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Launching the New Republic, 1788–1800



NANCY WARD (Photo By D. Ray Smith. See www.smithdray.net for more information on Nancy Ward.)

FOR NANCY WARD, as for all Americans, the 1790s was a decade marked by political and economic transformation. But whereas many Americans cautiously hoped the new republic would offer them a secure future, Ward, a Cherokee Indian, had less reason to be optimistic. Born in about 1738, with the name Nanye’hi, she became a “War Woman” (or “Beloved Woman”) in 1755 when, after attacking Creeks killed her husband, she picked up his

gun and helped drive them off. As a War Woman, Nanye’hi not only participated in combat but conducted diplomacy and occasionally released war captives. She changed her name when remarrying a British trader, Bryant Ward, and retained it after he left her and their daughter.

When the American Revolution broke out, the Cherokees were hopelessly divided. Ward and other leaders urged the Cherokees to avoid war and negotiate with the winning side to achieve their goals. They argued that the Cherokees could not afford another bloodbath such as they had suffered when opposing Britain and the colonies during the Seven Years’ War. But more militant Cherokees favored allying with Britain and Ohio valley tribes against the colonies as the best means of preserving their land and independence. They noted that negotiations by Ward’s uncle and others had resulted in losses of about 50,000 square miles of Cherokee land. Unable to reconcile their differences, the two sides parted ways.

During the war, peaceful Cherokees, including Ward, sought an agreement with the United States. At a treaty conference in 1781, she and other speakers persuaded the Americans not to take additional Cherokee land. But after the war ended, U.S. treaty commissioners pressured the Cherokees in 1783 and 1785 to cede another eight thousand square miles. Thereafter, Ward urged those Cherokees still resisting the Americans to make peace. Only in 1794, after their Shawnee allies were crushed at the Battle of Fallen Timbers (discussed in this chapter), did the last Cherokees submit to U.S. rule.

Ward advocated peace with the United States, not because she embraced the new republic and its values, but because she recognized that resistance to its military power was futile. Since the 1750s, the Cherokees had lost nearly half of their population and more than half of their land. Whether pro-British, pro-American, or neutral, most other Native Americans suffered comparable losses. During the same period, the former colonies had grown from just under 2 million people to over 5 million, 90 percent of whom

JUDITH SARGENT STEVENS (MURRAY) BY JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, CA. 1770 Judith Sargent Murray was the foremost American advocate of women’s rights at the end of the eighteenth century. (*Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago/Art Resources, NY*)

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lived and worked on the land. These planters and farmers equated the ownership of land with liberty and political rights, and considered Native Americans like Ward an obstacle to those goals. Whether accommodating the expansionist republic would actually improve prospects for the 125,000 Indians east of the Mississippi was questionable at best.

Besides holding common attitudes toward Native Americans and their lands, whites in 1789 successfully launched a new constitutional republic. But over the next decade, they became increasingly divided over the political and diplomatic course the United States should take. By 1798, voters had formed two parties, each of which accused the other of threatening republican liberty. Only when the election of 1800 had been settled—by the narrowest of margins—did it seem certain that the United States would endure.

FOCUS Questions

- Which points in Hamilton's economic program were most controversial and why?
- What was the impact of the French Revolution on American politics?
- What principal issues divided Federalists and Republicans in the election of 1800?
- On what basis were some Americans denied full equality by 1800?

Constitutional Government Takes Shape, 1788–1796

Although the Constitution had replaced the Articles of Confederation as the law of the land, its effectiveness had yet to be tested. Given the social and political divisions among Americans, the successful establishment of a national government was anything but guaranteed. Would Americans accept the results of a national election? Would the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the new government function effectively? Would Congress and the states amend the Constitution with a Bill of Rights, as even many of its proponents advocated?

Implementing Government

The first step in implementing the new government was the election of a president and Congress. The

first elections under the Constitution, in fall 1788, resulted in a Federalist sweep. Antifederalists won just two of twenty seats in the Senate and five of fifty-nine in the House of Representatives. An electoral college met in each state on February 9, 1789, with each elector voting for two presidential candidates. Although unaware of deliberations in other states, every elector designated George Washington as one of their choices. Having gotten the second-most votes, John Adams became the vice president. (The Twelfth Amendment would later supersede this procedure for choosing the president and vice president, as discussed in Chapter 8).

There was nothing surprising about the unanimity of Washington's victory. His leadership during the Revolutionary War and the constitutional convention earned him a reputation as a national hero whose abilities and integrity far surpassed those of his peers. Because of his exalted stature, Washington was able to calm Americans' fears of unlimited executive power.

Traveling slowly over the nation's miserable roads, the men entrusted with launching the federal experiment began assembling in New York, the new national capital, in March 1789. Because so few members were on hand, Congress opened its session a month late. George Washington did not arrive until April 23 and took his oath of office a week later.

The Constitution required the president to obtain the Senate's "advice and consent" to his nominees to head executive departments. Otherwise, Congress was free to determine the organization and accountability of what became known as the cabinet. The first cabinet, established by Congress, consisted of five departments, headed by the secretaries of state, treasury, and war and by the attorney general and postmaster general. Vice President John Adams's tie-breaking vote defeated a proposal that would have forbidden the president from dismissing cabinet officers without Senate approval. This outcome strengthened the president's authority to make and carry out policy independently of congressional oversight, beyond what the Constitution required.

The Federal Judiciary and the Bill of Rights

The Constitution authorized Congress to establish federal courts below the level of the Supreme Court, but provided no plan for their structure. Many citizens feared that federal courts would ride roughshod over each state's distinctive blend of judicial procedures.



GEORGE WASHINGTON'S INAUGURAL JOURNEY THROUGH TRENTON, 1789 Washington received a warm welcome in Trenton, site of his first victory during the Revolutionary War. (*Library of Congress*)

With the **Judiciary Act** of 1789, Congress quieted popular apprehensions by establishing in each state a federal district court that operated according to local procedures. As the Constitution stipulated, the Supreme Court exercised final jurisdiction. Congress had struck a compromise between nationalists and states' rights advocates, one that respected state traditions while offering wide access to federal justice.

The Constitution offered some protection of citizens' individual rights. It barred Congress from passing *ex post facto* laws (criminalizing previously legal actions and then punishing those who had engaged in them) and bills of attainder (proclaiming a person's guilt and stipulating punishment without a trial). Nevertheless, the absence of a comprehensive bill of rights had prompted several delegates at Philadelphia to refuse to sign the Constitution and had been a condition of ratification in several states. James Madison, who had been elected to the House of Representatives, led the drafting of the ten amendments that became known as the **Bill of Rights**.

The First Amendment guaranteed the most fundamental freedoms of expression—religion, speech, press, and political activity—against federal interference. The Second Amendment ensured that “a well-regulated militia” would preserve the nation's security by guaranteeing “the right of the people to bear arms.” Along with the Third Amendment, it sought to protect citizens from what eighteenth-century Britons and Americans alike considered the most sinister embodiment of tyrannical power: standing armies. The Fourth through Eighth Amendments limited the police powers of the state by guaranteeing individuals' fair treatment in legal and judicial proceedings. The Ninth and Tenth Amendments reserved to the people or to the states powers not allocated to the federal government under the Constitution, but Madison headed off proposals to limit

The Second Amendment ensured that “a well-regulated militia” would preserve the nation's security by guaranteeing “the right of the people to bear arms.”

federal power more explicitly. In general, the Bill of Rights imposed no serious check on the Framers' nationalist objectives. The ten amendments were submitted to the states and ratified by December 1791.

Hamilton's Domestic Policies, 1789–1794

President Washington left his secretary of the treasury, **Alexander Hamilton**, in charge of setting the administration's domestic priorities. Hamilton quickly emerged as an imaginative and dynamic statesman with a sweeping program for strengthening the federal government and promoting national economic development. While Hamilton succeeded in pushing his proposals through Congress, the controversies surrounding them undermined popular support for Federalist policies.

