth University, NH,” in Austin, *Selection of Patriotic Addresses*, 26.

<sup>35</sup>“Citizens of Newberryport to the President,” *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>36</sup>“College of New Jersey to the President,” *ibid.*, 186.

and “[subjugation of] those who are not submissive slaves.” France “indirectly menace[d]” them with a display of “those unfortunate and degraded people, who have already been forced to bend beneath their yoke.” Inhabitants from Norfolk, Virginia, concurred: a victorious France threatened the United States with its conquests. They “[disdained] the spirit that would mean subserviency [sic] to the views of any power whatever.”<sup>37</sup>

This larger public discourse on Franco-American relations and enslavement by a foreign power also contained a slight yet unobvious association of the South with foreign intrigue. Stephen Higginson, a Massachusetts Federalist, observed how the XYZ Affair had “roused” the Southern states. France's earlier treatment of Pinckney in January 1797 had alienated many Southern francophiles. “Black-cockade fever” swept southward. The French consul at Charleston, South Carolina, Victor Marie Du Pont de Nemours, confirmed that Southern members of Congress had turned against France. Like their Northeastern brethren, they were disaffected, though they were likely more upset with depredations on U.S. commerce by French colonial administrators in the West Indies.<sup>38</sup> The Inhabitants of Hartford, Connecticut concurred with Higginson that French designs had mesmerized the Southern states. Nevertheless, when faced with “real danger,” the South would display its “collective firmness,” falling in line with the rest of the country to “crush every attempt at disorganization, disunion, and anarchy.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Austin, *Selection of Patriotic Addresses*, 285-6, 304.

<sup>38</sup>Bowman, *Struggle for Neutrality*, 290, 308.

<sup>39</sup>Ray, “Not One Cent for Tribute,” 14; Austin, 130-131.

Massachusetts Federalist William Austin collected, edited, and published a selection of the addresses as a book. Its dedication to the Directory was an obvious shot across the bow: genuine popular sentiment would have remained latent in the American bosom, had not the “inimitable art” of the French republic roused it.<sup>40</sup> The French deceived themselves regarding the effectiveness of their intrigues. Pro-French sentiment belonged only to a noisy minority. French meddling had backfired: reliance on this minority for information about America underestimated the true state of the people's sentiment as well as the “American character.” Austin rounded off his collection of addresses with a letter from George Washington endorsing Adams's conduct. In the wake of the Farewell Address's “Great Rule of Conduct,” it amounted to an imprimatur.

Both John and Abigail Adams remarked with satisfaction that the nation seemed to be speaking with one voice. John Adams had never been so popular. A “union of sentiments” seemed to prevail across the nation. The Federalists, it seemed, had achieved their unitary public sphere. Adams delighted in answering public addresses in support of himself and his foreign policy, openly sympathizing with public indignation at France.<sup>41</sup> Like Washington, he courted public sentiment, expounding on the nature of the national character as well as enhancing his own. From the Genet Affair and the Jay Treaty through to the Farewell Address, the gradual public veneration of Washington's public and private virtue provided ways for Federalists to promote consensus, even consent of the governed.

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<sup>40</sup>“Dedication,” Austin, *Selection of Patriotic Addresses*, v.

<sup>41</sup>Austin, *Selection of Patriotic Addresses*, 316. For “unitary public sphere,” see John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic” in *Launching the “Extended Republic”: The Federalist Era*, eds., Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 309.

Taking his cue from Washington's valedictory, Adams addressed freedom from foreign bondage and foreign intrigue's alarming ability to separate the people's affections from their own government. If "you have no attachments, or exclusive friendship for any foreign nation," read his answer to the inhabitants of the towns of Arlington and Sandgate in Vermont, "you possess *the genuine character of true Americans.*"<sup>42</sup> The petitions also expressed the bond of nationhood in familial language, wherein wives, children, and sisters were at stake.<sup>43</sup> Adams was expected to take up Washington's role as "father of his country."

The XYZ Affair gave the Federalist majority in Congress impetus to cast a series of war measures into law from May through July, 1798. The legislation authorized U.S. warships to seize French armed vessels and placed an embargo on trade between the United States and France and her colonies. On July 7, 1798, Congress unilaterally abrogated the Franco-American treaties.<sup>44</sup> The XYZ Affair also made the Federalists the champions of publicity; the French, for their emphasis on candor and openness in relations with the American people, were now the intriguers. Abigail Adams noted that it was the likes of Bache and his *Aurora* who were out of step with popular opinion.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, the XYZ Affair's Federalist consensus also suggested that the national character, the body politic, and its attendant foreign relations were crystallizing, but

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<sup>42</sup>Austin, *Selection of Patriotic Addresses*, 12, 73. Author's emphasis.

<sup>43</sup>Seth Cotlar, "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse," 281.

<sup>44</sup>Robert Troup notes that these measures passed easily. See Robert Troup to Rufus King, June 3, 1798 in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, 2:329.

<sup>45</sup>James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 8.



uncomfortably. Style mattered a great deal in behaving neutrally and presidentially, but it was not everything. Moreover, Washington's magic could only go so far. James Madison questioned whether Adams was adequate to the task of filling Washington's shoes. He remarked that the interaction between Adams and those responsible for the patriotic addresses constituted "not only the grossest contradictions to the maxims measures & language of his predecessor, and the real principles & interest of his Constituents, but to himself."<sup>46</sup> Washington was steady, measured, and prudent. Public posture aside, Adams was no Washington.

Local meetings supporting Adams, though not primarily orchestrated by Federalists, presented opportunities for seizing upon national outrage. But the results were mixed. Federalist suspicion of popular impulses and town meetings rendered their efforts atomized and ill-coordinated. Also, Federalist support in well-known Republican areas in the Mid-Atlantic and the South suggest that local Federalists managed to silence local Republicans.<sup>47</sup>

But not for long. Public outrage over the XYZ Affair raised the issue of what the "true American" character was. The national character's contested nature, moreover, colored discussion of foreign relations and foreign intrigue unto the very end of the 1790s. While the XYZ Affair led to a torrent of anti-French sentiment and support for the Adams administration, Americans continued to develop partisan rivalries. Republicans organized their own counter-petitions: pro-Adams petitions, signed by "lawyers,

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<sup>46</sup>James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, June 10, 1798 in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30:405.

<sup>47</sup>Ray, "Not One Cent for Tribute," 15-16, see n 23; Cotlar, "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive," 280; Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 277.

merchants, children, refugees, tories, and Englishmen,” did not express their interests. Replying to these counter-demonstrations, a reader of the Boston *Columbian Centinel* noted that a man had to be “a knave or a fool” to be a Jacobin now. Adams’s dispatches were read, but the “industrious farmers from Cambridge, Roxbury, Dedham, Dorchester, &c.” had not bothered to read them while voting against the Address to the President. Moreover, “on the road to Providence, there are several poles hoisted, stuck at the top with the American cockade, and tar and feathers below. The men (brutes rather) who could do this, were certainly born to be slaves, or to be hanged.”<sup>48</sup>

*“Reign of Witches”: The Alien and Sedition Acts*<sup>49</sup>

In addition to passing legislation against French shipping and the Franco-American treaties, the XYZ Affair also enabled the Federalists to pass the Alien and Sedition Acts. John Adams later described them as “war measures, and intended altogether against the advocates of the French and peace with France.”<sup>50</sup> Historians usually see them in the context of domestic politics rather than foreign relations. Yet, the acts demonstrated Federalist cognizance of close connections between foreign relations and public opinion, and therefore the importance of the ability to control the public sphere in foreign relations. Federalists based the Alien and Sedition Acts on the idea that

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<sup>48</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 299-301; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), August 11, 1798.

<sup>49</sup>Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 724. Jefferson referred to the environment that produced the Alien and Sedition Acts as “not the natural state” and also as “the reign of witches.”

<sup>50</sup> DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 100.

Republicans constituted a French faction that threatened national security, which they used to force conformity to their war aims.

The Alien and Sedition Acts made popular anti-Jacobinism central to American political self-conception. They led to the crystallization of an anti-revolutionary vision of American politics, widely disseminated for the first time. A crucial moment in how Americans publicly talked about politics, it allowed for the growth of “a new self-congratulatory narrative of national identity.” Building on long-festered existing themes of foreign intrigue threatening the independence of the United States, this narrative construed the United States as separate from Europe, if not wholly isolated from it.<sup>51</sup> As the Farewell Address showed, however, political opportunities arose from linguistic double-sidedness and ambiguity that allowed for slippage. The risks of overreach were also great. The more Federalists harped about French intrigue, the more vulnerable they were to Republican accusations that they were tools of the British.

Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts near the end of 1798. The Alien Acts—the Alien Friends Act and the Alien Enemies Act were “a bold attempt to purify the national character by isolating all aliens from American society and from each other.”<sup>52</sup> The Alien Friends' Act of June 25, 1798 concerned alleged French agents. The Alien Enemies Act of July 6 applied only to a declared war or invasion, and after a presidential proclamation. The Alien Acts authorized the deportation of aliens considered dangerous, or even suspected of “treasonable or secret” inclinations. Though not strictly enforced, they prompted many French refugees to depart the United States.

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<sup>51</sup>Cotlar, “The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive,” 275-77.

<sup>52</sup>Smith, *Freedom's Fetters*, 52.

The Sedition Act, which Federalist judges far more rigorously enforced, targeted the Republican press. Anyone found guilty of circulating “false, scandalous, and malicious statements” against the president, members of either house of Congress, or the government would be prosecuted and fined.

While Congress deliberated the Alien and Sedition Acts, Federalists and Republicans fought to claim public space with their mobilization of militia and the press. Federalists conflated national honor with male identity, which served to mobilize Federalist militia to take over public space during the Quasi-War. The militia competed with the Cincinnati and Democratic societies as exemplars of public opinion, because there were simply more of them. They also made so much noise when they took to the streets that members of Congress could barely hear themselves debate the merits of the Sedition Acts.<sup>53</sup> Federalist talk of “honor” in public and in private directly and purposefully challenged the Republican lexicon of equality, brotherhood, and solidarity with the French Revolution. Politics, foreign affairs, and personal identities converged.<sup>54</sup>

The Alien and Sedition Acts also produced the opposite of their intended effect, providing the Republicans with crucial political opportunities. Previously scattered, the Republican press grew into a more powerful rival to its Federalist counterpart.<sup>55</sup> The Federalists still had newspaper superiority in 1798. The foreign relations crises of the 1790s, however, transformed printers keeping the public informed into political

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<sup>53</sup>Stevens Thomas Mason to Thomas Jefferson, July 6, 1798, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 443.

<sup>54</sup>David Waldstreicher, “Founder Chic as Culture War,” *Radical History Review* 84.1 (2002): 185-194; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 157; Smith, *Freedom's Fetters*, 111.

<sup>55</sup>Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 106, 131.

professionals instrumental to the growth of political parties, as opposed to their being mere practitioners of the printing trade. In addition, Federalist attempts to manufacture consensus (and silence dissent) allowed the language of conciliation to be used for partisan advantage, with the two emerging parties wrestling for control of it.

Jefferson was aware of this phenomenon. In a letter to Madison, he enclosed a copy of “a poem on the Alien bill” entitled *The Aliens* by Humphrey Marshall, a Federalist Senator from Kentucky who supported the Alien and Sedition Acts. Jefferson noted that the work “would be lost by lending if I retain it here, as the publication was suppressed after the sale of a few copies of which I was fortunate enough to get one.”<sup>56</sup> The suppression of Marshall's poem was perhaps unsurprising: its understanding of intrigue, aliens, and sedition cut in two directions. It suggested that British and French intrigue were both dangerous, reflecting the loss of Federalist power in the South and West. It could give the Republicans political ammunition in its alternative ways of celebrating Washington and his neutral behavior.

Addressed to Washington and praising his exemplary conduct, *The Aliens* extolled America as a bucolic land of freedom. It made sense for aliens to find asylum in a nation ruled by a firm and steady hand so far from the Old World, “where most to tyrants stoop and bend, like slaves of base bred condition.”<sup>57</sup> Openly welcoming foreigners, however, meant that the *wrong kind* as well as the harmless ones often ended up on American shores. Innocent aliens had nothing to fear, but all Americans needed to

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<sup>56</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, May 31, 1798, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 380.

<sup>57</sup>Humphrey Marshall, *The Aliens: A Patriotic Poem (Occasioned by the Alien Bill Now before the Senate)* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1798), 6. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 34048.

beware of the disruptive sort, such as an Edmund Genet (who separated the people's affections from Washington) or a Robert Liston. The wrong kind of alien spread discord that "pit brother against brother," and needed to be ferreted out, exposed, and prosecuted.

Particularly noteworthy is that Marshall exploits widespread condemnation of French intrigue to argue that the British pose an equal threat, and pleads for moderation in rooting out foreign intrigue. The United States was hemmed in on two fronts in its battle against foreign disruption in domestic affairs—the aristocracy in the case of Britain and the mob in the case of France. Defend against French intrigue by all means, urged Marshall, but remain equally on guard against those who toast King George. In exposing sedition, there was also no need to stoop to arbitrary laws. Arbitrary laws only reaped the reward of "basest slaves, drivellers, and fools."<sup>58</sup>

While not mentioning chattel slavery, Marshall warns that zealously prosecuting "slavery" from foreign intrigue could result in "slavery" from tyrannical laws in domestic politics. His poem was potentially explosive in an atmosphere where Americans were divided over the exercise of federal power and which foreign power was doing the enslaving. While Federalists decried French intrigue, Republicans still smarted from the Jay Treaty's concessions to Great Britain and saw the Blount Conspiracy as evidence of British intrigue. Marshall would propose in 1800 that the Senate investigate all breaches of its privileges by newspapers, be they Federalist or Republican. He would also recommend that the Senate inquire after the calumny directed at it by the Federalist *Gazette of the United States*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Marshall, *The Aliens*, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19.

<sup>59</sup>Senate, 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, *Annals*, 10:92-96; 103-104; Smith, *Freedom's Fetters*, 293.

Expansion of the Republican press enabled it to more readily contest the Federalist nationalist consensus, its attempts at a unitary public sphere, and its interpretations of political and diplomatic language. Republicans re-appropriated Federalist tactics to drive the Federalists from power. As they had only begun to during the Jay Treaty debate, they condemned Federalist attempts to direct popular opinion and control the public sphere. The Republicans—the “losing” side during the Jay Treaty debate—were regrouping.<sup>60</sup> The Sedition Acts facilitated this comeback. Republicans seized upon Federalist use of the epithet “Jacobin” to charge their opponents with public disorder: the Federalists were now the instigators of scurrility, whereas Republicans were the true friends of civility, order, and constitutional orthodoxy.<sup>61</sup>

Blaming Britain for foreign intrigue that separated the American people from their government enabled Republicans with more radical, democratic views of publicity to appropriate partisan anti-partisanship. Near the end of the Quasi-War, the *Aurora* criticized as obsessively one-sided Federalist condemnation of foreign intrigue. The *Aurora* claimed that Britain’s motives for intrigue were stronger, its means far greater, than those of France— Britain, jealous of American prosperity, sought a monopoly in the areas of manufactures, navigation, and commerce. Britain also hated and feared the example of the American Republic and its system of government, and aimed to crush it by drawing it into foreign wars. Moreover, the advertising that supported the urban-

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<sup>60</sup> Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 491; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), June 15, 1795, August 27, 1798, September 27, 1798.

based press allowed British influence to “steal into our newspapers” through merchant interests.<sup>62</sup>

Among Republicans' choice “alien” targets were “British pensioners” like Peter Porcupine. An English émigré and an actively anti-Jacobin political journalist, Cobbett was a perfect symbol of “British influence” corrupting public opinion.<sup>63</sup> Cobbett’s pamphlets and newspapers (*Porcupine's Gazette* and the *Country Porcupine*), known for their nasty wit aimed at the Republican attachment to the French Revolution, were widely read. Printers like William Duane also exposed “the English connexions” of the Federalist *Gazette of the United States*, claiming that John Ward Fenno, along with Cobbett, conspired with Robert Liston to subvert the American press. Duane succeeded Benjamin Franklin Bache as the *Aurora*’s editor when Bache died of yellow fever on September 10, 1798. By the summer of 1799, Duane and the *Aurora* had learned to wield the language of moral indignation against foreign meddling and its domestic facilitators. Exploiting public anxiety and fear of disorder, Republicans claimed the diplomatic and moral high-ground of American independence and neutrality for themselves.

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<sup>62</sup>“Enemy to Foreign Influence,” *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), January 23, 1799; mentioned in James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, January 12, 1799, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30:619-620. Editors of the papers of James Madison have identified the *Aurora* essay as Madison's.

<sup>63</sup>See for example James Carey, “A nosegay, for the young men from 16 to 24 years of age. A true picture of the King of England. Dedicated to his hireling skunk Porcupine, with his petition to the corporation, of the city of Philadelphia, &c. &c. &c.” (Philadelphia: James Carey, 1798). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 33495; Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 265-6, 277; Jerald Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley, 1970), 115. Carey, a younger brother of Matthew Carey, was the editor of the *Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser* (Richmond, VA). Carey accuses Porcupine—and Federalists like Hamilton—of being part of a British conspiracy.



*National Security and Domestic Disturbances: Foreign Affairs, National Character, and the Politics of Slavery*

As foreign relations, print publicity, and national character converged during the late 1790s, the personal became political and vice versa. Attacks on Washington for the Jay Treaty and for the Farewell Address's open identification of neutrality with the first president's public virtue foreshadowed that convergence. Partisan battles over foreign intrigue showed that the expansion of the public sphere came with its ironies: as it supposedly made public life more impersonal and anonymous, political discourse became more personalized.<sup>64</sup> A politics that attributed significance to national character and its burdens of representation provided the basis for scurrilous journalism (such as Porcupine's or even William Duane's) to openly challenge boundaries between public and private. Scurrility affected national discourses by disturbing national silences.

Federalists portrayed neutrality and Washington's character as cool, detached, and above disorderly passion. Republicans, conversely, warned of the intrigue that necessarily accompanied unchecked power that ran roughshod over the people. Both sides made occasional, but not insignificant, use of the slavery metaphor whenever concerns over inordinate subservience to a foreign power or to a national figure (a potential monarch or despot) arose. In a land where chattel slavery calibrated public values, however, recourse to the slavery metaphor heightened the sense of crisis even as it made revolutionary rhetoric more open to critique.<sup>65</sup> As the private virtue of public men increasingly mattered in politics and foreign relations, chattel slavery found its way

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<sup>64</sup>Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 216.

<sup>65</sup>Peter A. Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as Metaphor in Revolutionary America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), xii.

into foreign-relations discourse as the existent reality of international, national, and local transgression.

Accusing Southern slaveholders of being bad republicans was a staple of Federalist newspapers and periodicals. New England Federalists in particular linked internal dissent against their foreign and domestic policies to Southern Republican slaveholders, who threatened the union with their hypocritical support for democracy and the French Revolution. Southerners protested aristocracy, but what about their own feudal “reign over a thousand negroes”? They were also ambitious men who professionally proclaimed liberty, but in practice, their tyranny of mankind would destroy the nation through “French ANARCHY.”<sup>66</sup>

William Cobbett consistently combined the politics of slavery with print publicity in his exposures of bad character, the wrong public sentiments, and threats to national security. Before the furor over the Jay Treaty leak, Cobbett had suggestively connected secrecy, sedition, sex, and Southern slaveholding.<sup>67</sup> In *The Bloody Buoy* (1796), written as Franco-American relations deteriorated, he ridiculed the hypocrisy in Republicans' fetishizing of the word “republic”: they fawned over the French Revolution while neglecting its bloodshed. Moreover, a Republican member of Congress denounced one

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<sup>66</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), reprinted from *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA) January, 15, 1796. For similar examples, see Daniel Davis, *An Oration, Delivered at Portland, July 4th, 1796...* (Portland: Thomas B. Waite, 1796), 16. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 30315; Remarks on the 'Feast of Reason' in New York" *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), July 18, 1797. See also Rachel Hope Cleaves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 104, 120.