Establishing the Nation's Credit

In Hamilton's mind, the most immediate danger facing the United States concerned the possibility of war with Britain, Spain, or both. The republic could finance a major war only by borrowing heavily, but because Congress under the Confederation had not assumed responsibility for the Revolutionary War debt, the nation's credit was weakened abroad and at home.

Responding to a request from Congress, Hamilton in January 1790 issued the first of two **Reports on the Public Credit**. It outlined a plan to strengthen the country's credit, enable it to defer paying its debt, and entice wealthy investors to place their capital at its service. The report listed \$54 million in U.S. debt, \$42 million of which was owed to Americans, and the rest to Europeans. Hamilton estimated that on top of the national debt, the states had debts of \$25 million, some of which the United States had promised to reimburse.

Hamilton recommended first that the federal government “fund” the \$54 million national debt by selling an equal sum in new government bonds.

Purchasers of these securities would choose from several combinations of federal “stock” and western lands. Those who wished could retain their original bonds and earn 4 percent interest. All these options would reduce interest payments on the debt from the full 6 percent set by the Confederation Congress. Hamilton knew that creditors

would not object to this reduction because their investments would now be more valuable and more secure. His report also proposed that the federal government pay off the \$25 million in state debts remaining from the Revolution in the same manner.

Hamilton exhorted the government to use the money earned by selling federal lands in the West to pay off the \$12 million owed to Europeans as quickly as possible. In his Second Report on the Public Credit, submitted to Congress in December 1790, he argued that the Treasury could accumulate the interest owed on the remaining \$42 million by collecting customs duties on imports and an excise tax (a tax on products made, sold, or transported within a nation's borders) on whiskey. In addition, Hamilton proposed that money owed to American citizens should be made a permanent debt. That is, he urged that the government not attempt to repay the \$42 million principal but instead keep paying interest to bondholders. Under Hamilton's plan, the only burden on taxpayers would be the small annual cost of interest. The government could uphold the national credit at minimal expense, without ever paying off the debt itself.

Hamilton advocated a perpetual debt as a lasting means of uniting the economic fortunes of the nation's creditors to the United States. In an age when financial investments were notoriously risky, the federal government would protect the savings of wealthy bondholders through conservative policies while offering an interest rate competitive with the Bank of England's. The guarantee of future interest payments would unite the interests of the moneyed class with those of the government. Few other investments would entail so little risk.

Hamilton's recommendations provoked immediate controversy. Although no one in Congress doubted that they would enhance the country's fiscal reputation, many objected that those least deserving of reward would gain the most. The original owners of more than three-fifths of the debt certificates issued by the Continental Congress were Revolutionary patriots of modest means who had long before sold their certificates for a fraction of their promised value, usually out of dire financial need. Foreseeing that the government would fund the debt, wealthy speculators had bought the certificates and now stood to reap huge gains at the expense of the original owners, even collecting interest that had accrued before they purchased the certificates. “That the case of those who parted with their securities from necessity is a hard one, cannot be denied,” Hamilton admitted. But making exceptions, he argued, would be even worse.

To Hamilton's surprise, Madison—his longtime ally—emerged as a leading opponent of funding.

“That the case of those who parted with their securities from necessity is a hard one, cannot be denied.”

Facing opposition to the plan in his home state of Virginia, Madison tried but failed to obtain compensation for original owners who had sold their certificates. Congress rejected his proposal primarily on the grounds that it would weaken the nation's credit.

Opposition to Hamilton's proposal that the federal government assume states' war debts also ran high. Only Massachusetts, Connecticut, and South Carolina had failed to make effective provisions for satisfying their creditors. The issue stirred the fiercest indignation in the South, which except for South Carolina had paid off 83 percent of its debt. Madison and others maintained that to allow residents of the laggard states to escape heavy taxes while others had liquidated theirs at great expense was to reward irresponsibility.

Southern hostility almost defeated assumption. In the end, however, Hamilton saved his proposal by enlisting Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson's help. Jefferson and other Virginians favored moving the capital to the Potomac River, hoping to make Virginia a national crossroads and thus preserve its position as the largest, most influential state. In return for the northern votes necessary to transfer the capital, Hamilton secured enough Virginians' support to win the battle for assumption. The capital would move in the following year to Philadelphia and remain there until a new capital city was built. Despite this concession, the debate over state debts confirmed many white southerners' suspicions that northern financial and commercial interests would benefit from Hamilton's policies at southerners' expense.

Congressional enactment in 1790 of Hamilton's recommendations dramatically reversed the nation's fiscal standing. European investors grew so enthusiastic about U.S. bonds that by 1792 some securities were selling at 10 percent above face value.

Creating a National Bank

Having significantly expanded the stock of capital available for investment, Hamilton intended to direct that money toward projects that would diversify the national economy through a federally chartered bank. Accordingly, in December 1790 he presented Congress with the [Report on a National Bank](#).

The proposed Bank of the United States would raise \$10 million through a public stock offering. Private investors could purchase shares by paying for three-quarters of their value in government bonds. In this way, the bank would capture a significant portion of the recently funded debt and make it available for loans; it would also receive a steady flow of interest payments from the Treasury. Under these circumstances, shareholders were positioned to profit handsomely.

Hamilton argued that the bank would cost the taxpayers nothing and greatly benefit the nation. It would provide a safe place for the federal government to deposit tax revenues, make inexpensive loans to the government when taxes fell short, and help relieve the scarcity of hard cash by issuing paper notes that would circulate as money. Furthermore, it would possess authority to regulate the business practices of state banks and would provide much needed credit to expand the economy.

Hamilton's critics denounced his proposal for a national bank, interpreting it as a dangerous scheme that would give a small, elite group special power to influence the government. These critics believed that the Bank of England had undermined the integrity of government in Britain. Shareholders of the new bank could just as easily become the tools of unscrupulous politicians. Jefferson openly opposed Hamilton, claiming that the bank would be "a machine for the corruption of the legislature [Congress]." Another Virginian, John Taylor, predicted that the bank would take over the country, which would thereafter, he quipped, be known as the United States of the Bank.

Madison led the opposition to the bank in Congress, arguing that it was unconstitutional. Unless Congress closely followed the Constitution, he argued, the central government might oppress the states and trample on individual liberties, just as Parliament had done to the colonies. Strictly limiting federal power seemed the surest way of preventing the United States from degenerating into a corrupt despotism.

Congress approved the bank by only a thin margin. Uncertain of the bank's constitutionality, Washington turned to both Jefferson and Hamilton for advice before signing the measure into law. Like many southern planters whose investments in slaves left them short of capital and often in debt, Jefferson distrusted banking. Moreover, his fear of concentrated economic and political power led him, like Madison, to favor a "strict interpretation" of the Constitution. "To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specifically drawn around the powers of Congress is to take possession of a boundless field of power no longer susceptible of any definition," warned Jefferson.

Hamilton fought back, urging Washington to sign the bill. Because the Constitution authorized Congress to enact all measures "necessary and proper" (Article I, Section 8), Hamilton contended, it could execute such measures. The only unconstitutional activities of the national government, he

Jefferson claimed that the bank would be "a machine for the corruption of the legislature [Congress]."

concluded, were those expressly prohibited. In the end, the president accepted Hamilton's argument for a "loose interpretation" of the Constitution. In February 1791, the Bank of the United States obtained a charter guaranteeing its existence for twenty years. Washington's acceptance of the principle of loose interpretation was an important victory for those advocating an active, assertive national government. But the split between Jefferson and Hamilton, and Washington's siding with the latter, signaled a deepening political divide within the administration.

Emerging Partisanship

Hamilton's attempt to build political support for Federalist policies by appealing to economic self-interest was successful but also divisive. His arrangements for rescuing the nation's credit provided enormous gains for speculators, merchants, and other investors in the port cities who by 1790 held most of the Revolutionary debt. As holders of bank stock, these groups had yet another reason to favor centralized national authority. Assumption of the state debts liberated New England, New Jersey, and South Carolina taxpayers from a crushing burden, enabling Federalists to dominate politics in these places. Hamilton's efforts to promote industry, commerce, and shipping also struck a responsive chord among northeastern entrepreneurs.

Opposition to Hamilton's program was strongest in sections of the country where it offered few benefits. Outside of Charleston, South Carolina, few southerners or westerners retained Revolutionary certificates in 1790, invested in the Bank of the United States, or borrowed from it. Resentment against a national economic program whose main beneficiaries seemed to be eastern "monied men"

and New Englanders who refused to pay their debts gradually united westerners, southerners, and some mid-Atlantic citizens into a political coalition that challenged the Federalists and called for a return to the "true principles" of republicanism.

With Hamilton having presented his measures as "Federalist," Jefferson, Madison, and their supporters began referring to themselves as "republicans." In this way, they implied that Hamilton's schemes to centralize the national government threatened liberty. Having separated from the Federalists, Jefferson and Madison

drew support from former Antifederalists whose ranks had been fatally weakened after the election of 1788. In 1791, they supported the establishment in Philadelphia of an opposition newspaper, *The National Gazette*, whose editor, Philip Freneau, had been an ardent Antifederalist. For the year preceding the election of 1792, Freneau attacked Hamilton relentlessly, accusing him of trying to create an aristocracy and monarchy in America. Hamilton responded vigorously to the attacks through his own column in Philadelphia's Federalist newspaper, *The Gazette of the United States*. Using pseudonyms, he also wrote columns in which he attacked Jefferson as an enemy of President Washington.

Although political partisanship intensified as the election approached, there was no organized political campaigning. For one thing, most voters believed that organized factions or parties were inherently corrupt and threatened liberty. The Constitution's framers had neither wanted nor planned for political parties. Indeed, in *Federalist* No. 10, James Madison had argued that the Constitution would prevent the rise of national political factions. For another thing, George Washington, by appearing to be above the partisan disputes, remained supremely popular.

Meeting in 1792, the electoral college was again unanimous in choosing Washington to be president. John Adams was reelected vice president but by a closer vote than in 1788, receiving 77 votes compared to 50 for George Clinton, the Antifederalist governor of New York.

The Whiskey Rebellion

Hamilton's program not only sparked an angry congressional debate but also helped ignite a civil insurrection in 1794 called the **Whiskey Rebellion**. Reflecting serious regional and class tensions, this popular uprising was the young republic's first serious crisis.

As part of his financial program, Hamilton had recommended an excise tax on domestically produced whiskey. He insisted that such a tax would not only help in financing the national debt but would improve morals by inducing Americans to drink less liquor. Though Congress enacted the tax, some members doubted that Americans (who on average annually consumed six gallons of hard liquor per adult) would submit tamely to limitations on their drinking. James Jackson of Georgia, for example, warned the administration that his constituents "have long been in the habit of getting drunk and that they will get drunk in defiance of ... all the excise duties which Congress might be weak or wicked enough to pass."

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WHISKEY REBELLION, 1794 Rebels in Washington County, Pennsylvania, tar and feather a federal tax collector. (Granger Collection)

The validity of such doubts became apparent in September 1791 when a crowd tarred and feathered an excise agent near Pittsburgh. Western Pennsylvanians found the new tax especially burdensome. Unable to export crops through New Orleans, most farmers distilled their rye or corn into alcohol, which could be carried across the Appalachians at a fraction of the price charged for bulkier grain. Hamilton's excise equaled 25 percent of whiskey's retail value, enough to wipe out a farmer's profit.

The law also stipulated that trials for evading the tax be conducted in federal courts. Any western Pennsylvanian indicted for noncompliance would have to travel three hundred miles to Philadelphia. Besides facing a jury of unsympathetic easterners, the accused would have to bear the cost of the long journey and lost earnings while at court, in addition to fines and other penalties if found guilty. Moreover, Treasury officials rarely enforced the law rigorously outside western Pennsylvania. For all these reasons, western Pennsylvanians complained that the whiskey excise was excessively burdensome.

In a scene reminiscent of Revolutionary-era popular protests, large-scale resistance erupted in July 1794. One hundred western Pennsylvanians attacked a U.S. marshal serving sixty delinquent taxpayers with summonses to appear in court at Philadelphia. A crowd of five hundred burned the chief revenue officer's house after a shootout with federal soldiers. Roving bands torched buildings, assaulted tax collectors, harassed government supporters, and flew a flag symbolizing an independent country they hoped to create from six western counties.

Echoing elites' denunciations of earlier protests, Hamilton condemned the rebellion as lawlessness. He noted that Congress had reduced the tax

rate per gallon in 1792 and had recently voted to allow state judges in western Pennsylvania to hear trials. As during Shays's Rebellion, Washington concluded that failure to respond strongly to the uprising would encourage outbreaks in other western areas.

Washington accordingly mustered nearly thirteen thousand militiamen from Pennsylvania and neighboring states to march west under his command. Opposition evaporated once the troops reached the Appalachians, and the president left Hamilton in charge of making arrests. Of about 150 suspects seized, Hamilton sent twenty in irons to Philadelphia. Two men received death sentences, but Washington eventually pardoned them both, noting that one was a "simpleton" and the other "insane."

The Whiskey Rebellion resulted in severe limits on public opposition to federal policies. In the early 1790s, many Americans still believed it was legitimate to protest unpopular laws using the same tactics with which they had blocked parliamentary measures like the Stamp Act. Indeed, western Pennsylvanians had justified their resistance with exactly such reasoning. By firmly suppressing the first major challenge to national authority, Washington served notice that citizens who resorted to violent or other extralegal means of political action would feel the full force of federal authority. In this way, he gave voice and substance to elites' fears of "mobocracy," now resurfacing in reaction to the French Revolution (discussed shortly).

Two men received death sentences, but Washington eventually pardoned them both, noting that one was a "simpleton" and the other "insane."

The United States in a Wider World, 1789–1796

By 1793, disagreements over foreign affairs had emerged as the primary source of friction in American public life. The political divisions created by Hamilton's financial program hardened into ideologically oriented factions that argued vehemently over whether the country's foreign policy should favor industrial and overseas mercantile interests or those of farmers, planters, small businesses, and artisans. Moreover, having ratified its Constitution in the year the French Revolution began (1789), the new nation entered the international arena as European tensions were once again exploding. The rapid spread of pro-French revolutionary ideas and organizations alarmed Europe's monarchs and aristocrats. Perceiving a threat to their social orders as well as their territorial interests, most European nations declared war on France by early 1793. For most of the next twenty-two years—until Napoleon's final defeat in 1815—Europe and the Atlantic world remained in a state of war.

While most Americans hoped that their nation could avoid this latest European conflict, the interests or values of many citizens led them to be partial toward either Britain, France, or Spain. Thus, differences over foreign policy fused with differences over domestic affairs, further intensifying partisanship in American politics.

Spanish Power in Western North America

Stimulated by having won Louisiana from France in 1762 (see Chapter 5), Spain enjoyed a brief revival of its North American fortunes in the late eighteenth century. Strengthened by new presidios and additional troops north of the Rio Grande, Spain sought to force nomadic Apaches, Navajos, and Comanches to end their damaging raids on Spanish colonists and allied Indians and to submit to Spanish authority. This effort succeeded, but only up to a point. The Apaches and Navajos moved farther from Spanish settlements, but primarily to avoid Indian enemies rather than Spanish attacks. Ironically, colonists in New Mexico and Texas depended on the Comanches as sources of some European goods, which the Comanches obtained through trade networks extending to Louisiana and to American territory east of the Mississippi. By 1800, nomadic Indians had agreed to cease their raids in New Mexico and Texas, but whether the truce would become a permanent peace depended

on whether Spain could strengthen and broaden its imperial position in North America.