<sup>67</sup>See William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats* (January, 1795) in *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution*, ed. David A. Wilson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 89-118 discussed in Chapter 3.

of his Federalist colleagues from New England as anti-republican, all because the latter “proposed something that seemed to militate *against negro slavery*.”<sup>68</sup>

As Franco-American relations plummeted further after the XYZ Affair, Cobbett reiterated his earlier points. Decrying French intrigue and influence in the United States in *Detection of a Conspiracy*, he now claimed that “what renders the situation of America more favourable to the views of France than any other country is the *negro slavery* to the Southward.” French intrigue also threatened the United States with the disorderly manumission of its slaves. According to Cobbett, free blacks were conspiring with transatlantic radicals like the United Irishmen (themselves in league with France). Moreover, some Carolina or Virginia slaveholders, in “*a case of URGENCY*,” had set their slaves free “in order to excite discontents among those of their neighbours, and thus involve the whole country in rebellion and bloodshed.”<sup>69</sup>

The impact of the French Revolution on the European balance of power and the extension of the Quasi-War to the West Indies made St. Domingue significant in Federalist ideas of French intrigue. Another common theme in Federalist print literature was that France would attack the United States from the Caribbean colony. A third was that the French Revolution would inspire American slaves to revolt. Through previously existing themes whose usage was already stoked by the foreign-relations crisis, St. Domingue resonated in American society at all levels—national and local, public and

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<sup>68</sup>Cobbett, *The Bloody Buoy* (1796), in *Ibid.*, 151. Original emphasis.

<sup>69</sup>Cobbett, *Detection of a Conspiracy* (May 6, 1798), in Wilson, *Peter Porcupine in America*, 254. Original italics and capital letters.

private. Always a danger in the public mind since the colonial period, slave revolt re-emerged in print as one of the tangled threads of the French Revolution's disorder.

In August 1797 Boston newspapers spread rumors that Frenchmen from St. Domingue were coming to burn American towns.<sup>70</sup> Blacks infected by the St. Dominguan slave revolt and the French Revolution constituted a similar danger. Since 1793, Americans in both the North and South wary of slave revolt increasingly referred to black and colored St. Domingans as “French negroes.” The term “French negroes” associated them with rebellion and designated them as instruments of foreign intrigue. In 1797 *The Pennsylvania Gazette* claimed to have discovered a plot where “French negroes” attempted to burn Charleston, kill its white inhabitants, and take possession of the gunpowder magazine and arms. The thwarted slave revolt resulted in the execution of at least two of the “French negroes” with another two being expelled from South Carolina.<sup>71</sup> Just as Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775 amounted to a foreign-instigated “domestic insurrection,” slaves were an entity acted upon and rarely possessed any agency of their own, despite St. Domingue’s slave revolt of 1791.

Rumors of French Revolutionary ideas inciting Southern slave revolts reinforced the idea of the South as a threat to national security. Some of those rumors appeared in print. After receiving the XYZ dispatches, Secretary Pickering informed South Carolina Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper that France was secretly fomenting a slave rebellion in

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<sup>70</sup>George Rogers Clark to Samuel Fulton, June 3, 1797, quoted in Bowman, *Struggle for Neutrality*, 309. Bowman quotes an extract from a Boston newspaper of August 31, 1796.

<sup>71</sup>*Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), December 13, 1797, quoted in Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 143; See also *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), December 9, 1794; For a detailed discussion of “French negroes,” see White, Chapter 4.

the South and would launch an invasion of the Southern states from St. Domingue.<sup>72</sup> Pickering claimed to have information that General Hédouville would lead the invasion, and that specially hired black agents were distributing arms to Southern slaves in anticipation of the attack. Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts repeated this rumor in a pamphlet that he published in April, 1798. Former Secretary of War Henry Knox feared the vulnerability of the Southern states, echoing Federalist desires to cooperate with Great Britain against a potential French invasion: the British navy was “the only preventative against an invasion of those States from the West India Island.”<sup>73</sup> *Porcupine's Gazette* warned Americans against “the diplomatic skill of the French republic!” chiding: “take care, take care, you sleepy southern fools! Your negroes will probably be your masters this day twelve month.”<sup>74</sup>

Previously, embracing the wrong public sentiments meant being politically enslaved by France. Now, embracing the wrong public sentiments—in any part of the country or in general— also made the United States susceptible to imitating St. Domingue’s slave revolt. A political cartoon about the XYZ Affair called “The Cinque Têtes, Or The Paris Monster” showed a five-headed hydra constantly demanding of the U.S. envoys, “Money, Money, Money!” The envoys refuse to offer even sixpence. A

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<sup>72</sup>Timothy Pickering to Robert Goodloe Harper, March 21, 1798. Pickering MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society, 10, 502 quoted in DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 84 from Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harrison Gray Otis, 1765-1848: The Urbane Federalist* (1913. Rev. ed. 2 vols in 1, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 1:68, n 11; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 598; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, 365; Joseph A. Fry, *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>73</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 85.

<sup>74</sup>*Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 7, June 22, 1798; DeConde, 405, n. 28.

poem accompanying the cartoon indignantly demands French restoration of American shipping and “treasure” while it condemns Gallic insults and bribery.

“A Civic Feast” provides the backdrop for the extortion attempt: the Terror (a harridan wearing the Phrygian cap and presiding over a guillotine) looks on as a group of men, including a well-dressed black from St. Domingue dine on a plate of live frogs. Succumbing to the Paris Monster and France's “close hugging” meant surrendering American independence to gratuitous blood-letting and slave revolt. The poem defiantly states that France will not sever the “voice” of the American mind from freedom or from Adams.<sup>75</sup> France had attempted to bribe the U.S. envoys and silence American public opinion by usurping the sentiment that had been fostered between the people and their president. Whenever St. Domingue came up in Congress, it was usually as an example of republicanism gone wrong, or as a threat to internal security.<sup>76</sup>

Fears that slave violence threatened neutrality, which arose from public contention of national character, public opinion, and foreign influence, also affected the American Revolution's “family romance.” Washington was “father of his country” and the people were his “children.”<sup>77</sup> The Farewell Address suggested that neutrality depended on citizens who were virtuous, cool, and restrained in public and in private.

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<sup>75</sup>Oberg, *PTJ*, 30:xxxix-xl and illustrations following 364. Author's emphasis.

<sup>76</sup>Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 138-139.

<sup>77</sup>Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 98, 111; see Cotlar, “The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive,” 282 for “romantic rhetoric of domesticity”; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Chapter 1; Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, Chapter 2; Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 168; Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 14; Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 4-5; Nick Cullather, “Modernization Theory” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 212-220.

William Cobbett demonstrated that internal security could involve intimate dimensions beyond geographic locality. Federalists, and even moderate Republicans, began to associate European-style democracy with threats to the “natural” order of affections that bound families, neighbors, and nations.

Anti-cosmopolitan discourse during the late 1790s stressed richly-detailed accounts of a Jacobin conspiracy to overthrow the federal government. In this anti-cosmopolitan construction’s “romantic rhetoric of domesticity,” the foreign endangered domesticity through publicity invading the private sphere. Domestic disturbance affected women as well as the oft-unmentioned members of many American “extended families” and households: African-American servants and slaves.

John Murdock's 1798 drama *The Politicians*, illustrates the controversy that had followed the Jay Treaty debate and Washington’s prescriptions for neutral behavior. It uses scenes of domestic disorder to illustrate the consequences of foreign intrusion into the “natural” order of affections. Murdock, a Philadelphia artisan and an acquaintance of Tench Coxe and Benjamin Rush, was significant for his dramatic pieces featuring slavery.<sup>78</sup> As commentary on the Jay Treaty, *The Politicians* depicts politics as disordering affections among families, neighbors, and nations by dividing Americans in society’s most intimate spaces as well as in the streets.

At the play’s opening, an older black servant named Cato laments the effect of “poletic” on women and the home. He expresses puzzled exasperation as to why the

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<sup>78</sup>Heather S. Nathans, “Staging Slavery: Representing Race and Abolitionism On and Off the Philadelphia Stage” in *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love*, ed. Richard S. Newman and James Mueller (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 204-206.

women, Mrs. Turbulent and Mrs. Violent, should talk endlessly about politics, the Jay Treaty, the president, the English and the French, with “dere two tongue [going] like mill clap.”<sup>79</sup> African Americans Cato, Caesar, Pompey and Sambo reflect and lampoon the disruptive influence of “poetic” on civil society. Murdock also links this disruption with the general, subtle recognition amongst the other characters that France, slavery, and blacks taken together present the frightening possibility of slave revolt.

In the midst of arguing passionately about the treaty, ardent Federalist Mrs. Violent and ardent Republican Mrs. Turbulent turn their thoughts to Washington. Mrs. Violent echoes the standard Federalist line: Washington is the father of his country. Mrs. Turbulent’s retort that love of Washington amounted to idolatry of a man who sold out American independence, and whose abilities are no more than those of a “negro driver” could have come straight out of the *Aurora*. Conciliate, Mrs. Violent’s brother, echoes Washington’s praise of religion, preaching Christian temperance as a neutralizer of passions: France was in a state of “political intoxication.” Political intoxication was contagious; until sobered and made rational again, France was dangerous. When Conciliate expects temperance to inspire France to blush at its poor treatment of the United States, Mrs. Violent expects to “see a Negro blush,” for “their faces have, from time to time, been well crimsoned with the blood of their fellow-citizens.”<sup>80</sup>

France had also sent America the “artful, designing junto” of Genet, Fauchet, and Adet, the last of whom “attempted to separate the people from their government.” If this

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<sup>79</sup>John Murdock *The Politicians; or a State of Things. A Dramatic Piece. Written by an American and a Citizen of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1798), 1. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 34160.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-29.



was diplomacy, France did not deserve gratitude. Only Washington's vigilance and that of some of his trusty counselors thwarted France's "hellish projects" while Republicans "belched" refrains of gratitude to France *ad nauseum*.<sup>81</sup> Amid the arguing, there emerges an "American" position that is neither British nor French for being agitated by neither belligerent power.

Murdock cuts through the national silence over slavery, using African Americans, black dialect, and the device of the servant joke to comment on the Jay Treaty debate: foreign influence in the body politic's private realm created potential for slave violence. While disdaining the women's political preoccupations and fighting over politics themselves, the blacks embody both domestic order and its disruption. As their classical Roman names suggest, obedient, virtuous slaves like Cato keep out of politics; foolish ones like Caesar and Pompey are preoccupied with their masters' political passions. To Caesar, the English are fine and manly—orderly— while the French are cutthroats. Pompey insists that "France git liberty to slabe liberty" (violence notwithstanding).

The "American" position, however, suggests that neutrality—detachment from foreign influence— begets peaceful manumission as opposed to imitating St. Domingue: Sambo has been freed by a master who sides not with France or Britain but "for he country." Sambo is temperate and honest, and therefore allowed to participate in political debate, while his "black fool" friends Caesar and Pompey fight over politics. Both

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<sup>81</sup>Murdock, *The Politicians*, 6-7, 20, 32.

women and slaves should know their place. Moreover, Cato points out, politicized slaves who ape Europeans in white powdered wigs only make themselves look blacker.<sup>82</sup>

*The Politicians* reflects the tendency of Early Republic's popular culture to repeatedly portray slaves as part of George Washington's family circle. In the late-eighteenth century and also in the nineteenth, the first president was the benevolent father of the republic and the nation—to both his white and his black “children.”<sup>83</sup> National discourse on public and private interests and sentiment imparted diplomatic lessons that safeguarding U.S. neutrality at home was closely linked with safeguarding the family romance of the American Revolution. Protecting the “natural” order of affections that bound families, neighbors, and nations involved minimizing domestic disturbances—including the explosive potential of slave revolt—in private and in public.

*Public Interest, Private Diplomacy, and the Enemy Within: The Logan Act*

Constant railing against foreign subservience did not make quelling domestic disturbances any easier. The crisis fanned by public brawls over Franco-American relations, “true” American character, and the national interest made private peace overtures a potential avenue of foreign “enslavement.” The Logan Affair and the law that bears his name resulted from the categorization of private diplomacy as the secret plotting of sedition, always contrary to the public interest.

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<sup>82</sup>Murdock, *The Politicians*, 6-7, 20, 32; John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 303-304.

<sup>83</sup>Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 94.

The Logan Act, which makes it a crime for private citizens to use their own resources for peace brokering with a country at war with the United States, originates in the Early Republic's exposés of intrigue as evidence of foreign influence. Signed into law on January 30, 1799 on Connecticut Representative Roger Griswold's motion, it has resurfaced in 20th-century deliberations over national security. There are very few cases of prosecution under the Logan Act, but it remains law. The threat of sanction for any U.S. citizen interfering without authority in the foreign relations of the United States still exists.

Public condemnation of Logan and his activities extended the Sedition Act and its anti-Jacobinism to diplomacy: the "diplomatic skill of the French Republic" was capable of fostering sedition and treason. Logan was the tool of a "pro-French party."<sup>84</sup> The Logan Affair reaffirmed the primacy of executive power in foreign policy: safeguarding neutrality meant quelling popular participation. The Logan Act negated the idea, often promoted by radical Republicans and French diplomats like Genet that the Franco-American alliance pertained not just to relations between heads of state but also the two peoples. It also negated the idea that the people themselves were capable of not only understanding foreign policy, but making it.

On June 7, 1798, in the midst of the XYZ Affair, Dr. George Logan, a Philadelphia Republican and Quaker, undertook a peace mission to France. Professing his intention to conduct agricultural research, Logan had been planning his mission for some time. Pickering had intercepted a letter from Logan to James Monroe in June, 1796,

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<sup>84</sup>Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, 364; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 133-6; Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 5, 8.

which he showed to Washington as “proof” of Monroe's treachery. Logan's actions were closely watched: he talked freely at public meetings, and the press, both in France and in the United States amply reported his movements and opinions in.<sup>85</sup> *The Journal of the Times* chastised him as a “self-created Envoy” whom the French Directory would be reluctant to acknowledge. But an address in *Greenleaf's New York Journal and Patriotic Register* praised him as a “true patriot” whose “manly remonstrances” served the national interest by raising the French embargo on U.S. shipping and returning captives and property. Logan's response also appeared in print: French generosity arose from wanting to avoid war. Americans owed their thanks to France, not to him.<sup>86</sup>

The Senate attacked Logan's private diplomacy, and Adams condemned the “officious interference of individuals without public character.” When debating the propriety of Logan's mission became Congress's first order of business in December, 1798, Republicans proceeded cautiously, purposefully avoiding “all questions of foreign relations” so that they would not be “charged with being agents of France.” In a memorandum to Jefferson, Monroe lamented that Logan's activities were not properly recognized as a *mission*, which would protect the Republicans from any suspicion of intrigue.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Bowman, 354; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 614.

<sup>86</sup>*Journal of the Times* (Stonington, CT), November 28, 1798; *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), December 4, 1798; *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), December 4, 1798; *Farmer's Register* (Chamberberg, PA), December 5, 1798; *Greenleaf's New York Journal and Patriotic Register* (New York, NY), December 5, 1798; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), December 6-10, 1798.

<sup>87</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 170-71; Frederick B. Tolles, *George Logan of Philadelphia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 183, 185-204.

Their fears were legitimate. Federalists in the House immediately accused Logan and the Republicans of conspiring with France. Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts claimed that the only persons privy to Logan's departure were the Vice President (Jefferson), Chief Justice of Pennsylvania (Thomas McKean), and ... *Genet*. Joseph Woodward, also of Massachusetts conjured up bloody horrors of being wedded to French principles, including "promiscuous ruin" and "enslavement." "Reformed Jacobin" Robert Goodloe Harper of South Carolina saw Logan's diplomacy as the work of a "pro-French party" conspiring with Talleyrand through an American agent to regain its lost prestige. According to Harper, Talleyrand and his co-conspirators meant to lull the American people into a false sense of security to pave the way for a French invasion of the United States. The cancer of foreign influence, left unchecked, would destroy the body politic. Logan's vanity and recklessness would lead America down the path to foreign despotism, as in Europe. Furthermore, there would be nothing preventing individuals, clubs, or factions from interfering with executive power to make war or peace.<sup>88</sup>

The Federalist press likewise lambasted George Logan. Deborah Logan, his wife and editor of his memoirs, referred to a "communication" in the *Philadelphia Gazette* dating from around June, 1798. The "communication" echoes common Federalist themes of Republicans as the purveyors of disorder. Logan's secret mission was "fraught with intelligence of the *most dangerous tendency to his country*." His "*inordinate* love of French liberty and hatred to *the sacred constitution* of the United States" would lead to the destruction of families and all decency. The "communication" specifically accused

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<sup>88</sup>Tolles, *George Logan*, 191; House of Representatives, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, *Annals*, 9:2510, 2528-9.

Logan of stealing out of his own home in order to meet with the French minister Le Tombe, and for abandoning his wife, children, relatives, and country. *The Philadelphia Gazette* shrilly denounced the Philadelphia Quaker's peace-feelers toward France as "a species of conspiracy, most fatal to freedom, and abhorrent to humanity."<sup>89</sup>

When Logan publicly defended his actions as those of a private citizen with no instructions from anyone, Republicans rallied behind him. Pennsylvania Republican Albert Gallatin was Logan's chief champion in Congress, accusing the Federalists of "[raising] a clamor" about foreign affairs in order to push through the Alien and Sedition Acts. The acts had raised a standing army, not for repelling a French invasion, but for crushing faction at home. "A Friend to Peace" in the *Independent Chronicle* condemned Logan's treatment by Adams and the Federalist press as "abuse" and "scurrility." If (to echo a long-standing theme in the Republican press) "the SPECULATORS . . . the FUNDING GENTRY . . . the CONTRACTORS and AGENTS . . . many BANKRUPTS . . . the IDLE and DISSOLUTE" condemned Logan's noble actions, that made him praiseworthy in the eyes of "the people." Unlike the malicious character of his detractors in the extreme-Federalist "WAR FACTION," Logan's character was morally upright for wanting peace with France. Anyone wanting war with France was morally suspect and an "enemy to his country."<sup>90</sup>

Federalist newspapers still equated George Logan's name and private diplomacy with a secret seditious plot by the end of the decade. *The Gazette of the United States*

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<sup>89</sup>Deborah Logan, *The Memoir of Dr. George Logan of Stenton*, ed. Frances Logan (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1899), 59-60. Original emphasis.

<sup>90</sup>*Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), January 7, 1799; *Farmers' Register* (Chambersburg, PA), January 9, 1799. Original emphasis; Tolles, *George Logan*, 189; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 312.

linked him to Republican Representative Matthew Lyon, the “Spitting Lyon,” whose trial under the Sedition Act had been publicized. The paper claimed that Lyon spat on Congress and Logan spat on his country, while the people sang their hosannas (or their “Ça iras,” depending on the *Gazette of the United States*'s variations on a theme, where in any case the French would become rulers of the land).<sup>91</sup>

The *Gazette of the United States* also claimed to have uncovered William Duane, rushing from the Senate at the behest of prominent Philadelphia Republican, Alexander Dallas, to plot sedition and treason with Logan and the Devil in the shadowy basement of Stenton, Logan’s Philadelphia mansion.<sup>92</sup> Logan’s public persecution over his private diplomacy tied his peace effort to courting aliens, sedition, and even treason. It contributed to an atmosphere that reinforced for all good American Whigs that subservience to foreign despotism eventually led to their own enslavement.

#### *Taxation and Tyranny: The Quasi-War, Sectionalism, and Slavery*

Republican re-appropriation of Federalist themes of foreign intrigue and disorder illustrated that those charges were double-edged. Print publicity helped construe the French Revolution in the public imagination as a disorderly foreign import and their American sympathizers as co-conspirators abetting sedition both in private and in public. On a deeper level, print publicity refashioned the French Revolution as an invasion of the private realm that threatened to “enslave” Americans by roiling their passions, and

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<sup>91</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), January 31, 1799; March 9, 1799.

<sup>92</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), April 18, 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), March 27, 29, 1800.

potentially those of their own slaves. In both instances, the mixed results of Federalist efforts allowed Republicans to claim neutrality for themselves, aligning it more clearly with its emerging nationalism.

The Quasi-War also affected Americans and their slaves in another way. Foreign relations triggered recourse to the politics of slavery when taxation needed to pay for increased military readiness hit Americans right in the purse, affecting some sections of the country more than others. Taxation reinforced anxiety over old problems that the Constitution had done little to solve.

On Adams's recommendation, Congress began constructing frigates, enlarging the army, and building fortifications in response to French attacks on U.S. shipping as well as "sudden and predatory incursions" along the Eastern coastline. To help pay for defense measures, the Ways and Means Committee imposed a direct tax in May 1798 "laid by uniform assessment, upon houses, land and slaves."<sup>93</sup> Historian John C. Miller remarks that "the Alien and Sedition Acts were ostensibly directed against 'intriguing and discontented foreigners,' 'Jacobins and vagabonds,' 'spies and incendiaries,' but the tax affected every landowner, householder, and slaveowner in the country."<sup>94</sup> The result was a heightened sense of sectional identity over the evils of "British-style" power that would contribute to the Jeffersonian Republican vision of the nation.