Spain's efforts in New Mexico and Texas were part of its larger effort to counter rivals for North American territory and influence. The first challenge arose in the Pacific Ocean, where Spain had enjoyed an unchallenged monopoly for more than two centuries until Russian traders entered Alaska (see Beyond America).

Perceiving Russia's move into Alaska as a threat, Spain expanded northward on the Pacific coast from Mexico. In 1769, it established the province of **Alta California** (the present American state of California) (see Map 7.1). Efforts to encourage



MAP 7.1 SPANISH SETTLEMENTS IN ALTA CALIFORNIA, 1800 While the United States was struggling to win its independence, Spain was establishing a new colony on the Pacific coast.

large-scale Mexican immigration to Alta California failed, leaving the colony to be sustained by a chain of religious missions, several presidios, and a few large ranchos (ranches). Seeking support against inland adversaries, coastal California Indians welcomed the Spanish at first. But the Franciscan missionaries sought to convert them to Catholicism while imposing harsh disciplinary measures and putting them to work in vineyards and in other enterprises. Meanwhile, Spanish colonists' spreading of epidemic and venereal diseases among natives precipitated a decline in the Native American population from about seventy-two thousand in 1770 to about eighteen thousand by 1830.

Between New Mexico and California, Spain attempted to make alliances with Indians in the area later known as Arizona. In this way, Spain hoped to dominate North America between the Pacific and the Mississippi River. But resistance from the Hopi, Quechan (Yuma), and other Native Americans thwarted these hopes. Fortunately for Spain, Arizona had not yet attracted the interest of other imperial powers.

Challenging American Expansion, 1789–1792

Between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River, Spain, Britain, the United States, and numerous Indian nations jockeyed for advantage in a region that all considered central to their interests and that Native Americans regarded as homelands (see Map 7.2, page 198).

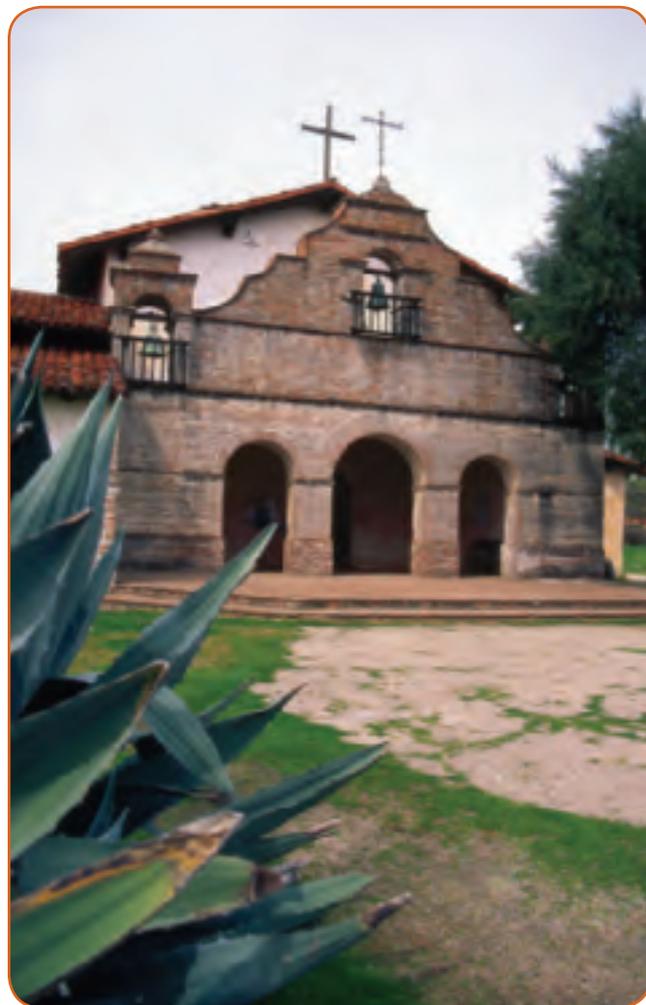
Realizing that the United States was in no position to dictate developments immediately in the West, President Washington pursued a course of patient diplomacy that was intended “to preserve the country in peace if I can, and to be prepared for war if I cannot.” The prospect of peace improved in 1789 when Spain unexpectedly opened New Orleans to American commerce, although exports remained subject to a 15 percent duty.

Thereafter, Spanish officials continued to bribe well-known political figures in Tennessee and Kentucky, among them a former general on Washington's staff, James Wilkinson. Thomas Scott, a congressman from western Pennsylvania, meanwhile schemed with the British. Between 1791 and 1796, the federal government anxiously admitted Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee to the Union, partly in the hope of strengthening their residents' flickering loyalty to the United States.

Washington also tried to weaken Spanish influence by neutralizing Spain's most important ally, the Creek Indians. The Creeks numbered more than twenty thousand, including perhaps five thousand warriors,

and they bore a fierce hostility toward Georgian settlers, whom they called *Ecunnaunuxulgee*, or “the greedy people who want our lands.” In 1790, the Creek leader Alexander McGillivray signed the Treaty of New York with the United States. The treaty permitted American settlers to remain on lands in the Georgia piedmont fought over since 1786 (see Chapter 6), but in other respects preserved Creek territory against U.S. expansion. Washington insisted that Georgia restore to the Creeks' allies, the Chickasaws and Choctaws, the vast area along the Mississippi River known as the Yazoo Tract, which Georgia claimed had begun selling off to white land speculators (as discussed in Chapter 8).

The Creeks called Georgia settlers *Ecunnaunuxulgee*, or “the greedy people who want our lands.”



MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA The early colonization of Alta California depended on missions at which Native Americans were subjected to harsh treatment and Roman Catholic religion. (Copyright © Tony Freeman / Photo Edit)



Beyond America

GLOBAL INTERACTIONS



Trade and Empire in the Pacific, to 1800

For more than two and a half centuries, no nation challenged Spain's monopoly on transpacific commerce (see Chapter 4 Beyond America). Then in the late eighteenth century, peoples from several parts of the world began traveling, fighting, and trading in the Pacific. By 1800, the Pacific Ocean had become an avenue rather than a barrier to global interaction.

After Spain, the next European nation to link Asia and America was Russia. Russian traders in Siberia reached the Pacific in 1639, and in 1689 found a lucrative market for sea otter pelts among the Chinese from whom they obtained silk, porcelain, and tea. From Siberia, the Russians during the 1740s crossed the Bering Sea to the Aleutian Islands. As commercial overhunting exterminated the sea otter in the westernmost Aleutians, the traders moved eastward to mainland Alaska, where they would establish a colony in 1799.

Meanwhile, Britain in 1768 appointed Captain James Cook to explore the entire Pacific Ocean. In two voyages (1768–1771 and 1772–1775), Cook explored and mapped the South Pacific and the Antarctic coast. To pre-empt Russia and Britain, Spain in 1769 extended its empire on the Pacific coast to Alta California. In 1774, a Spanish expedition sailed to Nootka Sound at Vancouver Island and proclaimed Spanish sovereignty on the Northwest Coast.

Beginning in 1776, Cook led a third expedition north of the equator. Cook charted the American coast from the Aleutians to northern California and, ignoring Spain's claim, spent a month at Nootka Sound, trading with the Nootka Indians for provisions and 1,500 sea otter pelts. The expedition then sailed to Hawaii, where Cook was killed in a dispute with Natives. Despite his death, the British concluded that most Hawaiians were willing and able to provide ample supplies of food and hospitality to visitors.

Paralleling Magellan's voyage two and half centuries earlier (see Chapter 2), Cook's crew continued circling the globe after its leader died fighting with Native peoples in the Pacific. At the Portuguese port of Macao, they were pleasantly astonished to discover the large quantities of fine goods that Chinese traders offered for the sea otter pelts from Nootka Bay.

The combination of Chinese demand for sea otter pelts, European demand for Chinese goods at affordable prices, and Hawaii's prime location in the mid-Pacific proved irresistible to merchants from several North Atlantic nations. By the end of the decade, dozens of ships, mostly British and American, regularly traveled first to the Northwest Coast to trade cloth and metal goods to Native Americans for sea otter pelts, then to Hawaii to trade more goods with Native Hawaiians for provisions, and finally to the Chinese port of Canton to unload the pelts in return for Chinese goods. Back in their home countries, they found ready markets among middle-class consumers who craved Chinese tea, spices, porcelain, jewelry, painted fans, silk, and the newest craze, wallpaper.

Seeking to protect Spain's monopoly, a Spanish expedition in 1789 banned foreigners from the Northwest Coast and arrested a British trader at Nootka Sound. But Britain defied the challenge, and in 1795 a humiliated Spain acknowledged British rights to trade at Nootka Sound. Spain soon thereafter abandoned efforts to colonize north of San Francisco Bay.

Commercial and imperial expansion in the North Pacific affected Europeans, Americans, and Chinese, but its deepest impact was on indigenous peoples. European-borne diseases inflicted massive mortality on Inuits, Aleuts, Northwest Coast and California Indians, and Native Hawaiians. Many Native Americans also perished through the harsh practices of Russian traders and Spanish missionaries. British officials armed the chief of the island of Hawaii, enabling him to conquer the entire archipelago and proclaim himself its king. Even where Native peoples were not coerced, their cultures changed as they altered their work patterns to produce skins and incorporated objects of metal, cloth, and other new materials into their daily lives and religious ceremonies. Some indigenous peoples, particularly Aleuts and Hawaiians, had even more novel experiences, hiring themselves out to Russians, Britons, and Americans as sailors and, occasionally, as hunters and traders in North America. (Defying Chinese imperial restrictions, a few dozen



NOOKTA INDIANS GREET SPANISH EXPEDITION, 1791 Spain unsuccessfully tried to prevent Britain and other rivals from trading with the Nootkas for sea otter pelts. (*Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.*)

Chinese men also sailed with Europeans before 1800, becoming the first Asian immigrants to North America.) Although most such laborers were men, a few women, particularly Hawaiian, joined their ranks.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Pacific was an arena for global commerce, imperial competition, and multicultural interaction. Although these developments had a limited impact on the United States at the time, they

fueled American dreams of expanding westward to the Pacific.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- Which European rivals first challenged Spain's monopoly on transpacific commerce and by what means?
- How did the China trade affect the nations and peoples who participated in it?



MAP 7.2 DISPUTED TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN THE WEST, 1783–1796 Until 1796, Britain, Spain, and their Native American allies controlled much of the western territory claimed by the United States.

Washington and his secretary of war, Henry Knox, adopted a harsher policy toward Native Americans who resisted efforts by American citizens to occupy the Ohio valley. In 1790, the first U.S. military effort collapsed when a coalition of tribes chased General Josiah Harmor and 1,500 troops from the Maumee River. A second campaign failed in November 1791, when one thousand Shawnee warriors surrounded an encampment of fourteen hundred soldiers led by General Arthur St. Clair. More than six hundred soldiers were killed and several hundred wounded before the survivors could flee for safety.

With Native Americans having twice humiliated U.S. forces in the Northwest Territory, Washington's western policy was in shambles. Matters worsened in 1792 when Spain persuaded the Creeks to renounce the Treaty of New York and resume hostilities. The damage done to U.S. prestige by these

setbacks convinced many Americans that the combined strength of Britain, Spain, and the Native Americans could be counterbalanced only by an alliance with France.

France and Factional Politics, 1793

One of the most momentous events in world history, the French Revolution began in 1789. The French were inspired by America's revolution, and Americans were initially sympathetic as France abolished nobles' privileges, wrote a constitution, bravely repelled foreign invaders, and proclaimed itself a republic. But the Revolution took a radical turn in 1793 when France declared an international revolutionary war of all peoples against all kings and began a "Reign of Terror," executing not only the king but dissenting revolutionaries.

Americans grew bitterly divided in their attitudes toward the French Revolution and over how the United States should respond to it. While republicans such as Jefferson supported it as an assault on monarchy and tyranny, Federalists like Hamilton denounced France as a “mobocracy” and supported Britain in resisting French efforts to export revolution.

White southern slave owners were among France’s fiercest supporters. In 1793, a slave uprising in the Caribbean colony of Saint Domingue became a revolution against French rule. Thousands of terrified French planters fled to the United States, recounting how British invaders had supported the uprising. Inspired by the American and French revolutions, enslaved blacks had fought with determination and inflicted heavy casualties on French colonists. Recalling British courting of their own slaves during the American Revolution, southern whites concluded that the British had intentionally sparked the bloodbath and would do the same in the South.

Many northerners, on the other hand, were more repelled by the bloodshed in revolutionary France. The revolution was “an open hell,” thundered Massachusetts’s Fisher Ames, “still ringing with agonies and blasphemies, still smoking with sufferings and crimes.” New England Protestants detested the French for worshiping Reason instead of God. Less religious Federalists condemned French leaders as evil radicals who incited the poor against the rich.

Northern and southern reactions to the French Revolution also diverged for economic reasons. Merchants, shippers, and ordinary sailors in New England, Philadelphia, and New York (which conducted most of the country’s foreign trade) feared that an alliance with France would provoke British retaliation against American commerce. They argued that the United States could win valuable concessions by demonstrating friendly intentions toward Britain and noted that some influential members of Parliament leaned toward liberalizing trade with the United States.

Southern elites, on the other hand, viewed Americans’ reliance on British commerce as a menace to national self-determination and wished to divert most U.S. trade to France. Jefferson and Madison advocated reducing British imports through the imposition of steep duties. Federalist opponents countered that Britain, which sold more manufactured goods to the United States than to any other country, would not stand idly by under such circumstances. If Congress adopted a discriminatory tariff, Hamilton predicted in 1792, “there would be, in less than six months, an open war between the United States and Great Britain.”

Enthusiasm for a pro-French foreign policy intensified in the southern and western states after France went to war against Spain and Great Britain in 1793. Increasingly, western settlers and speculators hoped for a French victory that, they reasoned, would induce Britain and Spain to cease blocking U.S. expansion. The United States could then insist on free navigation of the Mississippi, force the evacuation of British garrisons, and end both nations’ support of Native American resistance.

After declaring war on Britain and Spain, France actively tried to embroil the United States in the conflict. The French dispatched Edmond Genet as minister to the United States with orders to mobilize republican sentiment in support of France, enlist American mercenaries to conquer Spanish territories and attack British shipping, and strengthen the French-American alliance. Responding to France’s aggressive diplomacy, President Washington issued a proclamation of American neutrality on April 22, 1793.

Defying Washington’s proclamation, **Citizen Genet** (as he was known in French Revolutionary style) recruited volunteers for his American Foreign Legion. Making generals of George Rogers Clark of Kentucky and Elisha Clarke of Georgia, Genet directed them to seize Spanish garrisons at New Orleans and St. Augustine. Genet also contracted with American privateers. By the summer of 1793, almost a thousand Americans were at sea in a dozen ships flying the French flag. These privateers seized more than eighty British vessels and towed them to U.S. ports, where French consuls sold the ships and cargoes at auction.

The French Revolution was “an open hell,” thundered Massachusetts’s Fisher Ames, “still ringing with agonies and blasphemies, still smoking with sufferings and crimes.”



CITIZEN EDMOND GENET After the French diplomat actively recruited American citizens to the French cause, the French government recalled him at the request of the United States. (*Granger Collection*)

Refusing Secretary of State Jefferson's patient requests that he desist, Genet threatened to urge Americans to defy their own government.