Miller's observation notwithstanding, taxation segued into existing fears of foreigners, spies, and intrigue, all of which fed into fears of "slavery." The law was not a

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<sup>93</sup>Robin Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 192.

<sup>94</sup>John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era, 1789-1801* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 247.



wholly Federalist measure, since Republicans in principle favored a direct tax. If they had opposed it, they would open themselves to the charge of trying to cripple the country's defense.<sup>95</sup> Republicans nonetheless sensed an opportunity to undermine, if not stop, Federalist efforts to define the nation and the national character. Jefferson viewed the Alien and Sedition Acts as a fever assaulting an otherwise sound republican body politic. With a little patience, the people would recover “their true sight, restoring their government to its true principles.” The fever would soon pass, for “the Doctor is now on his way to cure it, in the guise of a tax gatherer.”<sup>96</sup>

Taxation stirred up reminders of how the American Revolution had begun after the British parliament levied taxes on the colonies to help pay for the Seven Years' War. The taxes had been an unwelcome exercise in revenue collection as well as in centralized imperial and federal power. Similar questions over political economy and regional interest arose with Hamilton's proposed program of credit, the Jay Treaty debate, and again during the Quasi-War. The *Aurora* had warned that the conflict's expense would adversely affect the country's credit, which was already stable.<sup>97</sup>

Jefferson believed that Federalist policies aimed to crush the South's agrarian economy, and he expected that a direct tax affecting every householder, landowner, and slaveholder would overturn the Alien and Sedition Acts. In a letter to his fellow Virginian Archibald Stuart, he remarked: “Of the two millions of Dollars now to be realised by a tax on lands, houses, and slaves, Virginia is to furnish between three and

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<sup>95</sup>DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 102.

<sup>96</sup>Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, November 26, 1798, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 588.

<sup>97</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), March 2, 1798; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), March 12, 1798.

400,000”—a number that was half of what it would cost to raise the provisional army, and on the whole a tenth of the annual military budget.<sup>98</sup>

If both the house and slave taxes were levied before the tax on land, wealthy planters might find themselves paying the entire quotas of the Southern states. In fact, they would be taxed double: while New England Federalists saw the houses as commercial proxies to demonstrate to yeoman farmers that merchant elites were paying their share, the slave tax already affected the “personal property” of Southern elites. A tax so heavily levied on both houses and slaves meant those in the backcountry would pay scarcely anything. The Federalist taxes had been designed to favor farmers over merchants in the North and to especially favor them over Southern slaveholders.<sup>99</sup>

The Federalists apportioned the direct tax to the states by the three-fifths population rule. The stipulations levied the tax on all slaves, excepting children of ages twelve and younger, the elderly (age fifty and older), and those disabled or infirm and incapable of labor. They levied a tax ad valorem on houses worth more than \$100 at progressive rates, and a tax ad valorem on land at fixed rates in order to raise the balance of state quotas after determining the yields for the slave and house taxes in every state.

The Founders during the 1780s had barely understood the provisions for “direct taxes” during the Constitutional Convention. No delegate expected the need to arise. Slavery escaped federal taxation unless the government imposed direct taxes. By the

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<sup>98</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Stewart, June 8, 1798, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 397.

<sup>99</sup>Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery*, 194, citing House of Representatives, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, *Annals*, 8: 2058.

1790s both Federalists and Republicans were exploiting them for partisan advantage.<sup>100</sup> In the South, vigorous debate arose over the Federalist program of 1798 with Federalists and Republicans accusing each other of wishing to foment civil war.

Resistance to national taxation to help pay for the Quasi-War in turn convinced Federalists of the remaining threat of transatlantic Jacobinism. It likewise became almost a truism of Republican newspapers that holders of both bank stock and federal certificates funding the war effort should be made to pay taxes equal to, if not higher, than those of small landowners and laborers. Abstract wealth (so the argument went) was “more productive than any general description of property possessed by the farmer.”<sup>101</sup> Jefferson sensed a potential exposé: the direct tax would have much the same “sedative” effect in the South as the Alien and Sedition acts had on the “XYZ inflammation.” The tax would “excite enquiries [sic] into the object of the enormous expences [sic] and taxes we are bringing on.”<sup>102</sup>

Republicans re-appropriated the slavery metaphor in protest against Federalist war preparations: they had earlier supported the building of a navy in 1794. Now, they saw fleets as instruments of oppression and “a burthen of slavery” upon the people.<sup>103</sup> The Republican press repeated this claim leading up to the election of 1800. Instead of standing armies or navies, a far more potent weapon of U.S. foreign policy was trade;

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<sup>100</sup>Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery*, 194; George Van Cleeve, *A Slaveholder's Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 145.

<sup>101</sup>Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 67; Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 155.

<sup>102</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799, Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 649; Onuf and Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War*, 4, 165, 180-82.

<sup>103</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 319-320.

standing armies would trample the people's rights. Only Jefferson's election would safeguard their sovereignty: Federalist obsessions with going to war with France would "insure slavery to man for centuries to come."<sup>104</sup> With both parties accusing the other of "slavery," not only could foreign powers "enslave" Americans, but also one section of the union could do as much to another.

*National Interests and Outside Agitators: St. Domingue, Slavery, and Revolution*

Public, national debates over neutrality contributed to two emerging visions of nationhood and union that were wary of foreign influence. Wariness of foreign influence segued into fears of outside agitators meddling in local affairs. Republicans throughout the neutrality crisis identified the nation with the union of states. When they feared that Federalists were using the federal government's power to promote the interests of privileged groups, they resorted to states' rights in their understanding of the union's preservation.

The respective legislatures adopted the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions on November 13, 1798 (Kentucky) and on December 24, 1798 (Virginia). Drafted in secret, they were a non-violent protest against the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Resolutions asserted that the Constitution had delegated certain powers to the federal government, specifically enumerated; all other powers were reserved for the states. In the case of the

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<sup>104</sup>*Farmer's Journal* (Newton, NJ), November 1, 1797; "American," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), May 16, 1799; *American* (Baltimore, MD), October 1, 1799; *Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC), May 9, 1799; *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 5, 1799; *Virginia Gazette and Petersburg Intelligencer* (Petersburg, VA), June 18, 1799; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 319-320, 769, n 206, 207.

Alien and Sedition Acts, a dangerous exercise of power not granted by the constitutional compact, the states had the right—if not the duty—to declare such acts null and void.

As Franco-American relations worsened at the close of the 1790s, relations with St. Domingue forced the issue of slavery's place in the union. The St. Domingue scare surfaced in Congress in 1798 when Governor Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania, a Federalist, argued that St. Dominguan refugees in the United States “with their armed slaves” posed a security risk. In the House of Representatives debate over trade with St. Domingue and Toussaint's Clause raised questions over whether the United States should recognize the colony's possible independence. Toussaint's Clause to the embargo on Franco-American trade allowed the president to authorize trade with the French colony whenever it proved beneficial to the United States.

In general, however, Adams did not want to publicly discuss policy toward St. Domingue, lest it further agitate public opinion.<sup>105</sup> Federalists generally showed some sympathy for Toussaint L'Ouverture and American need for continued trade with the colony. Republicans wondered how seriously this sympathy might undermine racial hierarchy and slavery in the United States. Voices from the North and from elsewhere contending that brutal exploitation of slaves justified rebellion made Southern slaveholders uncomfortable. So, too, did views that the slave rebels were recovering their lost liberty.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Brown, *Toussaint's Clause*, 139, 153, 167.

<sup>106</sup>Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 30.

St. Domingue was significant in Republican realignment with the interests of Southern slaveholders, and also indicated how Republican nationalism and appropriation of neutrality would have to confront slavery's place in the union. In the exercise of federal power, all Southerners were united on the belief that slavery must remain an issue for Southerners alone to deal with. St. Domingue became their reigning paradigm for the complete abolition of slavery in a slave society: when *outside agitators* meddled with slavery, the result was massive slave revolts and even revolution.

The link between French intrigue and the ever-present threat of slave revolt persisted. Southern Federalists supported a strong centralized government to protect them from Republican anarchy that would endanger slavery. Henry de Saussure of South Carolina wrote: "there can be little doubt that the French genius & disposition for mischief would lead them to attempt bold measures of seduction in relation to our blacks, and we shall guard carefully against their arts, altho' we do not apprehend mischief from any measures which are not backed by a strong military force."<sup>107</sup> In the debates over the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Southern Federalists played—if not preyed—upon white Virginians' fears of their slaves. They portrayed themselves as friends of order and Republicans as proponents of disorder. For example, the Alien Enemies Act was surely beneficial if it acted as a protection against outside agitators of slave discontent.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Henry de Saussure to Timothy Pickering, February 5, 1799. *Timothy Pickering Papers*, microfilm edition, 69 reels (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1966), reel 24, No. 53. Pickering tallied the slave population from 1791 to 1801, observing that they had increased from 648,440 to 147,748 *Timothy Pickering Papers*, reel 54, No. 69. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, February 5, 1799, *The Papers of James Madison, Legislative Series*, ed. David B. Mattern, et al. (Charlottesville, 1991), 17:226; Jefferson to Aaron Burr, February 11, 1799, in *Writings of Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (12 vols., New York, 1904-5), 7: 348.

<sup>108</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World*, 158; Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 105; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, 1993), 198.

As they tried to maintain their support for the French Revolution, Republicans incorporated fears of St. Domingue into pre-existing anti-British tropes. Adams had given U.S. shipping permission to conduct naval captures and privateering, though still short of an official declaration of war. Jefferson feared that Adams's friendliness toward Toussaint L'Ouverture would further imperil relations with France. According to Republican newspapers, Adams made the United States virtual British allies in the West Indies. The accusation also complemented another theme: the Adams administration was cooperating with Britain to encourage Toussaint's revolt, provoking the French Directory.<sup>109</sup>

Americans rarely saw the Haitian Revolution as the responsibility of the slaves themselves. In their private correspondence and in the press, Americans often praised Toussaint L'Ouverture for his piety, honesty, competence, and moderation. By contrast, they associated St. Domingue with bloody civil war, massacres, atrocities, Jacobinism, and abolition. Black St. Domingans—"French negroes"—could corrupt the character of black Americans. Neither Federalists nor Republicans wanted blacks infected by French revolutionary ideas participating in the public sphere.<sup>110</sup>

Thomas Jefferson concurred that outside agitators meddling with slavery in the United States were dangerous. He had feared a St. Domingue occurring in America with the influx of refugees from the island in 1793. While not averse to trading with St.

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<sup>109</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, January 30, 1799, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 30: 665; *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC), July 31, August 3, 1799; "Consistency," *Mirror of the Times* (Wilmington, DE) reprinted in *The Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), March 12, 1800; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 269, 316, 325, who quotes "N.," *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA), June 21, 1800.

<sup>110</sup>White, *Encountering Revolution*, 139, 144; Brown, *Toussaint's Clause*, 138-139.

Domingue per se, he foresaw complications. The Senate passed Toussaint's Clause—even the South Carolinians had voted for it—and Adams signed it into law on February 9, 1799. But if British traders failed to restrain St. Domingue, it might mean “black crews, supercargoes, and missionaries of revolution” in the Southern states, along with Caribbean sugar and coffee. When that “leven” [sic] began to work, he would “gladly compound with a great part of our northern country, if they would honestly stand neuter [neutral].” White Northern abolitionists might join with Southern slaves in bloody uprisings. Jefferson noted that “if this combustion [slave revolt] can be introduced among us under any veil whatever, we have to fear it.”<sup>111</sup> Outside agitators could be foreign or American; union at home and independence abroad involved the North staying out of Southern affairs regarding slavery.

Jefferson linked St. Domingue to British intrigue: Britain might use St. Domingans to attack the United States, “[playing them] off against us as they please.” This despite British naval presence and a secret treaty between Toussaint L'Ouverture, and British commanding officer Thomas Maitland keeping the island from becoming “an American Algiers.” Jefferson still saw the situation as a “leven” [sic] to guard against, where “timely measures on our part to clear ourselves by degrees” would be crucial to the country's safety.<sup>112</sup> Jefferson's pro-French neutrality would affect St. Domingue: Southern slaveholders exploited the debate over trade with the island to argue that normal relations with the French colony would create a threat to national security. Near the end

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<sup>111</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, February 12, 1799, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 31:29-31; Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 104.

<sup>112</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, February 5, 1799 in Oberg, *PTJ*, 31:9-11.



of the 1790s and into the early 1800s, Jefferson echoed his Federalist rivals that African Americans were a potential fifth column that a rival power might use against the United States. By then, he was inquiring into geographic locations where he might safely deport that distinct nation within the nation existing in a perpetual state of war.<sup>113</sup>

*Conclusion: The Political, the Personal, and National Security*

The Mortefontaine Convention of 1800 resolved the dispute over neutral rights with France. France, the most-favored nation before the Quasi War, conceded the loss of that status and the consequences of the Jay Treaty. The treaties with France and the alliance of 1778 had by then been abrogated. After some deliberation, Adams sent a second peace mission to Paris in October 1799. The final convention provided for the termination of both the old treaties and all claims by both France and the United States, and included articles incorporating the traditional doctrine of neutral rights.

Peace did not, however, resolve turmoil within the union over foreign relations and foreign intrigue that the dispute over neutral rights had generated. As Oliver Ellsworth, William Davie, and William Vans Murray negotiated peace terms, national politics fixated on the upcoming election of 1800. George Washington, U.S. neutrality personified, died in 1799. Immediately both Federalists and Republicans staked their claim to his memory and legacy. Each party claimed it was the true heir to the policy of neutrality and accused the other of surrendering to foreign influence.

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<sup>113</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, June 2, 1802, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, 12 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892-99), 8:154.

The manner in which the politics of slavery worked with the politics of publicity illustrated how neutrality as a foreign-policy paradigm proved malleable. Their combined dynamics presented both parties with political opportunities as well as pitfalls. Partisan rhetoric intensified, crystallizing around the widening gap between North and South, New England and Virginia. Federalists portrayed Jefferson as a Jacobin libertine who slept with slave women. Republicans denounced Adams's Tory vanity. William Duane's *Aurora* claimed that not voting for Jefferson signaled a lack of virtue and consenting to "be slaves at once."<sup>114</sup> While Federalists and Republicans accused each other of bad diplomacy and being the dupes of foreign powers, Gabriel's Rebellion—an unsuccessful Virginia slave revolt allegedly inspired by the French Revolution—heightened fears of St. Domingue, disunion, and civil war.<sup>115</sup>

After Jefferson's election in 1800, Southern interests greatly influenced the terms of national consensus for the victorious Republicans. Republican newspapers in the late 1790s generally condemned slavery as wrong in the abstract, while nonetheless espousing racial inequality. Beleaguered Federalists, especially in New England, found themselves on the periphery in the Jefferson's national political calculus. They groused repeatedly in years to come that if not for the three-fifths clause, Adams would have won. Instead, they were being held captive—*enslaved*—by Southern slaveholders.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), March 29, 1800 in Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: a Democratic-Republican Returns* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 764; David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 544-545.

<sup>115</sup>Paul A. Varg, *Foreign Policies of the Founding Fathers* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1963), 141; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 226; Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 170.

<sup>116</sup>Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 67; Dorsey, *Common Bondage*, 119; Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union*, 139.

Emphasis on print publicity in the Early Republic reminds us that foreign policy is a way a nation makes sense of itself. Union and nation were hardly synonymous in the Early Republic. Controversy arose from conflating the two, which print publicity enabled and exacerbated. In addition, there was slippage between metaphorical, political slavery, and chattel slavery, which heightened the controversy over conflating union and nation. The resulting tectonic shifts defined the limits of U.S. neutrality: as Federalists and Republicans used print to publicize each others' intrigues at the national level, the politics of slavery calibrated their nationalist politics, affecting their ideas of the national character.

The emerging parties did not merely capitalize on diplomatic crises to push agendas. Diplomatic crises exposed and exacerbated fault lines and vulnerabilities that put either or both on the defensive. Foreign relations fixated both Federalists and Republicans on fault lines in the union's balance of power, which manifested themselves in sensitivities to sectional interests that either defined or undermined party consensus. The loss of Federalist power in the South after the Jay Treaty and the election of 1796 weakened the Federalist nationalist vision. Federalist overreach during the Quasi-War and attacks on Southern slaveholding drew fire from Northern Republicans while it ultimately relegated Federalism to New England. The rise of Southern slaveholding interests within Republican nationalism enabled crystallization of the Republican national vision around slavery and forced Northern Republicans to compromise.

Both parties accused each other of partisanship while denying their own, seizing political opportunities to marginalize interests antithetical to their national vision and to

alleviate their fears. When Jefferson's 1801 Inaugural Address proclaimed, "we are all republicans, we are all federalists," the Federalists were the opposition, and Republicans were becoming the nation. His election, administration, and vision of Republican nationhood meant to marginalize the Federalists as the union's center of gravity shifted from Philadelphia and the Northeast to Washington DC and the South and West.

Americans in the Early Republic sought a common sentiment to bind them together. But fear of political enslavement in highly publicized discussions of international, national, and local affairs demonstrated how common sentiment would only go as far as its union of interests with its common bondage would allow it. Ironically, print publicity exposed and provoked the very intrigue that it meant to guard against, and the very secrecy, corruption, and Old World balances of power supposedly anathema to the New World. Worse, independence, the *sine qua non* of belonging to the 18<sup>th</sup> century's modern world of nations, depended upon them.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE DIPLOMATIC SUBTLETIES OF DOMESTIC SECURITY: JEFFERSON, NEUTRALITY, AND THE REVOLUTION OF 1800

Amid constant Republican accusations of Federalist “aristocracy” and “British influence” that would undermine U.S. neutrality, it was significant that Jefferson would take a consciously different approach to politics and to foreign relations. He signaled this difference through a change in style. His inauguration on March 4, 1801, was a low-key affair. It had little of the pomp and circumstance that had come to characterize the Federalist political style while it also stressed a continuation in substance with the preceding administrations.

Americans at the time noticed the change. They were nearly unanimous that Jefferson meant to make a political statement.<sup>1</sup> And they were correct. Most commentators contrasted Jefferson’s modesty with the coach and sixes that marked the inaugurations of Washington and Adams. In addition, the Revolution of 1800 was “bloodless” transfer of power—“effected by public spirit, and excited by the apostate ingratitude of public functionaries.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in wake of the raucous and divisive debates over foreign relations, Jefferson claimed: “we are all republicans, we are all federalists.” Jefferson’s inauguration was a foretaste of his approach to politics and foreign relations, and the relationship between the two. He broadly aimed to promote

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Adams, *History of the United States under the Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2 vols., (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1889), 1:187.

<sup>2</sup>*Constitutional Telegraphe* (Boston, MA), March 11, 1801.

unity at home and independence abroad by ridding the United States of domestic corruption.

Jefferson himself expounded with some enthusiasm that his “Revolution of 1800” would accomplish something new. The president-elect remarked to Joseph Priestley that “we can no longer say that there is nothing new under the sun.” Ecclesiastes to the contrary, “this whole chapter in the history of man is new. the [sic] great extent of our republic is new. it’s [sic] sparse habitation is new. the [sic] mighty wave of public opinion which has rolled over it is new. but [sic] the most pleasing novelty is it’s so quickly subsiding, over such an extent of surface, *to it’s [sic] true level again.*”<sup>3</sup>

The Revolution of 1800 was a process of recovery. The term “revolution” meant not a radical creation of a new order, but a return to—and restoration of—the true principles of 1776. Revolutions contained suggestions of coming full circle.<sup>4</sup> To begin with, the Revolution of 1800 marked the peaceful transition of power to the opposition at a time when in Europe and elsewhere such transfers more commonly dissolved into violence. It also marked the national ascendancy of Virginia-based interests and the reorientation of the nation's center of political and economic equilibrium away from the Northeast toward the rapidly expanding South and West. In addition, Jeffersonian politics projected the importance of union at home *into* the home: beyond wearing homespun, it involved a shift of the center of politics to the domestic and private.

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, March 21, 1801 in *The Papers of Thomas* (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. Barbara B. Oberg, 40 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 33:393-395. Author’s emphasis. For the reference to Scripture, see Ecclesiastes 1:9.