Diplomacy and War, 1793–1796

Although the Washington administration swiftly closed U.S. harbors to Genet's buccaneers and demanded that France recall him, Genet's exploits provoked an Anglo-American crisis. George III's ministers decided that only a massive show of force would deter American support for France. Accordingly, on November 6, 1793, Britain's Privy Council ordered the Royal Navy to confiscate foreign ships trading with the French in the West Indies. The council purposely delayed publishing these instructions until after most American ships sailing to the Caribbean had left port, so that their captains would not know that they were entering a war zone. The British then seized more than 250 American vessels.

The Royal Navy added a second galling indignity—the impressment (forced enlistment) of crewmen from U.S. ships. Thousands of British sailors had previously fled to the U.S. merchant marine, where they hoped to find an easier life than under the tough, poorly paying British system. In late 1793, British naval officers began routinely inspecting American crews for British subjects, whom they then impressed as the king's sailors. Overzealous commanders sometimes broke royal orders by taking U.S. citizens, and in any case the British did not recognize former subjects' right to adopt American citizenship. Impressment scratched a raw nerve in most Americans, who argued that their government's willingness to defend its citizens from such abuse was a critical test of national character.

Meanwhile, Britain, Spain, and many Native Americans continued to challenge the United States for control of territory west of the Appalachians. During a large intertribal council in February 1794, the Shawnees and other Ohio Indians welcomed an inflammatory speech by Canada's royal governor denying U.S. claims north of the Ohio River and urging destruction of every American settlement in the Northwest. Soon British troops were building an eighth garrison on U.S. soil, Fort Miami, near present-day Toledo. Spanish troops also encroached on territory claimed by the United States by building Fort San Fernando in 1794 at what is now Memphis, Tennessee.

Hoping to halt the drift toward war, Washington launched three desperate initiatives in 1794. He authorized General Anthony Wayne to negotiate a treaty with the Shawnees and their Ohio valley

allies, sent Chief Justice John Jay to Great Britain, and dispatched Thomas Pinckney to Spain.

Having twice defeated federal armies, the Shawnees and their allies scoffed at Washington's peace offer. "Mad Anthony" Wayne then led thirty-five hundred U.S. troops deep into Shawnee homelands, building forts and ruthlessly burning every village within his reach. On August 20, 1794, his troops routed four hundred Shawnees at the Battle of Fallen Timbers just two miles from Fort Miami. As Indians fled toward the fort, the British closed its gates, denying entry to their allies. Wayne's army then built an imposing stronghold to challenge British authority in the Northwest, appropriately named Fort Defiance. Indian morale plummeted, because of the American victory and their own losses but also because of Britain's betrayal.

In August 1795, Wayne compelled the Shawnees and eleven other tribes to sign the **Treaty of Greenville**, which opened most of modern-day Ohio and a portion of Indiana to American settlement. But aside from the older leaders who were pressured to sign the treaty, most Shawnees knew that U.S. designs on Indian land in the Northwest had not been satisfied and would soon resurface (as discussed in Chapter 8).

Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers helped John Jay, in **Jay's Treaty**, win a British promise to withdraw troops from American soil by June 1796. Jay also managed to gain access to British West Indian markets for small American ships, but only by bargaining away U.S. rights to load cargoes of sugar, molasses, and coffee from French colonies during wartime.

Aside from fellow Federalists, few Americans interpreted Jay's Treaty as preserving peace with honor. The treaty left Britain free to violate American neutrality and to restrict U.S. trade with France. Opponents condemned the treaty's failure to end impressment and predicted that Great Britain would thereafter force even more Americans into the Royal Navy. Slave owners were resentful that Jay had not obtained compensation for slaves taken away by the British army during the Revolution. After the Senate barely ratified the treaty in 1795, Jay nervously joked that he could find his way across the country at night by the fires of rallies burning him in effigy.

Despite its unpopularity, Jay's Treaty prevented war with Britain and finally ended British occupation of U.S. territory. The treaty also helped stimulate an enormous expansion of American trade. Upon its ratification, Britain permitted Americans to trade with its West Indian colonies and with India. Within a few years, American exports to the British Empire shot up 300 percent.

On the heels of Jay's controversial treaty came an unqualified diplomatic triumph engineered by Thomas Pinckney. Ratified in 1796, the **Treaty of San Lorenzo** with Spain (also called Pinckney's Treaty) won westerners the right of unrestricted, duty-free access to world markets via the Mississippi River. Spain also agreed to recognize the thirty-first parallel as the United States' southern boundary, to dismantle its fortifications on American soil, and to discourage Native American attacks against western settlers.

By 1796, the Washington administration could claim to have successfully extended American authority throughout the trans-Appalachian West, opened the Mississippi for western exports, enabled northeastern shippers to regain British markets, and kept the nation out of a dangerous European war. As the popular outcry over Jay's Treaty demonstrated, however, the nation's foreign policy left Americans much more deeply divided in 1796 than they had been in 1789.

Parties and Politics, 1793–1800

By the time Washington was reelected, the controversies over domestic and foreign policy had led to the formation of two distinct political factions. During the president's second term, these factions became formal political parties, Federalists and Republicans, which advanced their members' interests, ambitions, and ideals. Thereafter, the two parties waged a bitter battle, culminating in the election of 1800.

Ideological Confrontation, 1793–1794

Conflicting attitudes about events in France, federal power, and democracy accelerated the polarization of American politics. Linking the French Revolution and the Whiskey Rebellion, Federalists trembled at the thought of guillotines and "mob rule." They were also horrified by the sight of artisans in Philadelphia and New York bandying the French revolutionary slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" and rallying around pro-French politicians such as Jefferson. Citizen Genet had openly encouraged opposition to the Washington administration, and had found hundreds of Americans willing to fight for France. Federalists worried that all of this was just the tip of a revolutionary iceberg.

By the mid-1790s, Federalists' worst fears of democracy seemed to have been confirmed. The people, they believed, were undependable and

vulnerable to rabble rousers such as Genet. For Federalists, democracy meant "government by the passions of the multitude." They argued that, as in colonial times, ordinary voters should not be presented with choices over policy, but should vote simply on the basis of the personal merits of elite candidates. Elected officials, they maintained, should rule in the people's name but be independent of direct popular influence.

Republicans offered a very different perspective on government and politics. They stressed the corruption inherent in a powerful government dominated by a highly visible few, and insisted that liberty would be safe only if power were widely diffused among white male property owners.

It might at first glance seem contradictory for southern slave owners to support a radical ideology like republicanism, with its emphasis on liberty and equality. A few southern republicans advocated abolishing slavery gradually, but most did not trouble themselves over their ownership of human beings. Although expressed in universal terms, the liberty and equality they advocated were intended for white men only.

Political ambition drove men like Jefferson and Madison to rouse ordinary voters' concerns about civic affairs. The widespread awe in which Washington was held inhibited open criticism of him and his policies. If, however, his fellow Federalists could be held accountable to the public, they would think twice before enacting measures opposed by the majority; or if they persisted in advocating misguided policies, they would ultimately be removed from office. Such reasoning led Jefferson, a wealthy landowner and large slave holder, to say, "I am not among those who fear the people; they and not the rich, are our dependence for continued freedom."

Jefferson's frustration at being overruled at every turn by Hamilton and Washington finally prompted his resignation from the cabinet in 1793, and thereafter not even the president could halt the widening political split. Each side portrayed itself as the guardian of republican virtue and attacked the other as an illegitimate "cabal" or "faction."

In 1793–1794, opponents of Federalist policies began organizing Democratic societies. The societies formed primarily in seaboard cities but also in the rural South and West. Their members included planters, small farmers and merchants, artisans, distillers, and sailors; conspicuously absent were big businessmen, the clergy, the poor, nonwhites, and women.

For Federalists,
democracy meant
"government by
the passions of the
multitude."