<sup>4</sup>Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 38.

Republican austerity had returned, and through it, Jefferson proposed to recover neutrality, also.

“Newness,” and a return to true principles, however, also emphasized and exacerbated old problems ranging from the territorial expansion of the republic to factionalism, and freedom from slavery. Jefferson’s “Revolution of 1800” therefore posed challenges to maintaining unity at home and independence abroad. Its politics and the foreign relations it engendered are a study in the confluence of change and continuity as well as the relationship between public and private. Instead of seeing the Revolution of 1800 as reflecting either change or continuity—with a revolution in the former and none in the latter—Jefferson’s continuing adherence to neutrality prompts us to see both change and continuity as mutually reinforcing and mutually illuminating.

In this chapter, I argue that Jefferson’s adoption of neutrality as a “style” of foreign policy built upon the political opportunities and lessons afforded him by the diplomatic crises and print politics of the 1790s. His promotion of “union at home, independence abroad,” as well as his attempt to contain faction, became manifest in the nation’s geographical reorientation and the shifts and calibrations in domestic politics. Neutrality for Jefferson depended upon separations of the international, national, and local from each other, and it likewise depended upon being able to police the vicinity between public and private. As Americans began to recognize the grave implications in who spoke in public as well as what was being said, Jeffersonian Republicanism

attempted to carve out a place for the public in his form of government while protecting it from the logical consequences of publicity.<sup>5</sup>

While political historians have assessed the Revolution of 1800 in the context of the Atlantic World, they have not made neutrality as a U.S. foreign-policy paradigm or “style”— and how Jefferson appropriated it— an explicit part of their discussions.<sup>6</sup> Diplomatic historians have often seen Jefferson's “entangling alliances with none” and his famous “we are all republicans, we are all federalists” as reflections of his practicality and pragmatism. There was also little change in the transition of power: when Jefferson started using his executive office to conduct foreign policy, it was difficult to see how any president could be more Federalist. These historians note the sharp differences between Hamilton and Jefferson regarding the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Both Hamilton and Jefferson, however, agreed that a strong central government was necessary to conduct it.<sup>7</sup>

Jefferson’s adoption of neutrality as a paradigm or “style” of foreign policy shows how practicality and pragmatism are contingent upon what is at stake. At stake was the very nature of federalism and republicanism. Americans in general grappled with those terms since the Constitutional Convention, itself originating over the question of foreign

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<sup>5</sup>Peter S. Onuf and Leonard J. Sadosky, *Jeffersonian America* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 63; Adams, *History of the United States*, 1:215.

<sup>6</sup>See for example the collection of essays comprising James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter Onuf eds., *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France* (New York: Scribner’s, 1966); Lawrence Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation: American Diplomacy, 1763-1801* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972); Kaplan, *Entangling Alliances with None: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Jefferson* (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 1987); Jeffrey L. Pasley, “1800 as a Revolution in Political Culture: Newspapers, Celebrations, Voting, and Democratization in the Early Republic” in Horn, Lewis, and Onuf, *The Revolution of 1800*, 121.



relations. What often made the terms “federalism” and “republicanism” controversial was that Federalists and Republicans could agree on the exclusive authority of the federal government over the development of American empire. But the 1790s illustrated Americans divisions over federalism and republicanism, because of their inability to agree on basic republican principles regarding the relationship of the nation state to the public. Federalists conflated Revolution, nation, and state. Republicans pitted Revolution against the regime, and the nation against the state. Jefferson's Republican supporters often dubbed themselves “federal republicans.” Jefferson himself had paired these words together as early as 1792, which could not but affect his approach to politics and foreign relations.<sup>8</sup>

The Revolution of 1800 defined Anglophile Federalists as foreigners and “Britishness” as foreign. Federalists' centralized, “aristocratic” style of governance, their politics of the court, and their political economy were inimical to the national interest and the public good.<sup>9</sup> Jefferson also re-conceptualized the operation of the central state. While vehemently disagreeing with Hamilton and the Federalists over executive prerogative in *proclaiming* neutrality, he saw the need for strong executive power in the conduct of foreign policy. The Jeffersonian vision allowed for decentralized government while the central state continued to operate. National (and nationalist) consensus

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<sup>8</sup>Bethel Saler, “An Empire for Liberty, A State for Empire: The U.S. National State before and after the Revolution of 1800” in Horn, Lewis, and Onuf, *The Revolution of 1800*, 361-2, 378; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 173; See editorial notes on Jefferson's First Inaugural Address in Oberg, *PTJ*, 33:134-152.

<sup>9</sup>Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 107; Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

depended on the existence of localism. Separations and differences spread over an extended geographical space also enabled a consensus that dispersed and silenced dissent against the central state.<sup>10</sup>

Fostering localism reinforced Jefferson's re-conceptualization of executive power. He meant to wield executive power indirectly, and meant for his foreign policy to serve his domestic policy. Fulfilling Jefferson's libertarian promise of the American Revolution depended on a foreign policy that enabled territorial expansion and suppression of partisan and sectional divisions, while maintaining a clear boundary between the Old World and the New.

The crucible of the 1790s shaped the Republican concept of nationhood. Republicans fears of centralized power and executive prerogative throughout the decade harkened back to 1775 and 1787. By the end of the 1790s, Republicans in general responded defensively to Federalist taunts that linked Republicans to Jacobinism and identified Southern slaveholding as dangers to domestic security. Republicans retaliated by defining Federalists as Anglophile monarchists whose policies amounted to seduction and enslavement of the people. As the balance of power in the union shifted in their favor, Jefferson and the Republicans articulated a broad commonality of sectional interests and identified them with the national interest.

Jeffersonian nationalism and commitment to neutrality grew out of his party's need to disclaim any foreign entanglements.<sup>11</sup> Entanglement was a word with mostly

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<sup>10</sup>Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 381.

<sup>11</sup>Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 82, 85.

negative connotations that suggested that two nations shared interests, and also destinies. When Republicans claimed to speak for the “American” people as a whole, they had to fend off charges that they were collaborators with French intrigue and its global designs. The emerging Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 also contributed to Americans' growing uneasiness with the French Revolution.

The “horrors of St. Domingo” raised uncomfortable questions about the American Revolution's logical conclusions and made Franco-American relations problematic on various levels. Disentangled from the European balance of power, however, the American nation—and empire—could expand peacefully, with market relations and republican institutions filling the continental void. Access to foreign commerce provided incentive for the industry of agricultural farmers, staving off the idleness that produced degenerate savagery, and preserving the republican character.<sup>12</sup>

Jefferson's politics and foreign policy of “entangling alliances with none” meant to promote domestic tranquility. His conviction was that the main responsibilities of the federal government lay in the realm of foreign relations: an avoidance of war would check those very things that would “enslave” the people—such as taxation and standing armies—and protect a republican political economy. The three essential conditions necessary to create and sustain a republican political economy were: a national government free from corruption, unobstructed access to a plentiful supply of open land,

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<sup>12</sup>Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 182-83; Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 197-8.

and a liberal international commercial order that would provide sufficient foreign markets for American agricultural surplus.<sup>13</sup>

Alliances with foreign powers would be commercial ones only.<sup>14</sup> Central power would concern itself with managing the nation's peripheries. The Revolution of 1800 was a process expressed in the changing nature of politics in the Early Republic. It continued to emphasize and ensure that balances of power were not just international: in the compound republic, they were crucial for maintaining the union, which guaranteed Americans their independence. For Jefferson and the Republicans maintaining that balance was contingent upon degrees of separation. Degrees of separation meant to guard against excessive centralization leading to the kinds of centrifugal forces that would lead to the end of the union—and the U.S. republican experiment.

*The Nation Enslaved: The Election of 1800 in Gabriel's America*

As they headed to the polls, Americans sensed that the nation's fate hung in the balance. Newspaper campaigning, reaching new heights, pronounced the election a most important one that would “fix our national character,” which had become “impaired” by the recent partisan rancor of the late 1790s.<sup>15</sup> The combined impact of the election of 1800 and Gabriel's rebellion reminded them how U.S. neutrality and its preservation of

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<sup>13</sup>Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Era of Expansion: 1800-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 15; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 186.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Edward Rutledge, June 24, 1797, Oberg, *PTJ*, 29:455-457; Thomas Jefferson to Gideon Granger, August 13, 1800, *Ibid.*, 32:95-97.

<sup>15</sup>*Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), March 24, 1800; *American Citizen* (New York, NY), April 2, 3, 5, 1800; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 574.

the American Revolution's gains provoked recourse to the politics of slavery. Two nationalist visions had emerged from the acrimony of the Quasi-War, both of which incriminated slavery in their often convoluted conspiracy theories about foreign influence, "outside agitators," and national security.

The election took place amid uncertainty in Franco-American relations. In November 1799 President Adams had sent a diplomatic mission consisting of William Vans Murray, Oliver Ellsworth, and William R. Davie to Paris to seek an end to the Quasi-War. France was still at war with Great Britain and did not want the United States drawn in on either side. The British navy would easily crush a belligerent United States allied with France, and France needed the grain that a neutral U.S. could provide.

France and the United States continued to negotiate peace at the Mortefontaine Convention while the terms were still unknown to Americans during the election campaigns. Adams's message of December 3, 1799, for example, was one of peace with France, but he did not disclose much about the Ellsworth Mission. In May 1800 the *New York Commercial Advertiser* reported that there is not yet news of the envoys, though there is strong reason to believe that they had been favorably received. They would be able to restore the United States to a state of neutrality, which both Washington had established, and Adams had worked to maintain, so long as it was in a way not damaging to the national honor.<sup>16</sup>

Both Federalists and Republicans believed their idea of the common good served the collective interests of the nation, and that the vision of their rivals necessarily jeopardized its existence. It was their rivals' vision—and not theirs—that was

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<sup>16</sup>DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 286; *The Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), July 15, 1800, citing the *Charleston State Gazette* (Charleston, SC), May 29, 1800.

necessarily tainted by unwanted foreign subservience. In addition, the timing of Gabriel's Rebellion in the summer of 1800, and the conspiracy's unmasking and prosecution, drew attention anew to the union's vulnerabilities at home and abroad. Together, these factors reinforced heightened fears of foreign influence and that the union would disintegrate, reducing Americans to "slavery." The election of 1800 constituted political mortal combat between two competing visions and narratives of national consensus.

Print publicity and its exposés were prominent in the lead-up to the election. The Federalist and Republican presses exploited the tropes that they had become adept at using in the 1790s. They aimed to rally the party faithful around well-known themes of foreign enslavement and its domestic enablers. Also of interest in these exposés was what was being exposed and who was doing the exposing. For example, an anti-Jefferson cartoon of the period entitled "The Providential Detection" depicted God exposing Jefferson as an enemy of the Constitution who was in league with France and the Devil. The all-seeing-eye of Providence catches him in the act of sacrificing the Constitution on the altar of Gallic despotism (while clutching the Mazzei letter in his other hand, no less). Before Jefferson can succeed in offering the Constitution as a burnt offering to a fire fueled by Paine's *Age of Reason* and the Philadelphia *Aurora*, the American eagle, symbol of a vigilant Republic, manages to snatch the Constitution from his grasp and keep him at bay.<sup>17</sup> Ever since Noah Webster's exposé of the Mazzei Letter, Federalists used it to remind everyone that Jefferson headed the "French party" in America.

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<sup>17</sup>Unidentified artist, "The Providential Detection" [1800?] (Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia PA), referenced in Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 270.

Republicans claimed to return to the true principles of 1776 and hammered away at Federalist aristocratic conspiracy and British influence. In the press, they signed their letters “WHIG” or “SPIRIT OF '76.” Foreshadowing what was to come, they even used the label “Federal Republicans.” Republicans largely avoided mentioning international affairs, knowing that Federalist foreign policy was popular, while Federalist direct taxation and war fever were not. Further, they ran their candidates under a “Constitutional Federalist” or “Federal Republican” banner, in contrast to a “Federal Aristocratic Ticket.”<sup>18</sup>

The Republican *Independent Chronicle* exhorted Bostonians not to be intimidated by Federalist electioneering skullduggery. The *Argus* warned of “Cockade Clubs” in New York that ripped Republican ballots out of the hands of voters, replacing them with “Royal ones.” The Federalists were an “ambitious faction” that forcibly dragooned prisoners from the Bridewell prison in New York and blacks off the streets to vote for their candidates. According to the Hartford *American Mercury*, a wink or a nod from influential businessmen and landowners dictated candidates for office.<sup>19</sup> With Jefferson’s victory, Republicans claimed that Federalists were disorderly “Aristocratic banditti” who would enthrone a king in America, but it was *the people themselves* who

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<sup>18</sup>*Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), September 18, 1798; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), October 22, 1798, November 5, 1798, August 18, 1800; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), August 2, 1800; *Constitutional Telegraphe* (Boston, MA), June 25, 1800.

<sup>19</sup>*Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), April 1, 1799; *Argus* (New York, NY), May 3, 1799; *American Mercury* (Hartford, CT), September 11, 1800, quoted in Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 510.

had detected and exposed this insidious plot. The election of 1800 had saved the country from monarchy.<sup>20</sup>

Republican rhetoric tied the Adamses— not just John, but Abigail and even John Quincy—to Britishness, aristocracy, and the politics of the court. Republicans noted how John Adams often traveled to and from the “dukedom of Braintree,” and that a British “conspiracy” in the country was “seeking to bring about *monarchy*.”<sup>21</sup> Federalist government expenditure was also exorbitant. William Duane’s *Aurora* exhorted for weeks that “Anglo-Federalist polices” constituted “public plunder.”<sup>22</sup>

When Hamilton’s pamphlet, *Letter Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq.* fell into the hands of Republicans, they deployed it as a campaign document. Written to criticize the president’s peacemaking with France and meant for private circulation, the pamphlet charged that Adams’s character was “unfortunate,” “unfit for the presidency,” and exhibited a jealousy toward the esteemed Washington. His vanity made him “very apt to fall into the hands of miserable intriguers, with whom his self-love is more at ease. . .” In addition to accusing Adams of bad character, Hamilton claimed that Adams wrongly portrayed him as the leader of a British faction. Moreover, Hamilton pledged his “veracity and honor” that he recommended solely

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<sup>20</sup>*Bee* (New London, CT), October 22, 1800; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 490, citing *Epitome of the Times* (Norfolk, VA), September 25, 1800; *Columbian Museum* (Savannah, GA), October 10, 1800; Allan Nevins, *American Press Opinion, Washington to Coolidge: A Documentary Record of Editorial Leadership and Criticism* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1928), 25-26.

<sup>21</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), August 1797. Original emphasis; Stewart, 513-515.

<sup>22</sup>See for example the *Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), June 17, 1800, reprinted in the *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), June 24, 1800.



commercial connections between the United States and Great Britain, and that his position was closer to that of Jefferson.<sup>23</sup>

In the midst of already existing division fueled by fears of foreign conspiracy and intrigue, Gabriel's Rebellion aroused new fears of slave insurrection during an election year.<sup>24</sup> It segued into Americans' ongoing fears that failure to guard their hard-won independence would result in their own enslavement. While the United States and France continued to negotiate peace, Gabriel's Rebellion presented the possibility that the horrors of St. Domingue had truly arrived in the United States.

Gabriel's Rebellion's expansive transatlantic vision challenged the American Revolution in several ways. Gabriel, sometimes known as Gabriel Prosser, was a literate slave who had learned the blacksmith trade. He and his army planned to march on Richmond, where, turning Patrick Henry's clarion call on its head, he planned to invite poor whites to join him under his banner, "death or Liberty." As Americans fought over the very principles of their revolution, Gabriel made deliberate reference to Lord Dunmore's black regiment, which Southerners already tied to "domestic insurrections."<sup>25</sup>

Due to two slaves who had turned informant, the plot was discovered before it could be brought to fruition, and the rebels were captured. Almost as if to justify earlier fears of "French negroes" during the 1790s, the testimony given by the informants

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<sup>23</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), October 27, 1800; Alexander Hamilton, *Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq.* (New York, 1800), 22, 40-47. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 37566; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 517.

<sup>24</sup>James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 198.

<sup>25</sup>Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 51.

involved evidence of French involvement in the plot. The news unsettled Republican magistrates in Virginia, and then-governor James Monroe found it incendiary enough to suppress it. Monroe informed the Speakers of the General Assembly that during the first twenty-four hours, he had “endeavored to give the affair as little importance as the measures necessary for defense would permit.”<sup>26</sup> Adding to the general anxiety was Gabriel's instructions that Quakers, Frenchmen, and Methodists, all of whom he assumed to be sympathetic to his cause, were not to be harmed. Gabriel and fifteen other slaves involved in the rebellion were hanged on October 7, 1800.

Southern slaveholders like Jefferson and Monroe also knew that “the other states and the world at large” had their eyes on Virginia: however Virginia handled Gabriel's Rebellion, it could not be for the purpose of revenge or to exceed what was necessary.<sup>27</sup> Maryland Federalist William Vans Murray, by then U.S. minister to the Netherlands, linked the threat of possible disunion with Jacobinism in the South. Referring to a newspaper reports from Boston and New York of alleged slave insurrection in South Carolina, he surmised that the East would assist the South if need be, but constant talk of liberty was responsible for the uprising. “Certainly,” he wrote to John Quincy Adams, “there are motives sufficiently obvious, independent of the contagion of Jacobinism, to account for an insurrection of the slaves, *but I doubt not that the eternal clamor about*

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<sup>26</sup>James Monroe, December 5, 1800, quoted in Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 157; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 243.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, September 20, 1800, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 32:160,

*liberty in Virginia and South Carolina, both, has matured the event which has happened.*”<sup>28</sup>

Building on their usual themes that the South and Southern slaveholding endangered neutrality and national security, Federalists swiftly made political capital of Gabriel’s Rebellion by tying it to the Republicans, France, and disorder. The *Gazette of the United States* warned of “the insurrection of Negroes in the Southern states, *which appears to be organized on the true French plan.*” Only voting for Adams and Pinckney would avert disaster. The *Gazette of the United States* also implicated the *Aurora* as “a paper dedicated to *French* measures” that would excuse “the most extensive plans of murder and desolation.”<sup>29</sup> The split among white elites consequently gave Gabriel and his associates an opportunity at freedom at a time when the example of Toussaint L’Ouverture in St. Domingue demonstrated that black rebellion could succeed if those on top were divided.<sup>30</sup>

Put on the defensive by the issue of national security via the politics of slavery, Republicans returned fire. They scoffed at Federalist accusations that French Jacobins had instigated it, claiming that the publicizing of Gabriel and his rebellion’s Jacobin ties were an example of Federalists diverting American voters from the *real* danger:

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<sup>28</sup>William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams, December 9, 1800, “Letters of William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams,” ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), 663. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>29</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), September 13, 23, 26, 1800; Herb Aptheker, *Slave Revolts*, 42; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 241; Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 102.

<sup>30</sup>Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 37, 46.

insidious government encroachment upon popular liberties.<sup>31</sup> William Duane's Philadelphia *Aurora* opined that Federalists claim that the insurrection “was organized on the French plan” was spurious. Rather, “it appears to us to be organized upon the British plan.”<sup>32</sup>

Northern Republicans utilized Gabriel’s Rebellion in their case for Jefferson’s election, portraying Franklin and Jefferson as the *true* abolitionists, New Englanders’ antislavery posturing notwithstanding. The failed slave revolt also played into Republican anti-British nationalism. Northern Republicans drew upon earlier protests against the slave trade from the imperial crisis, indicating an accommodation with Southern interests, including Southern—particularly Virginian—ideas of antislavery protest. The *Aurora* recalled Jefferson’s insertion into the Declaration of Independence an article against King George III withholding his assent from laws passed in Virginia and in other colonies prohibiting the importation of African slaves. The initiative (or outside agitation) of “an *eastern* [New England] member of Congress” struck out the clause. American slavery was primarily Great Britain's fault (aided by pro-British New England); had the efforts of Franklin and Jefferson been allowed to continue, Gabriel's Rebellion might not have happened.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Northern Republicans repeated the charge that Adams’s policy regarding St. Domingue was pro-British. Adams had concluded a trade agreement in

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<sup>31</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 328, 346.

<sup>32</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), September 24, 26, 1800, cited in Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 854-6; the *Aurora* cites and answers the *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), September 23, 26, 1800.

<sup>33</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), September 24, 1800; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 138-139.

collaboration with Great Britain to aid Toussaint L'Ouverture, providing the latter with naval support against his French-backed rival, Benoît Joseph Andre Rigaud. Adams's assistance to Toussaint L'Ouverture raised the issue of recognizing St. Domingue's rebel government as legitimate and unnecessarily endangered relations with France.<sup>34</sup>

The Treaty of Mortefontaine abrogating the 1778 Franco-American alliance was signed amid much amity and celebration on October 1, 1800. Festivities at Joseph Bonaparte's chateau followed soon afterward. The treaty ended the Quasi-War and put Franco-American relations on a "most favored nation" footing. As the Philadelphia *Aurora* reported, there was to be "a firm, inviolable, and universal peace, and a true and sincere friendship" between the French Republic and the United States. Ships taken and property captured on either side were to be restored.<sup>35</sup> From a strategic standpoint, the Treaty of Mortefontaine's enabled Jefferson to pursue neutrality without problematic legal connections with any of the hostile powers.

But the politics of slavery on the international, national, and local levels continued to provide a powerful, if potentially destructive, undercurrent to U.S. neutrality. Accusing each other of conspiracy, Americans publicly harangued each other all the way to the ballot box from October to December. As they did so, mutually reinforcing anxiety over foreign intrigue and the politics of slavery contributed to a sectional emphasis on difference between the Northeast and South and West.

In the midst of an election where unmasking foreign intrigue was a campaign tactic, Gabriel's Rebellion and its suppression reminded Americans where the

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<sup>34</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 328, 346.

<sup>35</sup>*Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), December 22, 1800.

consequences of foreign intrigue would ultimately lead. It also foreshadowed that a return to the principles of 1776 would have certain limits, lest it appear that the French and American Revolutions had a shared future. Those limits would affect and be affected by foreign relations as antipathy between France and Great Britain continued. In addition, both America's relations with St. Domingue and Napoleon Bonaparte's ambitions to regain a significant foothold for France in Louisiana continued to challenge the ability of the United States to maintain its neutrality at home and abroad.

*"We are all republicans, we are all federalists...": Partisan Anti-Partisanship and the National Interest*

Jefferson's inaugural address of March 4, 1801, laid out the contingencies of neutrality in its vision of union and nation. Jefferson drew up the image of the United States as "a rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye."

Territorial expansion was a Republican article of faith, as it was for many Americans, for it promised the relief of a host of problems, including factionalism. Against this providential backdrop, Jefferson decried "political intolerance" that was "as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions." Americans all agreed that partisanship was a problem. Like its Federalist predecessor, Jeffersonian politics and foreign policy addressed it also. The newly elected president posited that "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle," and that "we are all republicans, we are all federalists..."

On March 8, James Bayard, a Federalist lawyer from Delaware, confided to Hamilton that he had remained in Washington to see the inauguration and to hear Jefferson's speech. He detected tentative bipartisanship, writing that “the scene was the same as exhibited upon former occasions and the speech in political substance better than we expected; and not answerable to the expectations of the Partizans of the other side.”<sup>36</sup> Republican newspapers likewise focused on bipartisan sentiments, deeming Jefferson's inaugural “a pleasing contrast to the exterminating war-whoops of John Adams” and the latter's insufferable partisanship.<sup>37</sup> The inaugural was printed in special broadsides. Capitalization, italics, block printing, or bold typeface emphasized and transformed the very words, “we are all republicans, we are all federalists.” Newspapers after 1801 often capitalized the words “federalists” and “republicans,” and often reversed their order: “we are all Federalists; we are all Republicans.”<sup>38</sup>

Jefferson faced the same problems over public opinion and popular sovereignty that the conduct of foreign policy had provoked in the 1790s. SIMON SLIM wrote that he expected the newly elected president to exercise his duties responsibly, trusting that the president needed “neither a Porcupine nor a Liston to advise in your councils.” He warned Jefferson of the trappings of power that had preoccupied Adams, and underscored that the very medium of Addresses corrupted the addressee with a “servile, canting,

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<sup>36</sup>James Bayard to Alexander Hamilton, March 8, 1801, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (hereafter *PAH*), ed. Harold C. Syrett, 26 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press), 25:344-46.

<sup>37</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 538.

<sup>38</sup>See, for example, *The Republican or, Anti-Democrat* (Baltimore, MD), May 31, 1802, and the *New-York Evening Post* (New York, NY), August 18, 1802. See editorial notes on Jefferson's First Inaugural Address in Oberg, *PTJ*, 33:134-152.

sycophantic flattery.” In addition, not even the president, who derived his authority from “the people,” was “above his fellows,” proclaimed SIMON SLIM.<sup>39</sup>

If Federalists detected a conciliatory note in the First Inaugural, they were soon disappointed. When SIMON SLIM alluded to “the people,” he raised the ongoing issue of “*which* people?” “Which people?” provoked larger questions of what constituted the national interest and what did not (and also which sections of the union endangered the national interest). Jefferson interpreted his election as a “recovery from delusion,” and a triumph for the national character. To Lafayette, he wrote that “the convulsions of Europe shook even us to our center. A few hardy spirits stood firm at their post, & the ship has weathered the storm.”<sup>40</sup> America would then return to the state in which Lafayette had known it, and the storm through which the United States had passed had proven its indestructibility. To Joseph Priestley, he wrote that “the order and good sense displayed in this recovery from delusion, and in the momentous crisis which lately arose, really bespeak a strength of character in our nation which augurs well for the durability of our Republic; & I am much better satisfied now of it's [sic] stability than I was before it was tried.”<sup>41</sup>

In Jefferson’s conception, Republican neutrality in foreign relations, recovery from delusion, and triumph for the national character involved geographic re-

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<sup>39</sup>SIMON SLIM, *Herald of Liberty* (Washington, PA), March 23, 1801.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, March 13, 1801. Oberg and Looney, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition* (hereafter *PTJ, Digital Ed.*), ed. Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008. <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-33-02-0229> [accessed February 4, 2013],

<sup>41</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, March 21, 1801 in *Ibid.*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-33-02-0336> [accessed February 6, 2013]; Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 274.



conceptualization: neutrality at home and neutrality abroad involved isolating New England and its Anglophile interests. New England was now the troublesome, noisy faction. Recovery from delusion notwithstanding, the election was not a national victory for the Republicans. It was a regional and sectional one that exacerbated the tension between Virginia and New England that had arisen in the mid-to-late 1790s.<sup>42</sup> But the waning of Federalist power only made it easier for Jefferson to capitalize on the regional and sectional split: the “delusion” of the 1790s made some sections of the union—New England in particular—lag behind the rest in resetting the course of the nation to the principles of 1776.

New England fostered disunion and was susceptible to foreign influence. Republicans during the Quasi-War noted that New Englanders “live[d] by commerce,” and unscrupulously wished to “*separate themselves from the Union.*” New Englanders’ favorite federal projects all required “a great expenditure of money, which must fall upon the landed interest in pretty heavy taxes.” Prior years demonstrated that those taxes affected Southern property in slaves. Moreover, the true object of New Englanders was “*placing themselves under the protection of the British Government.*”<sup>43</sup> New England, compared to the remainder of the United States “from N.Y. southwardly,” might be as republican as any, but having “drunk deeper of the delusion” it would take longer to recover. Jefferson ultimately reassured Massachusetts Republican Elbridge Gerry that “your people will rise again,” however, and that Gerry would be the one to rally them.

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<sup>42</sup>Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 248; Robert M.S. McDonald, “The (Federalist?) Presidency of Thomas Jefferson” in *A Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Francis D. Cogliano (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2012), 166.

<sup>43</sup>*Time Piece* (New York, NY), July 7, 1797. Italics are original.

New England's loss of power within the union since the mid-1790s also arose in the changing interests of New York. Home of Alexander Hamilton, New York had been known as a "British Town," and a center of Anglophilia too close to the interests of New England. New England was heavily involved in nation-building, and intertwined itself more closely with New York city and state.<sup>44</sup> Republicans had to show that they could appeal to more than the yeoman farmer. With Aaron Burr, a senator from New York, as Vice President, they were able to appeal to commercial interests and mechanics. Federalists could no longer claim a monopoly on commercial interests in urban metropolises. Burr's influence in the state assembly secured New York's electoral votes for Jefferson instead of Adams.<sup>45</sup> Following the election, Jefferson envisioned New York interests as attached to everything southward, which allowed him and his nationalist vision to silence sectional dissent. Northern Federalists like Hamilton depicted Southern interests as marginal to the national interest. Jefferson similarly believed that only extreme Federalist "monarchists" would remain outside of the Republican consensus.

Jefferson looked askance at Robert Treat Paine's riff on "Rule Britannia" entitled "Rule, New-England." Paine was a Massachusetts representative and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson remarked that the song "betray[ed] one principle of their present variance from the Union. But I am in hopes they will in time discover

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<sup>44</sup>D.W. Meinig, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 400; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 338, quoting the *Pennsylvania Mercury* (Philadelphia, PA), June 19, 1790. Furthermore, according to the *Mercury*, New York had worked to attach New England to its selfish interests, and had courted the Southern states by exempting blacks from tariff duties.

<sup>45</sup>Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 179-186, 196-202.

that the shortest road to rule is to join the majority.”<sup>46</sup> New England possessed a “general uneasy and refractory spirit” that plagued New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Massachusetts especially was “the seat of sedition.”<sup>47</sup> After a bitterly fought election, Jefferson's First Inaugural dissolved policy differences into ideological consensus. Anti-partisanship, however, was not an ideal in itself but a requirement for national (and nationalist) progress. Partisan anti-partisanship identified one's party with the real nation and denied the opposing party's legitimacy as well as the partisanship of one's own party.<sup>48</sup> Jefferson abhorred the idea that the Republicans were a political party; by the time he left office, he claimed: “Republicans are the nation.”

The change of the federal Capitol from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. further emphasized New England's position as “sectional.” A city built primarily for politics, Washington was “the patriots' belated fulfillment of the patriots' vision of an empire without a metropolis.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike the port metropolis of Philadelphia, the growing, vibrant Washington City was built on a rural inland swamp, and travel to it was difficult. It was “a conscious act of decentralization, a federal compromise rather than an integrative national focus.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Jefferson to John Langdon, 1802, quoted in Adams, 1:333-34. The song's chorus is: “Rule, New-England, New-England rules and saves; Columbians never, never shall be slaves!”

<sup>47</sup>Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* 3 vols. (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1805), 3:346.

<sup>48</sup>Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 203.

<sup>49</sup>Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 76; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, 1993), 276.

<sup>50</sup>Meinig, *Atlantic America*, 404.

Built in “the negative space of Federalist fears,” Washington began as an expansive, almost empty space that gradually filled in, as opposed to beginning with a concentrated population center that gradually spread out, as had Boston and Philadelphia. Government was its only business, which freed it from the influence of bankers, shippers, and other trappings of trade and commerce that were fixtures of more established cities—everything that Republican orthodoxy in the 1790s had identified with undue “British” influence.<sup>51</sup> Washington City, Henry Adams observed, “rising in a solitude on the banks of the Potomac, was a symbol of American nationality in the Southern states.”<sup>52</sup> It was a slaveholding town, surrounded by plantations as well as rural settlements, and with a slave market not far from the Capitol.

In isolating New England within the union, Republicans also hoped to isolate and silence Federalist “outside agitators” on the slavery issue. Chattel slavery affected the political economy of both region and nation, and therefore inter-state diplomacy within the union. As Hamilton's economic policies demonstrated, the favoring of a particular kind of economy over another put the interests of some sections of the union on the defensive, prompting questions of whether the federal government would protect them. Federalist rhetoric in the 1790s and into the early 1800s argued that the slaveholder’s “spirit of domination” disqualified him for leadership. It also identified the South and Southern slaveholding as “local” interest, and then a national security problem that weakened the entire union (and by extension, U.S. neutrality). Southern slaveholders

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<sup>51</sup>Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 16-17; James Roger Sharp, *The Deadlocked Election of 1800: Jefferson, Burr, and the Union in the Balance* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 97.

<sup>52</sup>Henry Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 1:30.

interpreted Northerners' "artful, impolitic questions about slavery" as an attack on their interests and their place within the union. Moreover, as Madison and Jefferson collaborated on the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the latter likened federal intrusion into state matters as interference by a foreign government.<sup>53</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Jefferson saw keeping the North out of Southern affairs regarding slavery as instrumental to maintaining neutrality: if "missionaries" of revolution from St. Domingue launched an attack on the Southern states, Jefferson feared that white Northern abolitionists would aid the West Indian invaders.<sup>54</sup> Could those in the North be trusted to come to the aid of their Southern brethren and protect their interests, or would the latter be abandoned? New England Federalists continually blamed Adams's defeat on the three-fifths cause. Since the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, Southerners had warned that they would interpret any challenge to the three-fifths clause as an attempt to breach the federal compact in preparation for abolishing slavery. The public debates over foreign policy during the 1790s taught Republicans that they could not trust their Northern countrymen. After 1800, Republicans coded anti-partisanship as Southern and Western, and partisanship came primarily from New England.

Jeffersonian Republicanism and several decades of massive national expansion fit the neutrality paradigm well, because they masked sectional differences. The

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<sup>53</sup>See Chapter 5 on the Quasi-War; Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 39; Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 64-65; Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 179.

<sup>54</sup>Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, February 12, 1799, in Oberg, *PTJ*, 31:29-31; Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 104; Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 31.

Constitution's federalism did not enable their disappearance.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the 1790s Republicans identified the American nation with the union of states and its constitutional charter. Sensitivity to any attacks on slavery had made Southerners suspicious about the uses—and abuses—of federal power, encouraging them to distinguish the nation from the union.<sup>56</sup> The Republicans had already begun to forge a “common identity” with the South before 1800.

Identifying the American nation with the union of states enabled Jefferson’s conception of neutrality to accommodate states’ rights: the states were “the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies.” Jefferson re-conceptualized the central state’s sphere of operation by distinguishing between a domestic republic governed by the voluntary will and subordinate jurisdictions of the American people, and a central state whose purpose was to manage the peripheries and protect the nation from foreign dangers. The purpose of securing states’ rights was to prevent legislation that would interfere with trade within and beyond the union. Securing states’ rights also meant to protect slavery from public clamor and outside agitation. The Jeffersonian nationalist consensus and its partisan anti-partisanship relied not on centralized power and centralizing consolidation but on fostering localism and dispersing dissent.

Neutrality within the union, the nation, and in U.S. foreign policy involved what Trish Loughran refers to as “the federalist spatial fix”—faith in geographic difference and the power to manage it. Management meant spreading differences across space, not

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<sup>55</sup>George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 182.

<sup>56</sup>Onuf and Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War*, 184.

managing them within it. The extended republic meant to isolate potential factions—like antifederalists during the Constitutional Convention in 1787, francophile Southern slaveholders in the mid-to-late 1790s, and now anti-slavery New Englanders. In addition, Jefferson believed up to the end of his life that crucial to his anti-British vision of American independence was the colonization of African Americans. They were a captive nation—perpetually in a state of war and a product of British despotism— that needed to be “liberated.”<sup>57</sup>

*Jeffersonians Behaving Neutrally: the Anti-Court, Domesticity, and Making Democracy “Safe for America”*

Working closely with the geographic dispersal of any British influence and Anglophile dissent in the union and nation was a politics meant to defuse dissent in private. As John Murdock’s *The Politicians* illustrated during the Quasi-War, foreign relations and domestic spaces affected each other through politics. Federalists and moderate Republicans used sentimental and familial language to illustrate their views on national cohesion and neutrality: the French Revolution destroyed those national bonds of sentiment in public and private. The fragmentation of private life through the “party spirit” of the 1790s had eroded the basis for social cohesion. It destroyed civil society from the bottom up, making difficult the consensus on which neutrality depended.<sup>58</sup>

Historians have observed the emergence of a distinct Jeffersonian politics after 1800. His inaugural ceremony had set the tone: the *National Intelligencer* reported that

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<sup>57</sup>Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 303, 381; Meinig, *Atlantic America*, 414; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 127; Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 151, 174-83.

<sup>58</sup>Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 168.

in marked contrast to George Washington and John Adams, the president-elect was “dressed as a plain citizen” and wore neither sword nor powdered wig (whereas Washington had worn both along with his suit of homespun broadcloth).<sup>59</sup> Jefferson’s public character was one of a studied refusal of ostentation. He gave no public addresses or appearances, relying mostly on the publication of the written word. His public character and politics emphasized the civilizing effects of domesticity and private life, where colleagues could speak freely. Jefferson’s ability to rule depended upon carefully cultivated displays of gentility and “antipower.”<sup>60</sup>

Jefferson ruled the country and kept it free of “entangling alliances” by ruling at home: he had come to understand public life as a deprivation of family life, especially in light of the late 1790s. He cultivated family life as the model for public behavior, and took up his role as father of his country within this context. Tranquil domesticity and “antipower” lay at the crux of Jeffersonian appropriations of neutral behavior and Washington’s “Great Rule of Conduct.” The most Americans would ever see of their president in public was the regular horseback rides he took in the woods—a stark contrast with Washington’s grand, national tours that meant to sentimentally unite the country in celebration of his presidency and person.<sup>61</sup> Jeffersonian “country” politics aimed to purge the federal government of all traces of Federalist “court” tendencies.

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<sup>59</sup>*National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 6, 1801; Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 170. John Adams himself was conspicuously absent, having caught the four o’ clock stage out of Washington City that very morning.

<sup>60</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 26, 35.

<sup>61</sup>*New York Evening Post* (New York, NY), April 20, 1802; Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 192; Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 1:197.



Classic republicanism placed an emphasis on virtue, stressing public good over private interest. Federalism's emphasis on the public good meant imposing particular standards on popular representation: whatever did not conform to its political-economic interests were deemed "private interests"—selfish, lacking in virtue, inimical to the public interest, and inimical to republicanism. By contrast, the politics of the "anti-court" meant to guard against intrigue: the Jeffersonian style of governance was determined to discourage any attempts at liaisons and coalitions among congressmen, even among members of his own party. Behaving neutrally involved discouraging the kinds of political alliances that fostered intrigue and the distribution of power and booty. If society were corrupt, it would corrupt politics.<sup>62</sup>

Public and private are relative, deriving their significance from each other. In cultivating a private life, Jefferson necessarily constructed a public world.<sup>63</sup> The stress on privacy and civility is significant given the politicization of the domestic realm during the Quasi-War. Upon meeting the president, Margaret Bayard Smith, a converted Federalist and the wife of journalist and proprietor of the Washington *National Intelligencer*, Samuel Harrington Smith, observed Jefferson's "meek and mild" disposition and "dignified" manner. It was quite unlike "that daring leader of a faction, that disturber of the peace, that enemy of all rank and order" that Federalists had made him out to be. Rather, his disarming manner "somewhat *neutralized*" the "virulence of

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<sup>62</sup>John Murrin, "Escaping Perfidious Albion: Federalism, Fear of Aristocracy, and the Democratization of Corruption in Postrevolutionary America" in *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-Interest: Political Values in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richard K. Matthews (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1994), 105.

<sup>63</sup>Jan Lewis, "'The Blessings of Domestic Society': Thomas Jefferson's Family and the Transformation of American Politics," in Onuf, *Jeffersonian Legacies*, 109-146.

party spirit.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Jefferson's domestic demeanor ensured that he was not a slave to the vilest passions. Republicans not only shifted the locus of politics to the domestic realm; they effectively sought to occupy and police it as well—all the better to resist the seductions of foreign monarchy.

Jeffersonian domesticity involved cleaning house when it came to the trappings of court luxury. In the United States, the exemplar of the court was Martha Washington and her “aristocratic” parlor and levees. Seizing upon old anti-aristocratic themes, critics charged that Martha Washington's parties did not exhibit the “republican simplicity” persuasive to those of “country” affiliation. What was more, her efforts to “dazzle the public” were “perfectly consistent with the spirit of the new Constitution, in which there is a strong aristocratical tendency.”<sup>65</sup> A politicized domestic realm that turned women into “female politicians” threatened men with effeminacy. Therefore, feminine activity had to be detached from the public, masculine, political realm and entirely contained within domesticity in order for it to be truly virtuous.

Elite women in Washington DC traversed the territory between private and public spheres. As exemplars of both virtue and civility, they tested the boundary between

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<sup>64</sup>Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith (Margaret Bayard) from the Collection of her Grandson, J. Henley Smith*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), 6, 10. Author's italics. See also Frederika J. Teute, “Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek: Margaret Bayard Smith and the Politicization of Spheres in the Nation's Capital” and Jan Lewis, “Politics and the Ambivalence of the Private Sphere: Women in Early Washington, D.C.” in *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic*, ed. Donald R. Kennon (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 89-121; 122-151.