The Republican Party, 1794–1796

In 1794, party development reached a decisive stage after Washington openly identified himself with Federalist policies. Republicans attacked the Federalists' pro-British leanings in many local elections and won a slight majority in the House of Representatives. The election signaled the Republicans' transformation from a coalition of officeholders and local societies to a broad-based party capable of coordinating local political campaigns throughout the nation.

Federalists and Republicans alike used the press to mold public opinion. In the 1790s, American journalism came of age as the number of newspapers rose from 92 to 242, mostly in New England and the mid-Atlantic states. By 1800, newspapers had about 140,000 paid subscribers (roughly one-fifth of eligible voters), and their secondhand readership probably exceeded 300,000.

Newspapers of both camps did not hesitate to engage in fear-mongering and character assassination. Federalists accused Republicans of plotting a reign of terror and of conspiring to turn the nation over to France. Republicans charged Federalists with favoring a hereditary aristocracy and even a royal dynasty that would form when John Adams's daughter married George III. Despite

the extreme rhetoric, newspaper warfare stimulated many citizens to become politically active.

Washington grew impatient with the nation's growing polarization into openly hostile parties, and he deeply resented Republican charges that he secretly supported alleged Federalist plots to establish a monarchy. "By God," Jefferson reported him swearing, "he [Washington] would rather be in his grave than in his present situation . . . he had rather be on his farm than to be made emperor of the world." Lonely and surrounded by mediocre advisers after Hamilton returned to private life, Washington decided in the spring of 1796 to retire after two terms. Washington recalled Hamilton to write his Farewell Address.

The heart of Washington's message was a vigorous condemnation of political parties. Partisan alignments, he insisted, endangered the republic's survival, especially if they became entangled in disputes over foreign policy. Washington warned that the country's safety depended on citizens' avoiding "excessive partiality for one nation and excessive dislike of another."

Washington warned that the country's safety depended on citizens' avoiding "excessive partiality for one nation and excessive dislike of another."

Otherwise, "real patriots" would be overwhelmed by demagogues championing foreign causes and paid by foreign governments. Aside from scrupulously fulfilling its existing treaty obligations and maintaining its foreign commerce, the United States must avoid "political connection" with Europe and its wars. If the United States gathered its strength under "an efficient government," it could defy any foreign challenge; but if it became sucked into Europe's quarrels, violence, and corruption, the republican experiment was doomed. Washington and Hamilton had skillfully turned republicanism's fear of corruption against their Republican critics. They had also evoked a vision of an America virtuously isolated from foreign intrigue and power politics, which would remain a potent inspiration for long afterward.

Washington left the presidency in 1797 and died in 1799. Like many later presidents, he went out amid a barrage of partisan criticism.

The Election of 1796

With the **election of 1796** approaching, the Republicans cultivated a large, loyal body of voters. Their efforts to marshal popular support marked the first time since the Constitution was ratified that political elites had effectively mobilized nonelites to participate in politics. The Republicans' constituency included the Democratic societies, workingmen's clubs, and immigrant-aid associations.

Immigrants became prime targets for Republican recruiters. During the 1790s, the United States absorbed about twenty thousand French refugees from Saint Domingue and more than sixty thousand Irish, many of whom had been exiled for opposing British rule. Although potential immigrant voters made up less than 2 percent of the electorate, the Irish could make a difference in closely-divided Pennsylvania and New York.

In 1796, the presidential candidates were the Federalist vice president John Adams and the Republicans' Jefferson. Republicans expected to win as many southern electoral votes and congressional seats as the Federalists counted on in New England, New Jersey, and South Carolina. The crucial "swing" states were Pennsylvania and New York, where the Republicans fought hard to win the large immigrant vote with their pro-French and anti-British rhetoric. In the end, the Republicans took Pennsylvania but not New York, so that Jefferson lost the presidency by just three electoral votes. As the second-highest vote-getter in the electoral college, he became vice president. The Federalists narrowly regained control of the House and maintained their firm grip on the Senate.

Adams's intellect and devotion to principle have rarely been equaled among American presidents.

But the new president was more comfortable with ideas than with people, especially nonelites. He inspired trust and often admiration but could not command personal loyalty or inspire the public. Adams's stubborn personality and disdain for ordinary people left him ill-suited to govern, and he ultimately proved unable to unify the country.

The French Crisis, 1798–1799

Even before the election, the French had recognized that Jay's Treaty was a Federalist-sponsored attempt to assist Britain in its war against France. On learning of Jefferson's defeat, France began seizing American ships carrying goods to British ports and within a year had plundered more than three hundred vessels. The French also directed that every American captured on a British naval ship (even those involuntarily impressed) should be hanged.

Hoping to avoid war, Adams sent a peace commission to Paris. But the French foreign minister, Charles de Talleyrand, refused to meet the delegation, instead promising through three unnamed agents ("X, Y, and Z") that talks could begin after he received \$250,000 and France obtained a loan of \$12 million. Americans were outraged at this bare-faced demand for a bribe, which became known as the XYZ Affair. "Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute" became a popular slogan as the 1798 congressional elections began.

The XYZ Affair discredited the Republicans' foreign policy views, but the party's leaders compounded the damage by refusing to condemn French aggression and opposing Adams's call for military preparations. The Republicans tried to excuse French behavior, whereas the Federalists rode a wave of militant patriotism. In the 1798 elections, Jefferson's supporters were routed almost everywhere, even in the South.

Congress responded to the XYZ Affair by arming fifty-four ships to protect American commerce. During an undeclared Franco-American naval conflict in the Caribbean known as the Quasi-War (1798–1800), U.S. forces seized ninety-three French privateers while losing just one vessel. The British navy meanwhile extended the protection of its convoys to America's merchant marine. By early 1799, the French remained a nuisance but were no longer a serious threat at sea.

Meanwhile, the Federalist-dominated Congress quadrupled the size of the regular army to twelve thousand men in 1798, with ten thousand more troops in reserve. Yet the risk of a land war with France was minimal. In reality, the Federalists wanted a military force ready in the event of a civil war, for the crisis had produced near-hysteria



SEAL OF THE GENERAL SOCIETY OF MECHANICS AND TRADESMEN OF NEW YORK. Founded in 1785, the Society included artisans in a wide variety of crafts. During the 1790s, it was a major force in the emerging Republican Party. (Private Collection/Picture Research Consultants & Archives)

among them about conspiracies being hatched by French and Irish revolutionaries flooding into the United States.

The Alien and Sedition Acts, 1798

The most heated controversies of the late 1790s arose from the Federalists' insistence that the threat of war with France required strict laws to protect national security. In 1798, the Federalist-dominated Congress accordingly passed four measures known collectively as the **Alien and Sedition Acts**. Adams neither requested nor particularly wanted these laws, but he deferred to Federalist congressional leaders and signed them.

The least controversial of the laws, the Alien Enemies Act, outlined procedures for determining whether citizens of a hostile country posed a threat to the United States as spies or saboteurs. If so, they were to be deported or jailed. The law established fundamental principles for protecting national security and respecting the rights of enemy citizens. It was to operate only if Congress declared war and thus was not used until the War of 1812 (discussed in Chapter 8).

Second, the Alien Friends Act, a temporary statute, authorized the president to expel any foreign

"Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute."



“PREPARATION FOR WAR TO DEFEND COMMERCE” (1800) BY WILLIAM BIRCH Birch’s engraving depicts the building of the frigate, *Philadelphia*, during the Quasi-War. (Library of Congress)

residents whose activities he considered dangerous. The law did not require proof of guilt, on the assumption that spies would hide or destroy evidence of their crime. Republicans maintained that the law’s real purpose was to deport immigrants critical of Federalist policies.

Republicans also denounced the third law, the Naturalization Act. This measure increased the residency requirement for U.S. citizenship from five to fourteen years (the last five continuously in one state), with the purpose of reducing Irish voting.