<sup>65</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 503, citing the *Federal Herald* (Lansingburgh, NY), November 2, 1798 and *State Gazette of North Carolina*, (Edenton, NC), October 15, 1790. See also William Sullivan, *Familiar Letters on Public Characters, and Public Events: From the Peace of 1783, to the Peace of 1815* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalfe, 1834), 17-18; Mary S. Austin, *Philip Freneau, the Poet of the Revolution: A History of His Times* (New York: A. Wessels Company, 1901), 163.

persuasion and deliberation. In general, the social and political activity in which elite Washingtonians participated confounded any simple separation of spheres. The blurring of boundaries enabled the domestication of politics. Governmental promulgation of civility as an explicit policy also diminished with Jefferson's coming to power, thus allowing the social-institutional zone between the state and the citizenry to become less public. Government in Washington created a particular space for the young nation's domestic public. The public was supposed to come to Washington, but it was not supposed to partake in activities that created interests antagonistic to or made any claim upon the public good. The Revolution of 1800 moved the people out of the center of politics and into the galleries—to attend government as spectators.<sup>66</sup>

The Jeffersonian Republican domestication of politics extended also to diplomacy, where the president used his politics of anti-court domesticity to openly demonstrate his commitment to neutral rights. Throughout 1801 to 1802, Jefferson had moved closer to Britain while the affair of Louisiana hung in the balance. Not long after Jefferson's inauguration in March 1801, he learned that the Louisiana territory, held by Spain since 1763, would be retroceded to France under the previously secret 1800 Treaty of San Ildefonso. It meant the likelihood of a strong French military presence on the Mississippi and a potential danger to U.S. expansion. Pinckney's Treaty of 1795 had granted the United States “right of deposit” in New Orleans, which granted U.S.

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<sup>66</sup>David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 327-328; Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 212; Teute, “Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek,” 97, 99; Lewis, “Politics and the Private Sphere,” 123, 133-5; John L. Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 229, 236.

merchants use of the port to store goods for export. It also granted uncontrolled access to the Mississippi. Without the latter, foreign powers would repeatedly harass the United States.

Jefferson's ability to secure New Orleans depended on some intricate diplomacy, perhaps combined with force or the threat of force. At the center were relations between France, the United States, and St. Domingue, which relations with Spain and Britain would either help or hinder. Without possession of New Orleans, Jefferson assured France that the United States would maintain its trade advantages with St. Domingue without harming French interests.<sup>67</sup> Jefferson saw no reason to cease profiting from trade with St. Domingue. He saw no need to upset Toussaint L'Ouverture, either. He also downplayed his well-known antipathy for Britain and all things British, disavowing the "newspaper trash" that made him a "creature of France and an enemy of Great Britain."<sup>68</sup>

But by late 1803, relations between Britain and France had ruptured. France had ceded Louisiana to the United States on April 30, 1803. No longer in need of British aid, Jefferson was free to insist on his own terms of neutrality. Having curbed Bonaparte, he could chasten Spain and discipline Britain.<sup>69</sup> In November 1803, the newly appointed British minister to the United States, Anthony Merry met with the president. Merry's full diplomatic dress consisted of a deep blue velvet coat with black velvet trim and gold braid, white breeches and silk stockings, buckled shoes, plumed hat, and sword. In contrast, the president came to the meeting in a state of undress: his coat, pantaloons, and

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<sup>67</sup>Pichon to Talleyrand, March 18, 20, 1801, quoted in Brown, *Toussaint's Clause*, 184.

<sup>68</sup>Edward Thornton to Lord Grenville, March 7, 1801, quoted Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 2:341.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:355, 361.

underclothes “indicative of utter slovenliness and indifference to appearances and in a state of negligence actually studied,” and in slippers without heels, no less.<sup>70</sup>

Jefferson's approach to diplomatic protocol was what he called the “rule of pell-mell,” where “all are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office” so as to “prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy.”<sup>71</sup> Merry was miffed upon discovering that he had to visit all of the heads of departments when his predecessor, Robert Liston, had only to visit the Secretary of State. Furthermore, he found that what had been done under the previous administration set no rule for the present one.<sup>72</sup>

Jefferson's reception of Merry and his wife Elizabeth on December 2, 1803, caused a stir because he eschewed existing diplomatic culture. Present also at the reception was the French chargé d'affairs, Louis André Pichon. As England and France were at war, diplomatic custom would not have allowed for their common presence. When it came time to escort the guests to dinner, Jefferson was to have escorted Mrs. Merry, the lady of honor, and Mr. Merry was to have escorted Dolley Madison, the lady of second rank. Instead, Jefferson took the arm of Mrs. Madison, causing confusion that the wife of the Spanish minister, Philadelphia-born Sally McKean, commented would be “the cause of war!”

The Merrys—particularly Mrs. Merry—personified everything that Jefferson despised about the politics of the court. Margaret Bayard Smith described Mrs. Merry as

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<sup>70</sup>Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 36-7.

<sup>71</sup>Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 2:365.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:367.

a “large, tall, well-made woman, rather masculine, very free and affable in her manners but easy without being graceful.” She was, in Smith’s judgment, a woman of “fine understanding” who was “so entirely the talker and actor in all companies that her good husband passes quite unnoticed.” In comparison, Mr. Merry was “plain in his appearance and called rather inferior in his understanding.”<sup>73</sup>

Mirroring Republican critiques of Martha Washington, Elizabeth Merry's luxurious wardrobe was “foreign.” The wardrobe played into familiar themes and symbols of the ills of court life: dreaded “female politicians,” showy women, and effeminate men. Margaret Bayard Smith similarly criticized “Mad’m \_\_\_\_\_,” the well-known American wife of a foreigner, whose dress made her appear almost naked. The ladies of Washington society demonstrated how women promoted neutral behavior, playing a role in policing domesticity and keeping “foreignness” at bay in Jeffersonian politics. They promptly sent “Mad’m \_\_\_\_\_” word to put more clothes on before meeting with them. Moreover, Smith generally contrasted these “foreign” women with Dolley Madison’s dignified warmth and hospitality.<sup>74</sup>

Jeffersonian domesticity shored up Jeffersonian diplomacy. While Pichon admitted that Jefferson's approach was out of the ordinary, he derived some satisfaction from the humiliation of the British minister and his wife. He barely concealed his pleasure when he relayed what had happened in a letter to Talleyrand. Mrs. Merry returned insult for insult, stopping short of “civil war” and turning Washington society

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<sup>73</sup>Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 40, 46-7; Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 2:374-375.

<sup>74</sup>Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 45.

“upside down.” Federalist newspapers capitalized on the incident, “increas[ing] the irritation by sarcasms on the Administration and by making a burlesque of the facts, which the Government has not thought proper to correct.”<sup>75</sup> Merry, not surprisingly, interpreted his reception as a calculated slight against his government.<sup>76</sup>

The rhetoric of domesticity became more central to public political discourse in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in wake of the foreign relations crises that disturbed the domestic realm in the 1790s. Both moderate Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans embraced the emphasis on domesticity, having come to some agreement after the election of 1800 in their banishment of 1790s radicals from the mainstream of American political life. Mercy Otis Warren writes that the American Revolution did not produce a “sense of barbarity” as in other countries, not even with the “late convulsions” of the Quasi-War.<sup>77</sup> In Jeffersonian politics, cosmopolitan radicalism became “un-American,” and “Jacobinism” became a catch-all term for all that had hitherto existed under the heading of “democracy.”

Through domesticity, elite Republicans channeled and diverted social discontent that had yet to find full expression by marginalizing radical Paineite democrats. The marginalization of radical Paineite democrats also contributed to the marginalization not only of anti-slavery Federalists but previously anti-slavery Republicans. In the process, the language of anti-Jacobinism helped persuade Southern slaveholders to repudiate the

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<sup>75</sup>Pichon to Talleyrand, February 5, 1804 cited in Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 2:368-69, 374-375.

<sup>76</sup>Anthony Merry to George Hammond, December 7, 1803, in *ibid.*, 2:371.

<sup>77</sup>Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 111. See also Rosemarie Zaggari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 2007), 94; Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 428.

French Revolution as African Americans increasingly identified black freedom with France and St. Domingue in the wake of Gabriel's Rebellion.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, as the republic expanded in the South and West, the subsequent association of “aristocracy” with distant metropolitan rule made everyone and no-one “democrats.” Jeffersonian politics defined the American Revolution as a homogenous and bloodless political movement, rendering democracy “safe for America.”<sup>79</sup> Due to geographical and political reorientation, the American Revolution had become respectable and domesticated.

Freedom from domestic corruption at the domestic, local, and national levels complemented and aimed to protect the status of the United States as a “treaty-worthy” nation—a nation with the same rights and sovereign powers of the nations of Europe, able to take its place “among the powers of the earth.” This meant, however, that slavery remained legal, both in the union’s own courts and statutes, and in the treaty law that Europe and the United States both shared. The United States as a compound republic was a slaveholding republic, where slaveholders depended upon the union to protect their rights. The decades following the American Revolution also saw the codification of the right to own slaves on the state and federal levels. That codification manifested itself in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, and the moving of the federal capitol to Washington, DC. If the Constitution was not simply a compromise with slavery but worked through

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<sup>78</sup>Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94.

<sup>79</sup>Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 5; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 36; Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 113, 211; Onuf and Sadosky, *Jeffersonian America*, 66; Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, *The Nationalist Ferment: The Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1792-1812*, trans. Lillian A. Parrott (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 65; Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 96; Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 3, 41.



slavery, rights that benefited Southern slaveholders demanded recognition within the union and ultimately affected foreign relations, also.<sup>80</sup>

*“The Voice of the Nation”: Print, National Silences, and the Politics of Slavery*

Jefferson's cultivation of a national politics that shifted its locus to localism and domesticity to check passion, intrigue, and foreign interference also manifested itself in print politics. Republican print politics served sectional interests and confirmed sectional identities. Managing the sectional aspects of print politics that had come to work intimately with the politics of slavery was part and parcel of promoting neutrality at home. Mansfieldian moments arose when foreign relations provoked fundamental questions of governance, raising the issue of the exercise of federal power that enabled sectionalism. Federalist nationalist celebrations publicized in newspapers were integral to making the case that slavery was a national problem that contradicted Americans' cherished founding ideals. Under Jefferson, print politics served the “federalist spatial fix” by accommodating localism and keeping “outside agitators” at bay.

On the whole, Jefferson had an ambiguous relationship with print. He was aware of its importance and the role that it should play in a republic bent on preserving its liberties. Republicans believed that a free press would engender an enlightened public opinion, which would uphold self-evident federal and republican principles. By “public opinion” Jefferson meant a natural consensus formed when all citizens focus their attention on public affairs. Freedom was meant to generate publicity, supposedly the best protection of the people's freedom and the nation's public virtue. Jefferson's earlier

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<sup>80</sup>Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2-4, 171.

thoughts on the First Amendment, however, raised press freedom to the constitutional level. Press freedom had caveats when it came to “false facts affecting injurious the life, liberty, property, or reputation of others or affecting the peace of the confederacy with foreign nations.”<sup>81</sup>

He did not shrink from others participating in print politics at his urging. Jefferson understood how the public prints could affect the hearts and minds of the people and the narratives that they learned about their relationship with their government. While Washington referred to Philip Freneau as a “rascal,” Jefferson encouraged Freneau to set up a national newspaper—the *National Gazette*—crediting it with “[saving] our Constitution, which was galloping fast into monarchy.”<sup>82</sup> The way Hamilton and the Federalists wielded print publicity as a weapon against French diplomacy and the alliance inspired Jefferson’s plea to Madison that the latter take up his pen and “cut [Hamilton] to pieces in the face of the public” during the Genet affair. Republicans voicing their support of Jefferson as the election of 1800 drew near decried the “slavery of the press” under the Sedition Act.<sup>83</sup>

But the experience of the 1790s had also taught Jefferson to be wary of print publicity. He declined to commit his words to the gazettes, unlike Hamilton and Madison. Compiled in 1818, Jefferson's memoranda, or “Anas,” constituted a

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<sup>81</sup>John Nerone, *Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55; Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 92; Jerry Knudson, *Jefferson and the Press: Crucible of Liberty* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 168; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 28, 1789 in Oberg and Looney, *PTJ, Digital Ed.* <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-15-02-0354> [accessed 23 Dec 2013].

<sup>82</sup>Everett Emerson, ed., *American Literature, 1764-1789: The Revolutionary Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 137.

<sup>83</sup>*Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), May 6, 1800.

Republican account of Washington's presidency. Its purpose was to answer John Marshall's historical biography of the late president. Jefferson offered his own correspondence as Secretary of State to challenge what he knew would be an arch-Federalist account. The "Anas" was a defense pamphlet, though it was never published.<sup>84</sup> "Anas" is a Latin word referring to a collection of table talk, anecdotes, and gossip (and thus reflecting and reinforcing the Jeffersonian shift of politics to the realm of domesticity). In this "gossip log," Jefferson recalled:

I expressed to [Washington] my excessive repugnance to public life, the particular uneasiness of my situation in this place, where the laws of society oblige me always to move exactly in the circle which I know to bear me peculiar hatred; *that is to say, the wealthy aristocrats, the merchants connected closely with England, the new created paper fortunes; that thus surrounded, my words were caught, multiplied, misconstrued, and even fabricated and spread abroad to my injury*; that he saw also, that there was such an opposition of views between myself and another part of the Administration, as to render it peculiarly displeasing, and to destroy the necessary harmony.<sup>85</sup>

Jefferson voiced similar concerns when Noah Webster published the *Mazzei Letter* in 1797. He warned his correspondents to be more circumspect, lest their letters end up in the hands of the press, which would surely "[mutilate] whatever they could get hold of."<sup>86</sup> Republicans began to have serious reservations regarding a completely unrestrained press when Jefferson became the target of Federalist newspaper attacks.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Joanne B. Freeman, "Slander, Poison, Whispers, and Fame: Jefferson's "Anas" and Political Gossip in the Early Republic" *Journal of the Early Republic*, 15 (Spring 1995): 53.

<sup>85</sup>Thomas Jefferson, 'Anas' in Albert Ellery Bergh, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Library Edition*, 19 vols., (Washington: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 1:385. Author's emphasis.

<sup>86</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Bell, May 18, 1797; Thomas Jefferson to Peregrine Fitzhugh, June 4, 1797; and Thomas Jefferson to John Moody, June 13, 1797, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (hereafter *PTJ*), ed. Barbara B. Oberg, 40 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 29:370-71, 415-419, 428-9.

<sup>87</sup>Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 1:326-7, citing Thomas Jefferson to R. R. Livingston, October 10, 1802.

With Jefferson in office, print politics took on a more genteel persuasion—another sign of the cultural re-orientation of the nation's political space. Republican leaders tended to hold radical editors at arms' length. They shared their Federalist counterparts' desire for a more gentrified press, and distrusted printers and other plebeians who, unlike gentlemen, did not possess the calm rationality needed to properly assess public affairs. They preferred printer-editors whose high education and backgrounds were similar to their own, or who were at least easy to control. Samuel Harrison Smith, with his pedigree from the University of Pennsylvania, was Jefferson's protégé. Smith established the *National Intelligencer* under Jefferson's patronage, which the president hoped would be another *National Gazette*.<sup>88</sup>

In contrast, Jefferson snubbed radicals like William Duane and his Philadelphia *Aurora*, and declined to offer patronage to Scottish émigré James T. Callender. To offer a printer patronage in form of a government printing contract would make his newspaper an *official* newspaper.<sup>89</sup> Callender turned on Jefferson, publishing an exposé on the president's encouragement of *The Prospect Before Us* (a pamphlet attacking John Adams), and his relationship with Sally Hemings. Duane had become an influential Republican leader in his own right by the time of the election of 1800, having demonstrated that newspapers were indispensable to partisan warfare and party organization. Duane's prominence demonstrated that newspapers were too important to be left in the hands of independent, urban artisan-intellectuals. Elite Pennsylvania

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<sup>88</sup>Jeffrey L. Pasley, "*The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 155.

<sup>89</sup>Knudson, *Jefferson and the Press*, 6.

Democrats like Alexander Dallas, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, John Dickinson, George Logan, Matthew Carey, and Tench Coxe sought to discredit Duane and the “antiquated” ideas of democracy he championed in his *Aurora*, thereby enforcing party orthodoxy.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, if neutrality abroad depending upon neutrality at home demanded prevention of Northern interference in Southern slavery, it followed that radical Northern printers were “outside agitators” who needed to be kept out of Southern print politics. As president, Jefferson did not speak out in favor of slavery, but he did not publicly speak out against it, either. The Republicans’ base constituency consisted of Southern slaveholders. Jefferson’s ambivalent relationship with the press stemmed in part from a larger Southern aversion to printer-editors. In addition, the “Anas” revealed his awareness that “newly created paper fortunes” (that is, speculators with their paper money and bank stock) misconstrued his words. Those same fortunes were closely tied to “aristocrats” and “merchants,” whom Republicans in general repeatedly tied to “British” interests in their own print discourse. This antagonism first arose in the 1790s, but later intensified as native-born Southern gentlemen themselves learned to be successful newspaper entrepreneurs. As the Southern elite's commitment to slavery hardened, this gentrified press rarely challenged it.

A letter from Virginia, printed in the *Gazette of the United States*, stated that slaveholders “would no longer permit the *Aurora* and other *Jacobin* papers to come into their houses as they are convinced that [Gabriel's Rebellion] is to be attributed entirely to

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<sup>90</sup>Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 5; Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 282-283; Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, 259; Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 211; Andrew Shankman, *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism & Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), Chapters 3-5; Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 11; Adams, *History of the U.S.*, 1:121; Murrin, “Escaping Perfidious Albion,” 122.

this source and to incendiary handbills and pamphlets from the same presses.”<sup>91</sup>

Notwithstanding the ability of the *Gazette of the United States* to use slavery and the print politics of Southern slaveholders for political gain, it nonetheless revealed an important truth: Americans consumed national news more and more through local cultures. Ultimately, very few Yankees, foreigners, radicals, or even printers were permitted to guide Southern public opinion.<sup>92</sup>

Political dissent or debate on fundamental issues such as slavery became increasingly unwelcome in the South. Republican journalists who relocated to the South accommodated themselves accordingly. James T. Callender's lack of sympathy for the condemned participants of Gabriel's Rebellion illustrates how the interests of Southern planters could influence the press. Callender's antislavery sentiment from his earlier days as a radical Republican journalist did not survive his relocation to Virginia, where his patrons were wealthy planters. Neither did the abolitionist sensibilities of English-radical émigré journalist Joseph Gales after he settled in North Carolina. Thomas Cooper, another English-radical émigré, criticized slavery while still in England and upon his arrival in Philadelphia. When he relocated to South Carolina, he changed his tune, becoming a staunch Southerner. Localized print politics that protected the sentiments of Southern slaveholders emphasized a parallel shift among Northern Republicans.

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<sup>91</sup>*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), October 1, 1800 [italics are original]; *Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), October 1, 1800.

<sup>92</sup>Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers* 263; Loughran, *The Republic In Print*, 293.

Republican newspapers in New England attempted to accommodate and explain away Jefferson's slaveholding, not least his relationship with Sally Hemings.<sup>93</sup>

In the wake of the Haitian Revolution's ultimate triumph in 1804 and the fierce debate in Congress over U.S. merchant ships to Haiti arming their vessels, Republican newspapers in the South published the Haitian constitution of 1805 in a highly truncated form. The *Richmond Enquirer*, *North Carolina Gazette*, *Aurora*, and *Raleigh Register* all published the Haitian constitution. But whereas in Pennsylvania, a state where slavery had recently been abolished, the *Aurora* published the constitution with no editorial changes, the *Richmond Enquirer*, another creation of Jefferson's, published it with several conspicuous omissions. Most notable among the missing articles were ones concerning equality, the abolition of slavery, and the ban on former masters returning to the island.<sup>94</sup>

Jefferson applied the political lessons he and the Republicans learned from the Alien and Sedition Acts to "outside agitators." In a move that combined those acts with their counteractive measures, the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the president simultaneously reaffirmed both the federal Constitution and state power regarding censorship and sedition. He continued to believe that the First Amendment barred press censorship by federal authorities, but the states could and should punish sedition whenever necessary.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 156-159; Pasley, 208-209; 260-265; Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 92; Rossignol, *Nationalist Ferment*, 134; Seth Cotlar, "Joseph Gales and the Making of the Jeffersonian Middle Class," in Onuf et al., *Revolution of 1800*; Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper, 1783-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 284-5.

<sup>94</sup>Rossignol, *Nationalist Ferment*, 133.

<sup>95</sup>Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 265.

Print publicity had steadily encroached upon domesticity and the private realm in the 1790s, attempting to expose what was salacious and potentially seditious while targeting foreign intrigue. With the Revolution of 1800, Republican preoccupation with domesticity attempted to check this form of political home invasion. Print politics in the service of Republican use of the “federalist spatial fix” enforced how slavery would be “neutralized” on the local level, enforcing its existence as a state issue, not a national one. Furthermore, “false facts”—like Federalist rumors corrupting public opinion— meant that the people’s incapacity to make judicious decisions for themselves reinforced “a perceived need for fixed federal characters”—like a General Washington or a Publius (of *Federalist Papers* fame)... or a Jefferson.<sup>96</sup>

*“Parent, Ornament, and Pride”<sup>97</sup>: Washington’s Neutrality, and the Revolution of 1800’s Diplomatic Heritage*

Americans expected Jefferson's Revolution of 1800 to fix the damage wrought by the Quasi-War on the national character. The “war of calumny” of those years had not assaulted private character alone. It also “invaded and impaired” public taste and respect for decency.<sup>98</sup> A part of the American Revolution's usable past, the national character of George Washington was significant to the Revolution of 1800's diplomatic heritage. In the midst of foreign turmoil that often intertwined with and found expression in profound

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<sup>96</sup>Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 145.

<sup>97</sup>*Bee* (New London, CT), January 8, 1800. See “ADDRESS TO DEATH: On the Demise of General Washington.”

<sup>98</sup>*Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), March 22, 1800.



partisan discord, Washington was the very personification of the American Revolution, the national character, and U.S. neutrality.

For both Federalists and Republicans, Washington provided a model to be emulated, and the two emerging political parties fought over his legacy. His public character was also crucial to what made the American Revolution distinct and set apart from other examples in the world. Washington as “parent, ornament, and pride” complemented the geographical thrust of Jeffersonian foreign policy. Jefferson’s First Inaugural envisioned that “nature and a wide ocean” would keep the republic safe from “the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe.”

Philadelphia Republican George Logan had argued in 1800 that American manufacturers were not to be part of the British mercantilist system, but instead independent citizens. They would be either household producers or virtuous artisans, as opposed to being the sort of dependent “slaves” found in the large public manufactories of Europe.<sup>99</sup> Territorial expansion at the expense of the union’s powerful imperial neighbors was the only alternative to division and disunion. Moreover, a vigorous defense of neutral rights would sustain America’s prosperity, power, and its “Empire for Liberty.”<sup>100</sup> If the United States could not be an empire *of* liberty by virtue of its citizens, it could nonetheless claim to enable liberty by expanding westward. Acquiring Louisiana would also inoculate Americans against corruption. Jefferson’s foreign policy also

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<sup>99</sup>Quoted in Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 223-4.

<sup>100</sup>Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions* (Madison, 1993), 159; McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, 9-10, 185-235; Walter LaFeber, “Jefferson and an American foreign policy,” in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 373.

centered itself primarily on commercial retaliation, since war would demand measures that would “enslave” the people—a reminder of 1798.

Diplomatic historians have traditionally contrasted Jeffersonian Republican “idealism” with Hamiltonian Federalist “realism.” More recently, however, Lawrence F. Kaplan has stressed their common ground.<sup>101</sup> Yet, given how little Americans in the Early Republic distinguished the foreign from the domestic, it is possible to exaggerate this distinction to the neglect of balances of power within the union itself as well as the fact that foreign relations triggered a need for them. In addition, common ground and consensus are contingent not just upon common goals, but also common vulnerabilities.

Americans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not separate morality from economic concerns, all of which affected foreign affairs and foreign policy at their basic level of national security and self-preservation. Preoccupation with “idealism” and “realism” can neglect how the issue of slavery within the union calibrated realism, national security, and self-preservation, whatever the recourse to any idealism. The Genet Affair, the Jay Treaty debate, the Quasi-War, and Jeffersonian politics gradually illustrated how the politics of slavery encouraged both Federalists and their Republican brethren to learn that all alliances—and not merely the wrong allies—endangered American independence.

Jefferson and the Republicans claimed the Washingtonian paradigm for themselves. Like Washington and Adams, Jefferson sought to be the nation's (and not

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<sup>101</sup>Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Paul A. Varg, *The Foreign Policies of the Founding Fathers* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1963); Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: the Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Lawrence F. Kaplan, *Alexander Hamilton: Ambivalent Anglophile* (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002).

just his party's) first character, which partisan warfare enabled him to cultivate. Though finding Washington's virtues "dangerous" to the country so long as the Federalists had the upper hand, Republicans found greater affinity for Washington's legacy when their political fortunes changed. When the first president died on December 14, 1799, the staunchly Republican New London *Bee* announced arrangements for a funeral procession, "both civil and military," in honor of "the memory of the immortal Washington." His death, continued the *Bee*, had robbed a system of its sun, and a nation of its "parent, ornament, and pride."<sup>102</sup> By proclamation of President Adams, all Americans were to wear crepe on their left arms for thirty days.

During the election of 1800 and thereafter, Republicans linked Jefferson's persona with Washington's. Jeffersonian Republicans appealed to Washington's Farewell Address, claiming that it fell more in line with their own vision of the union and defense thereof, and not that of Federalist sophists.<sup>103</sup> Republicans knew from the partisan warfare of the 1790s and the ambiguous, double-edged nature of the Farewell Address itself that denunciations of intrigue cut both ways.

As an example of Republican exegesis, "OLD SOUTH" stressed the Farewell Address's emphases on economy, love of and fidelity to the Union, and dislike for large military establishments. Standing armies were a "MONSTER," tantamount to the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and according to the illustrious late president, "destructive to *Republican Liberty*." "OLD SOUTH" claimed that Federalist anglophilia,

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<sup>102</sup>*Bee* (New London, CT), January 8, 1800. See "ADDRESS TO DEATH: On the Demise of General Washington." See Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, Chapter 6 for more on the New London *Bee* and its owner, Charles Holt.

<sup>103</sup>*Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), August 25, 1801.

print politics, and rumor mongering had “sacrificed the privileges which President Washington had contemplated in his [neutrality] proclamation” and had “violated the American character.”<sup>104</sup>

Federalists had abused federalism; true federalists rallied around the Constitution. Federalists blamed Southern slaveholding for Jefferson’s election, but it was the Essex Junto—a powerful New England group of Federalist lawyers, merchants, and politicians who opposed Republican policies— that was the true instigator of disunion.<sup>105</sup> Other themes stressed that John Adams had not relied upon the Constitution as his compass and instead threatened old sailors who tried to warn him that the ship of state was endangered. Jefferson was the good, loyal, and courageous first mate under Washington. Washington and his Revolution could supposedly be absorbed into the new cult of Jefferson.<sup>106</sup>

That relationship simultaneously worked in reverse. The image of Washington as father, hero, and savior of his country reinforced the Federalist-Republican rapprochement over “Jacobinism” and its rejection of cosmopolitan democratic radicalism: Washington’s respectable revolutionary image enabled Americans to be proud inheritors of an orderly American Revolution while distancing themselves from the chaotic French Revolution. European reliance upon noble lineage in eulogizing great

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<sup>104</sup>“OLD SOUTH,” *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), January 1, 28, 1800, December 16, 1800. Original emphasis. The Essex Junto, so named because of its origins in Essex County, MA, initially formed around opposition to a proposed constitution for the state of Massachusetts, circa 1778. After the adoption of the state constitution for Massachusetts in 1780, the group expanded to include those from other counties in the state who opposed Republican policies. On the Essex Junto, see David Hackett Fisher, “The Myth of the Essex Junto,” *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 21 (April, 1964): 191-235.

<sup>105</sup>*Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), May 5, 1801.

<sup>106</sup>“JACK OAKUM,” *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), August 18, 1800; Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 574; Robert Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 121.

men—“the praise of *slaves*”—was unnecessary for *Americans*, whose nobility came from merit and virtue. Why would Americans need nobility at all, when they had Washington, whose name eclipsed all others?<sup>107</sup>

When Jefferson's victory in the election of 1800 appeared more likely, Republicans began to make increased appeals to unity. The last purported words from the lips of the dying first president were those of the father of his country to his unruly children: “BE UNITED.”<sup>108</sup> And when toasting Jefferson's electoral victory, Republicans toasted Washington's memory also: his life was “the joy of a nation,” and his death “threw a nation in tears.”<sup>109</sup> By the time Jefferson retired, the charge that the Federalists had hijacked and gotten “unchecked hold” of Washington's character was a consistent theme in the Republican master narrative. Jefferson himself used it in his condemnation of Federalist monarchy and preaching of disunion.<sup>110</sup>

Public eulogizing (and civic canonization) of Washington included neutrality among his achievements.<sup>111</sup> In foreign relations, he had reliably delivered his country from usurpation by another power: he had sacrificed his deserved rest at Mount Vernon to rescue his nation from the political “imbecility” that led to violent partisan passion. Samuel Stanhope Smith of Princeton preached about a calm and serene Washington, the

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<sup>107</sup>Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Oration Upon the Death of George Washington* (Trenton, 1800), 5. Author's emphasis; Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 8.

<sup>108</sup>Stewart, *Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 369, 503; citing the *American* (Baltimore, MD), January 7, 1801.

<sup>109</sup>*Constitutional Telegraphe* (Boston, MA), March 11, 1801.

<sup>110</sup> Jefferson, “Anas,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (etext, University of Virginia): <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefBv012.html> [accessed February 8, 2013]

<sup>111</sup>See for example *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), October 14, 17, 21, 1799.

Revolutionary War hero who displayed courage under fire. Neutrality— which entailed prudence in international affairs while protecting union at home—was directly related to a steady, honest, and humble character.

Republicans reinforced Washington's claim that he personally embodied the neutrality laid out in the 1793 proclamation that was the “index” of his Farewell Address. Washington was benign and benevolent, not just because he stood firm as wave after wave of foreign turmoil buffeted and threatened to destroy the United States, but also because he had repeatedly refused to seize power when opportunity presented itself. Here, Jefferson’s carefully cultivated anti-power aspirations in private and in public were not without import or gravity.

The first president and his foreign policy also made the American Revolution different from both its French counterpart and the emerging Haitian Revolution. Both were also evidence that the American Revolution was the dominant and triumphant international revolutionary paradigm. Washington and neutrality had protected the country from various forms of “outside agitation,” having prevented the United States, “by the audacity of foreigners,” from being “stripped of the power of self-government.” Moreover, Washington’s wisdom had defended America against becoming “the prey of civil discord,” like “the wretched inhabitants of St. Domingo,” who were “the dreadful victims of domestic treason.”<sup>112</sup> By contrast, France, in repeated efforts, had attempted to imitate the American constitution—and failed.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Smith, *Oration upon the Death of George Washington*, 34.

<sup>113</sup>Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 8; Smith, *Oration*, 29; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 172.

As Americans observed the Haitian Revolution with interest and trepidation from 1791-1804, Washington remained a symbol of order. The Washington paradigm bolstered sympathetic portrayals of Toussaint L'Ouverture in the early 1800s. To even Southern newspaper editors, Toussaint "must be a man of no inconsiderable talent, since he has both conceived and executed so great a project as that of rescuing his unhappy country from the miseries with which it was afflicted by the tyranny of France." For Southern Federalists, Toussaint was something of a St. Dominguan Washington, urging forgiveness of white slaveholders, and never allowing a volatile situation to spiral out of control. He had also permitted the return to a slave economy and returned slaveholders' property. Viewed this way, both Washington and Toussaint checked disorderly and violent manumission.<sup>114</sup>

Jefferson generally concurred with the self-congratulatory view of the American Revolution, confiding his impressions of Bonapartism and French Revolutionary chaos to Virginia Republican John Breckinridge: not only were the French "not in the habit of self-government," but they also did not yet acknowledge or understand majority rule. Self-government was impressed upon Americans "in the cradle," rendering majority rule viable and sustainable. Fearing Bonaparte's example of a single executive for life, Jefferson pointed out that Americans' own character and situation were materially different from the French.

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<sup>114</sup>*The Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* (Alexandria, VA), August 15, 1800, December 10, 1800; Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 86-87; Hunt cites the *Columbia Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), May 25, 1799; *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* (Williamsburg, VA), April 17, 1802; *Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer* (Alexandria, VA), June 18, 1802.

Whatever the fate of republicanism in France, it could be preserved inviolate in the United States: “[W]e are sensible of the duty and expediency of submitting our opinions to the will of the majority, and can wait with patience till they get right, if they happen to be at any time wrong. Our vessel is moored at such a distance, that should theirs blow up, ours is still safe, *if we will but think so.*”<sup>115</sup> Prudence or pragmatism on Jefferson's part acknowledged that balances of power were closely tied to the Early Republic's politics of exposure and secrecy, itself linked to the overarching issues of tyranny, slavery, and consent.

Printed versions of Jefferson's Inaugural Address stressed federalist-republican conciliation. They utilized how George Washington *himself* was neutrality personified. From the beginning of the neutrality crisis, Federalists had used Washington's prestige to shore up popular support for their foreign policy, be it the Proclamation of Neutrality, condemning Genet and his successors as foreign intriguers, passing the Jay Treaty, or turning the XYZ Affair into a neutrality pep rally. Sales of Washington's Farewell Address peaked in 1800, and had by then become the deathbed words of the “father of the nation”—sacred and sage advice to be obeyed and internalized by all of his “children,” black and white.<sup>116</sup>

Complementing their earlier success in claiming the moral and political high ground of neutrality for themselves, Republicans appropriated Washington's legacy. During the XYZ Affair, Madison alluded to this possibility when, as pro-Adams

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<sup>115</sup>Thomas Jefferson to John Breckinridge, January 29, 1800, Oberg and Looney, *PTJ: Digital Ed.*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-31-02-0292> [accessed January 2, 2013].

<sup>116</sup>François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 6-7, 49, 239; Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 146.



addresses poured in from all over the country, he contrasted Adams with Washington, deciding that Adams did not measure up. Republicans proposed that it was the Federalists and their foreign policy that were truly out of step with the first president. The New London *Bee* opined that Washington had died just as he was becoming aware of the horrors of Federalist foreign policy: it was *opinion* that he had been influential in the sending of the envoys to France, and *fact* that in the last months of his life, he was heard to be more wary of the British than he had ever been previously. Had Hamilton not deceived Washington, the first president would most assuredly have acted with other staunch Democrats like Jefferson and Madison.<sup>117</sup>

The Republican claim is dubious. Washington remained sympathetic to Hamilton throughout his life. Regardless, Jefferson's First Inaugural's stress upon "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none" emphasized continuity between George Washington, John Adams, and himself. Neutrality as the basis for American foreign policy with the rest of the world had by then become part of the political lexicon of all Americans, Republican or Federalist.

As Southerners reformulated national character and its family romance according to a geographic shift, Jefferson as national character enabled Republicans to map the republican requirement for virtue onto the union itself and its balance of power. It was the "more perfect union" created by the Constitution, and not the superior virtue and

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<sup>117</sup>*Bee*, (New London, CT), January 8, 1800; *Constitutional Telegraphe* (Boston, MA), December 6, 1800.

peaceful character of Americans, which gave the United States an advantage over Europe and made the Constitution “the strongest government in the world.”<sup>118</sup>

The federal union was where “all the qualities of strength, wisdom and virtue, move in one consolidated mass to the accomplishment of every great measure upon which our happiness depends.”<sup>119</sup> Unlike the Old World balance of power, the New World’s balance of power was supposedly perfect. Republicans applied partisan anti-partisanship to foreign policy and the lessons about politics and diplomacy that they wished Americans to learn.

The importance of that balance of power within the union also meant that slavery being relegated to the local and the private realm depended upon public silence. All of these aspects of politics were modeled for the public by a president whose approach to governance was domestic and indirect. A significant effect of Jefferson’s approach was that it made slavery, which emphasized the imperfection of the union’s balance of power, invisible.

Jefferson domesticated publicity, neutrality, and slavery by projecting his cultivation of domestic family life nationally. He made his family the model for national political life, and treated intrigue, corruption, and excessive exercises of federal power as threats to that family. Domestic tranquility in private life became necessary for fostering public virtue, and localism served the national interest. Moreover, a foreign policy that favored westward expansion would project that model over an extended space. Within

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<sup>118</sup>Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1801 in Oberg, *PTJ*, 33:148-52.

<sup>119</sup>Allan Bowie Magruder, *Political, Commercial, and Moral Reflections Political, Commercial, and Moral Reflections, on the Late Cession of Louisiana, to the United States* (Lexington, KY: D. Bradford, 1803), 73-74. Early American Imprints, Series 2, no. 4578.

the Jeffersonian political calculus, slavery—and master-slave relations— fell within the bounds of family management.<sup>120</sup>

*Conclusion: The Politics of Slavery and U.S. Neutrality's Degrees of Separation*

In her history of the American Revolution, which she entitled *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, Mercy Otis Warren echoed the Republican credo and Jefferson's First Inaugural Address, explicitly tying U.S. neutrality to westward expansion. Projecting expansion "throughout a country almost without bounds," Warren coupled maintaining with "unshaken magnanimity the present neutral position of the United States" with developing the virgin resources with which "the hand of nature had blessed it," wherein America would be fulfilled and maintained as a land of promise.<sup>121</sup> The Republican hope was that westward expansion would come to fulfill the promises of Washington's policy of neutrality. Therein, Jefferson's pledge of "entangling alliances with none" would be fulfilled.

And yet, Republicans were aware of how that neutrality was tenuous in spite of that bucolic projection: the Louisiana Purchase and uncontrolled access to the Mississippi made Jefferson's vision of neutrality sustainable. But close connections between the Louisiana Purchase and the Haitian Revolution meant a power imbalance in the union with regard to the rapidly expanding South and West, as well as relations with the only other republic in the Western Hemisphere. The Louisiana Territory doubled the

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<sup>120</sup>Lucia Stanton, "'Those Who Labor for My Happiness': Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves," in Onuf, *Jeffersonian Legacies*, 149-150.

<sup>121</sup>Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 433-35; Rossignol, *Nationalist Ferment*, 106.

size of the United States and contained the largest number of free blacks anywhere in the slave-holding Americas. It also became a borderlands problem as runaway slaves capitalized on the Louisiana Purchase by fleeing to the territory that touched upon Texas and the Floridas. The existence of slavery pointed to a rejection of both attachment and nationality on federal terms. Runaway slaves frustrated the long arm of the U.S. federal regime by evading capture.<sup>122</sup>

In addition, U.S. recognition of St. Domingue's black government was problematic so long as trade with the French colony continued. As earlier debates in the House of Representatives during the Adams administration indicated, continued trade between the West Indian island and the United States came with the danger of official recognition of St. Domingue. Possible recognition of St. Domingue increased the anxiety of Southern slaveholders. Also, if neutrality was dependent upon Westward expansion, it was all the more clear that it involved the politics of slavery. Furthermore, the military victory of former slaves on St. Domingue enabling the Louisiana Purchase had ironically enabled Jefferson's neutrality despite any claims of Republicans to have escaped the "slavery" of British political economy and Old World intrigue.

Jefferson's embrace of neutrality as a style of foreign policy and his re-configuration of political space sought to render the combination of print publicity and the politics of slavery less explosive. Jefferson, like all Americans in the Early Republic, was concerned with the effects of sentiment on the people's consent. He cultivated bonds of sentiment as a basis for his politics by removing the fostering of these bonds from the public sphere, whereas Federalists had earlier used publicity to promote sentiment. The

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<sup>122</sup>Peter Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.

highly public diplomatic furor of the 1790s and its insistence on “frank overtures” had involved all of American society through print publicity. Amid worsening Franco-American relations, well-publicized exposés of foreign intrigue—both real and imagined— had turned even its most intimate corners and private spaces into political battle grounds. In the domestic realm as in public sphere, sentiment affected security. There as well, the republic and its common good could be won or lost.

Jeffersonian Republicans had seen, through the rising political power of urban, artisan newspapermen as well as scurrilous journalism, how freedom of the press in politics could be taken to unwanted conclusions: exposés uncovered foreign intrigue whose “seduction” endangered republican government. They also dredged up the nation’s dirty secrets and upset the balance of power in the union. Debate over what actually counted as foreign intrigue colored public discussion of foreign relations. It invited Americans to make connections regarding the private lives of public men, virtue, and the “wrong” kinds of national and public sentiments and interests. An astute commentator on republican virtue, Mercy Otis Warren noted what resulted when public opinion became corrupted: “when grounded on false principles and dictated by the breath of ambitious individuals,” public opinion “sometimes creates a tyranny, felt by the minority more severely than that usually inflicted by a sceptered monarch.”<sup>123</sup>

Jefferson's efforts at political realignment to protect union at home and independence abroad involved checking the public’s intrusion of the private that had

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<sup>123</sup>Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 427. For more on Warren and her histories, see Rosemarie Zagari, *A Woman’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (New York: Harlan Davidson, 1995), 132-160, and Lester H. Cohen, “Mercy Otis Warren: The Politics of Language and the Aesthetics of Self,” *American Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1983): 481-498.

reached a fever pitch during the Quasi-War. In the process, it affected what Americans learned about how to behave diplomatically. Jeffersonian Republicans had good strategic reasons for their political culture to dampen the ill effects of publicity. Jefferson attempted to de-center print publicity so that it was no longer the locus of political activity that it had been in the 1790s.

Print publicity, however, continued to exist in tension with his new focus on domesticity. Federalist newspapers delighted in scandal, as with the Merry incident, and New Englanders continued their assaults on Republican interests by associating them with slave-holding and framing them in terms of metaphorical “enslavement” to “French influence.” Both New Englanders and Virginians knew that the tug-of-war between them affected the balance of power in the union, making the slavery issue difficult to conceal. And while Jeffersonian political culture attempted to police the boundaries between public and private, difficulties in foreign policy in the early 1800s continued to challenge them.

The re-engineering of national political space regarding the balance between public and private within the federal union itself constituted a series of diplomatic subtleties. Protecting the independence of the United States abroad involving managing the politics of slavery and effecting damage control. Censoring sedition—and dealing with metaphorical and chattel slavery—were domestic issues meant for the states, and not national ones.

Slavery was meant to fall within the bounds of national silence once more, and rendered “peculiar” for the sake of the public interest and also national security. But attempts to avoid or even neutralize the enslavement of Americans on international,

national, and domestic levels in the Early Republic ironically threatened to rub up against the issue anyway— every time foreign relations prompted Americans to ideologically re-fight the American Revolution in both private and public. Far from there being no longer nothing new under the sun, much that was new was also old again.

Drew McCoy observes that Americans mostly disapproved of chattel slavery between the Revolution and the War of 1812, but not yet involved in debates over political economy. He argues that slavery was not yet a major part of American discourse on the subject, largely because most Americans saw it as inimical to republicanism and expected it to die away.<sup>124</sup> I suggest that slavery had already begun to involve itself in debates over political economy via the discussion of foreign policy and national security, because it calibrated the Early Republic's politics.<sup>125</sup> Slavery did not die away. Attitudes to it hardened in the crucible of reciprocal relations between foreign relations and domestic politics. Political economy and the exercise of constitutional power were closely related to the emerging parties' sense of the national interest. Similar to loud disapproval of public credit, loud disapproval of slavery involved political gain, but more specifically whose vision and interests got to define the nation (and whose interests, by extension, endangered it).

Moreover, Americans knew that the politics of slavery derived its explosive potency from the reality of slave revolt at home and in the larger Atlantic World. That reality affected the U.S. national character, interest, and psyche via metaphor, memory,

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<sup>124</sup>McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 251.

<sup>125</sup>See the essays in John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason eds., *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012); Hammond, "Slavery, Settlement and Empire: the Expansion and Growth of Slavery in the Interior of the North American Continent, 1780-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (Summer 2012): 175-206; Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*, Chapter 1.

the movement of people, and merchant capital. As ever, how well the United States balanced the slavery issue in relation to everything else—including separation from the Old World— depended upon skillful maneuvering in domestic politics and in foreign relations. On January 1, 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a former slave and leader of the newly independent Haiti, declared that he had “avenged America.” The existence of Haiti came with the possibility of avenging Gabriel, too.



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION - U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND EARLY AMERICA'S REPUBLICAN GOTHIC

The story of Early American neutrality is one of intricate calibrations at the international, national, and local levels. The self-congratulatory general assessments of the Early Republic's neutrality tend to belie irony, as well as the contingencies that create both anxiety and opportunity. Generations of Americans have patted themselves on the back for the benevolent and benign orderliness of the American Revolution, for successfully and skillfully avoiding war with Europe and meeting great-power condescension with defiance, for the superiority of their national leaders, and for the viability of their form of government during the "critical period." This benign, simplistic narrative often relates the political achievements of a fledgling nation that succeeded in punching above its weight.

Political achievements notwithstanding, former ambassador to the Netherlands and negotiator of the Mortefontaine Convention, William Vans Murray, knew better what the nation had experienced. Remarking upon the dissolution of the League of Armed Neutrality in 1801, he skeptically noted "that there are men who study newspapers in the United States who eternally babble with a triumphant chuckle that we are out of European politics while we are perpetually affected by them!"<sup>1</sup> The League of Armed Neutrality was the second of two coalitions of European powers meant to protect neutral

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<sup>1</sup>William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams, June 10, 1801 in "The Letters of William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams," ed. Worthington C. Ford, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914): 698-99.

shipping from British naval policy. While neutrality kept the young republic out of foreign wars that it was unprepared to fight, exhortations against “foreign attachments” and “entangling alliances” nonetheless threatened a national crisis.

Neutrality involved far more than securing neutral rights. The nature of the republic and its federal union, as well as its contested relationship between the government and the people ensured such a situation. Preserving federal union and republican government were never a foregone conclusion. Neutrality therefore confronted Americans with far larger and older questions that the American Revolution and the adoption of the federal Constitution had left unresolved.

Due to the demands of enlightened openness, print battles over public opinion played a crucial role in the neutrality crisis, making the public sphere of print central to the mediation of diplomacy and foreign affairs. The publicizing of foreign affairs in print provoked public discussions about the national interest, and by extension, national security. Print publicity influenced the way Americans understood themselves as neutrals—both in their embrace of print publicity, and also their de-centering of it. Print publicity put Americans on guard against foreign intrigue, pitting them against the kinds of habitual affections, prejudices, and disordered public sentiments that would draw the country into the general European war.

The enlightened spread of information, however, also had a habit of permeating society in ways that Americans were unprepared for and did not want. “No foreign influence” and “no entangling alliances” became sacrosanct through repetitive print consumption, but also because print described, perpetuated, and heightened deep-rooted fears over corruption, intrigue, and power that were recent and real. In this context, those

responsible for the enlightened spread of information themselves became suspected purveyors and enablers of foreign intrigue.

Generations of complaints and warnings about “the mob of the people” and foreign diplomats who “did not behave diplomatically” have steered attention away from the implications of the American Revolution’s ideological beliefs. The neutrality crisis of the 1790s explosively raised the issue of participation in the public sphere, and whether the public sphere could be truly national, for emphasizing the problem of publicity in foreign relations. Americans relied on print and the spread of information to root out the “foreign influence” that undermined the people’s consent, thus preserving the republic. Print technology, however, did not lead to a more cohesive, centralized union. Print publicity communicated both two competing nationalisms and the threat of excessive centralized power. If print networks proliferated, and yet were fragmented, the spread of certain kinds of information gave some who competed in the battle for national public opinion ample reason to welcome fragmentation due to the political challenges that threats of increasing connectivity throughout the union wrought.

Print publicity also foregrounds an old problem in a new way. Publicity in foreign relations is a long-standing problem of democracies, and it arose during the neutrality crisis as the ideals of the transatlantic radical Enlightenment made contact with the American public sphere. Throughout the neutrality crisis, Americans feared national and republican collapse as print publicity unmasked foreign intrigue. Moreover, the federal government making public its correspondence with foreign nations met with repeated warnings against “dangerous precedents.” In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that he considered democracies inferior to other governments in the

conduct of foreign relations: “[A] democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience.”<sup>2</sup>

Enlightenment ideology, American’s post-Revolutionary obsession with corruption, and print publicity in foreign relations drew attention to the complexities of “the Toqueville Problem”—namely how a Jeffersonian democratic republic, whose vitality rested on the pursuit of individual interests with minimal direction from a central government, could create the national consensus necessary for the conduct of an effective, long-term foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>

The basis for national consensus ironically lay in print publicity’s interaction with the politics of slavery, which diplomatic crises provoked. Print publicity essentially threatened to push slavery into mainstream politics, where Americans generally agreed that it did not belong. Even as print politics instructed Americans on the dangers of foreign entanglement, it provided the kind of mediation that reminded Americans in various ways how protection of their precious neutrality could not bypass the slavery issue, no matter how much they attempted to repress or silence it.

Chattel slavery’s lack of singular centrality to every issue did not make it any less a proverbial itch that Americans demanded to have scratched. Emphasis on the importance of public opinion drew out the issue as both emerging political parties

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<sup>2</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (New York: Bantam Classics, 2004), 272.

<sup>3</sup>Walter LaFeber, “Jefferson and an American Foreign Policy” in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 377.

accused the other of intrigue, making the ability to remain neutral and act neutrally highly contingent upon managing the politics of slavery by the end of the 1790s. Partisans in the Early Republic easily incorporated chattel slavery and slaveholding into their accusations of corruption, bad character, secrecy, monarchy, and foreign influence. They were, after all, continuing earlier practices and using them to make sense of new realities and challenges on the international, national, and local levels.

As Samuel Johnson's *Taxation no Tyranny* and the print politics of the Early Republic demonstrated, "slavery" was a powerful metaphor in Anglo-American colonial politics, whose relevance continued after American Independence. It was also a rhetorical flashpoint that cut in many directions simultaneously, because of its connection to other issues. At a basic level, it was not difficult for Americans in the 1790s to be talking about slavery—even with and *through* their public silences—when it was simply *everywhere*. Slavery calibrated everything that it touched as an economic, social, and political reality. The politics of slavery gave rise to the sorts of corrupt balances of power that Americans claimed not to want when they asserted that their federal union's perfect balance of power separated them from the Old World. Print publicity fixated Americans on foreign intrigue, and on individual, group, and local sources of corruption, forcing confrontation over those issues at the national level. In turn, print publicity in the service of foreign relations made itself and those issues problems of national security that permeated every level of American society, public and private.

Moreover, it was not altogether clear to all Americans throughout the 1790s that slavery and republicanism were incompatible. In 1796, Oliver Wolcott observed in his private papers the words of "a public character from Virginia":

Notwithstanding all the scoffing and reproaches against us as slave-holders, the cause of republicanism in this country is connected with the political ascendancy of the southern states. Freemen cannot be employed generally in laborious and servile occupations, without debasing their minds. It was a wise and profound observation of Edmund Burke, in a speech at the commencement of the [War for Independence], that the people of the southern colonies were much more strongly, and with a higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty than those to the northward. Such will all masters of slaves be, who are not slaves themselves.<sup>4</sup>

“These sentiments of a prime agent of the Virginia party,” Wolcott wryly noted, “furnish a clue by which many intricacies of our political labyrinth may be traced.” Foreign relations—Anglo-American, Franco-American, and Haitian-American relations—and the “right” kind of public sentiments and attachments that would serve American interests at home and abroad repeatedly raised that question, threatening confrontation at the national and federal levels.

Little wonder, then, that publicity, neutrality, and slavery constituted a potentially explosive combination during the diplomatic crises of the 1790s. A grandson of Wolcott's, George Gibbs, who in 1846 compiled a memoir of the Washington and Adams Administrations from Wolcott's papers, wrote of Washington's steady hand at the rudder of the U.S. ship of state, guiding it to neutrality through troubled waters. There was no longer any need to defend Washington's purity and wisdom. The time when the public listened to radicals such as Paine, Callender, Bache, and Duane were now past. The best commentary on the government, he wrote, “is found in the fact that the country has been most prosperous when its policy has been most nearly imitated, and that its bitterest opponents have been driven to adopt in turn almost every characteristic measure.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Oliver Wolcott, circa 1796, in Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, 1:380.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 446.

But imitation and adoption illustrated more than bipartisan overtures, reflecting and enabling instead multilevel shifts in the union's balance of power. Those shifts enabled neutrality to become a malleable paradigm of U.S. foreign policy. Both Federalists and Republicans could appropriate and exploit it for the purpose of containing factionalism and sectionalism, because they shared a common political language and a common problem by association. In addition, when print publicity and the politics of slavery engaged each other at the national level, they created both political opportunities and demands for calibration in the nationalist visions of both parties. How well either or both parties claimed and appropriated neutrality became increasingly dependent on navigating those two aspects of Early American politics acting in concert.

Both emerging political parties could lay claim to neutrality, as well as extol its virtues and its wisdom in keeping the nation clear of foreign influence and conflicts. Both learned to adapt the neutrality paradigm to fit their concept of the nation, the national interest, and widely held fears of disunion.

Federalists and Republicans seized upon the slavery metaphor as a rhetorical enabler of both print politics and foreign relations. It was a constant fixture of their complex conspiracy theories: their rivals were dupes of foreign intrigue, and thus hostile to the national interest and conspired to "enslave" the people. Slaveholding made Americans from particular parts of the country more susceptible to foreign seduction. Those who harped about slavery were irresponsibly fostering disunion, and diverting the people's attention away from their true interests and true dangers to those interests. Moreover, slavery was not regional, but national, and those who pointed accusatory

fingers at slaveholders were denying their share of the responsibility in preserving national interests. The combinations, twists, and turns were virtually endless.

The irony of U.S. neutrality in the Early Republic is that even while it claimed to relieve centrifugal forces it reflected, if not exacerbated, them. The inability or unwillingness to deal with slavery collectively and directly for fear of dissolving the union ultimately made the extended republic far from a benign safety valve, and something more akin to a pressure cooker.

Americans idealistically relied on print publicity to expose sources of corruption leading to political slavery. In the process, however, print publicity also enabled chattel slavery to calibrate U.S. foreign policy by exposing its fault lines. Chattel slavery affected the ways in which both Federalists and Republicans were able to define certain interests as “national,” whereas the interests of their opponents were “regional” or “local,” depending on where the regional locus of power was for either party. Slavery challenged both emerging parties because it affected the entire union. It affected their competing nationalisms, also, because questions about national interests and republican government raised the issue of slavery’s place in the union. Print politics proved to be intrusive; localizing it became an imperative.

Amid fears of foreign depredation, national collapse, and disorderly manumission drawing on each other at the end of the 1790s, a consensual republic with slaveholders could only conduct a foreign policy held captive by slavery. A democratized politics offered the possibility that the people would participate more directly in the running of government, including foreign policy, at an idealistic but highly tenuous moment. But the extent of their participation also depended on what anyone understood by popular



sovereignty. In addition, democratic ideals and popular sovereignty could allow for the triumph of anti-democratic forces, also: if “slavery in the United States persisted due to the anti-democratic power of slaveholders,” it was because of existing ambiguities and resulting controversy over what it meant for Americans to be a single people. Those knotty problems underlay any invocation of “we, the people.” The mediation print politics provided forced Americans to make choices at the national level that were far from ideal.<sup>6</sup>

Diplomatic crises created the circumstances that made the place of the people in government not only paramount, but problematic: Americans came away from the Constitutional Convention in 1787 with that particular question unresolved, as widespread anxiety during the 1790s over “appeals to the people” and “separating the people from their government” illustrated. That unresolved, but important, question made it difficult to confront what it meant for “the people” to allow for the holding of people in bondage, especially when concerns over national interests and national security made the very concept of “the people” volatile. The anti-democratic power of slaveholders flourished in the absence of pressure from the centralizing of federal power. Diplomatic crises elicited demands for centralization, which threatened national-level confrontation over the slavery issue. Protecting the anti-democratic power of slaveholders became pressing when difficulties in foreign relations threatening disunion made the union, nation, and Revolution vulnerable, adding a darker twist to Benjamin Franklin’s warnings about hanging together or hanging separately.

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<sup>6</sup>Padraig Riley, “Slavery and the Problem of Democracy in Jeffersonian America” in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, ed. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 242.

Neutrality therefore emerged as a precarious form of order due to controversy. It could not be otherwise. While keeping the United States out of foreign wars, it simultaneously confronted Americans with larger problems about the nature of federal governance, union, and nationhood. Print publicity fueled an already volatile situation. The neutrality crisis confronted Americans with the price of popular consent and enlightened openness. Neutrality was precarious, because it depended upon a consensus that was never fixed, but which was always susceptible to the vagaries of foreign power. Neutrality's impact on the union's balance of power at the international, national, and local levels provided political opportunities to claim its mantle from political rivals while simultaneously promoting what undermined consensus.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has observed that republicanism—fused as it is with liberalism—“celebrates an enlightened public sphere and future, governed by reason, law, and science.” In sharp contrast, “the gothic looks back to a decadent and aristocratic world darkened by horror, superstition, and the unnatural. It is obsessed with the irrational twists and turns of depraved and perverse psyches.”<sup>7</sup> Trying to preserve republican government and federal union in the midst of foreign war produced those very irrational twists and turns, due to the volatile relationship between foreign relations, print publicity, and the politics of slavery. Foreign relations demanded attention to national security. National security fixated Americans' attention on who endangered the republic, the union, and its national interests.

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<sup>7</sup>Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 413.

Print publicity surrounding foreign relations in the 1790s and its role in formulating and maintaining a workable foreign policy of neutrality confronted the Early Republic with paradox that gave rise to irony. Obsession with exposing the secrets and intrigue that would threaten U.S. neutrality, wherein reason and openness would supposedly triumph, made U.S. foreign relations an exercise and study in “republican gothic.” Nothing promoted these obsessions during the 1790s more than did foreign relations and its concomitant threat of foreign “enslavement” that would lead to the union’s dismemberment. Print publicity's demands for frank overtures rubbed up against the problem of slavery in the union, creating diplomatic subtleties in the way both incipient parties appropriated neutrality. “Republican gothic” reflected and culminated in a nation that faced both East and West at once, exacerbating differences between North and South.

Gradually, both detachment from and alliance between the United States and either Great Britain or France meant potential confrontation with the slavery problem. Americans employed a series of intricate mental gymnastics to avoid dealing with it directly. The Jay Treaty and alliance with monarchy dredged up complaints against British tyranny originating from the colonial period and the Revolutionary War. Slavery and the potential for slave insurrection was Great Britain’s fault: slaves were present in the United States because British power put them there. Moreover, British power prevented Americans from enacting the necessary legislation to end the slave trade, and “enslaved” Americans by stealing away their human “property.”

St. Domingue’s slave revolt culminating in revolution proved that the French Revolution was anarchic, violent, and dangerous. France would launch an attack on the

United States from St. Domingue and infect American slaves with revolutionary ideas that would result in a slave insurrection. Relations with both Britain and France were also fraught with the danger of outside agitators meddling with slavery, resulting in anarchy, all of which anxious Southern slaveholders adapted to the political realities within the union. The only guarantee of peaceful, orderly manumission was Americans being left alone to deal with the issue themselves, and only through local authorities. No European foreigners or Yankees needed apply.

Americans in the Early Republic could agree on the need for consensus. But consensus had the potential to contain centrifugal forces only for so long before new demands for calibration needed to be met—a political reality that both the Constitution and also the first-party system illustrated. Neutrality in the realm of foreign policy deeply affected domestic politics, and the relationship also worked in the reverse. And when it did, it exposed the precariousness of the relationship between union, state, nation, and Revolution at its most intimate levels. Rather than being merely an example of "the wisdom of the Founders," neutrality was ambiguous and troubling.

Print publicity in the Early Republic's foreign relations demonstrated that one of the reasons why U.S. nationalism ultimately could not contain its eternal contradictions was slavery, but not because of something as simple as "hypocrisy." Those contradictions proved difficult and ultimately impossible to contain because of the need to define and preserve enlightened republican popular "consent." If foreign policy required the people's consent, the danger was that they could also withdraw it. Preventing "the people" from withdrawing their consent involved the willful suspension of the logical consequences of republican ideology that could not remain indefinitely suspended.

Successive foreign-relations crises that raised demands for “frank overtures” to the level of national security illustrated how suspension of logical consequences involved “diplomatic subtleties” over what “slavery” meant.

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