Finally came the Sedition Act, the only one of these measures enforceable against U.S. citizens. Although its alleged purpose was to punish attempts to encourage the violation of federal laws

or to overthrow the government, the act defined criminal activity so broadly that it blurred any distinction between sedition and legitimate political discussion. For example, it prohibited an individual or group from opposing “any measure or measures of the United States”—wording that could be interpreted to ban any criticism of the party in power. Another clause made it illegal to speak, write, or print any statement about the president that would bring him “into contempt or disrepute.” Under such restrictions, a newspaper editor could face imprisonment for criticizing an action by Adams. The *Federalist Gazette of the United States* expressed the twisted logic of the Sedition Act perfectly: “It is patriotism to write in favor of our government—it is sedition to write against it.” However one regarded it, the Sedition Act interfered with free speech. Ingeniously, the Federalists wrote the law to expire in 1801, so that it could not be turned against them

“It is patriotism to write in favor of our government—it is sedition to write against it.”

if they lost the next election, while leaving them free to heap abuse on Vice President Jefferson (who did not participate in the making of government policy).

A principal target of Federalist repression was the opposition press. Four of the five largest Republican newspapers were charged with sedition just as the election campaign of 1800 was getting under way. The attorney general used the Alien Friends Act to threaten Irish journalist John Daly Burk with expulsion (Burk went underground instead), and Scottish editor, Thomas Callender, went to prison for criticizing the president.

Federalist leaders never intended to fill the jails with Republican martyrs. Rather, they hoped to use a few highly visible prosecutions to silence Republican journalists and candidates during the election of 1800. The attorney general charged seventeen persons with sedition and won ten convictions. Among the victims was Republican congressman Matthew Lyon of Vermont (“Ragged Matt, the democrat,” to the Federalists), who spent four months in prison for publishing a blast against Adams.

In 1788, opponents of the Constitution had warned that giving the national government

extensive powers would eventually endanger freedom. Ten years later, their prediction seemed to have come true. Shocked Republicans realized that because the Federalists controlled all three branches of the government, neither the Bill of Rights nor the system of checks and balances reliably protected individual liberties. In this context, they advanced the doctrine of states’ rights as a means of preventing the national government from violating basic freedoms.

Recognizing that opponents of federal power would never prevail in the Supreme Court, which was still dominated by Federalists, Madison and Jefferson anonymously wrote manifestos on states’ rights known as the **Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions**, adopted respectively by the legislatures of those states in 1798. Repudiating his position at the constitutional convention (see Chapter 6), Madison in the Virginia Resolutions declared that state legislatures had never surrendered their right to judge the constitutionality of federal actions and that they retained an authority called *interposition*, which enabled them to protect the liberties of their citizens. Jefferson’s resolution for Kentucky went further by declaring that ultimate sovereignty rested



VIOLENCE IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 1798 Partisan bitterness turned violent when Republican Matthew Lyon (with tongs) and Federalist Roger Griswold fought on the House floor. (*Library of Congress*)

with the states, which empowered them to “nullify” federal laws to which they objected. Although Kentucky’s legislature deleted the term “nullify” before approving the resolution in 1799, the intention of both resolutions was to invalidate any federal law in a state that had deemed the law unconstitutional. Although the resolutions were intended as nonviolent protests, they challenged the jurisdiction of federal courts and could have enabled state militias to march into a federal courtroom to halt proceedings at bayonet point.

No other state endorsed these resolutions (ten expressed disapproval), but their passage demonstrated the great potential for disunion in the late 1790s. So did several near-violent confrontations between Federalist and Republican crowds in Philadelphia and New York City. A minor insurrection, the Fries Rebellion, broke out in 1799 when crowds of Pennsylvania German farmers released prisoners jailed for refusing to pay taxes needed to fund the national army’s expansion. But the uprising collapsed when federal troops intervened.

The nation’s leaders increasingly acted as if a crisis were imminent. Vice President Jefferson hinted that events might push the southern states into

secession from the Union, while President Adams hid guns in his home. After passing through Richmond and learning that state officials were purchasing thousands of muskets for the militia, an alarmed Supreme Court justice wrote in January 1799 that “the General Assembly

of Virginia are pursuing steps which will lead directly to civil war.” A tense atmosphere hung over the Republic as the election of 1800 neared.

“The General Assembly of Virginia are pursuing steps which will lead directly to civil war.”

The Election of 1800

In the election campaign, the two parties again rallied around the Federalist Adams and the Republican Jefferson. The leadership of moderates in both parties helped to ensure that the nation survived the **election of 1800** without a civil war. Jefferson and Madison discouraged radical activity that might provoke intervention by the national army, while Adams rejected demands by extreme “High Federalists” that he ensure victory by deliberately sparking an insurrection or asking Congress to declare war on France.

“Nothing but an open war can save us,” argued one High Federalist cabinet officer. But when Adams suddenly learned in 1799 that France wanted peace, he proposed a special diplomatic mission.

“Surprise, indignation, grief & disgust followed each other in quick succession,” said a Federalist senator on hearing the news. Adams obtained Senate approval for his envoys only by threatening to resign and so make Jefferson president. Outraged High Federalists tried to dump Adams, but their ill-considered maneuver rallied most New Englanders around the stubborn, upright president.

Adams’s envoys did not achieve a settlement with France until 1800, but his pursuit of peace with France prevented the Federalists from exploiting charges of Republican sympathy for the enemy. Without the immediate threat of war, moreover, voters grew resentful that in only two years, taxes had soared 33 percent to support an army that had done nothing except chase Pennsylvania farmers. As the danger of war receded, voters gave the Federalists less credit for standing up to France and more blame for adding \$10 million to the national debt.

While High Federalists spitefully withheld the backing that Adams needed to win, Republicans redoubled their efforts to elect Jefferson. As a result of Republicans’ mobilization of voters, popular interest in politics rose sharply. Voter turnout in 1800 leaped to more than double that of 1788, rising from about 15 percent to almost 40 percent; in hotly contested Pennsylvania and New York, more than half the eligible voters participated.

Adams lost the presidency by just eight electoral votes out of 138. But Adams’s loss did not ensure Jefferson’s election. Because all 73 Republican electors voted for both Jefferson and his running mate, New York’s Aaron Burr, the electoral college deadlocked in a tie between them. Even more seriously than in 1796, the Constitution’s failure to anticipate organized, rival parties affected the outcome of the electoral college’s vote. The choice of president devolved upon the House of Representatives, where thirty-five ballots over six days produced no result. Aware that Republican voters and electors wanted Jefferson to be president, the wily Burr cast about for Federalist support. But after Hamilton—Burr’s bitter rival in New York politics—declared his preference for Jefferson as “by far not so dangerous a man,” a Federalist representative abandoned Burr and gave Jefferson the presidency by history’s narrowest margin.

Economic and Social Change

During the nation’s first twelve years under the Constitution, the spread of economic production for markets, even by family farms, transformed the

lives of many Americans. These transformations marked the United States' first small steps toward industrial capitalism.

Meanwhile, some Americans rethought questions of gender and race in American society during the 1790s. Even so, legal and political barriers to gender and racial equality actually became more entrenched.

Producing for Markets

For centuries most economic production in European societies and their colonial offshoots took place in household settings. At the core of each household was a patriarchal nuclear family—the male head, his wife, and their unmarried children. Many households included additional people—relatives; boarders; apprentices and journeymen in artisan shops; servants and slaves in well-off urban households; and slaves, “hired hands,” and tenant farmers in rural settings. (Even slaves living in separate “quarters” on large plantations labored in enterprises centered on planters’ households.) Unlike in our modern world, before the nineteenth century most people except mariners worked at what was temporarily or permanently “home.” The notion of “going to work” would have struck them as odd.

Although households varied greatly in the late eighteenth century, most were on small farms and consisted of only an owner and his family. By 1800, such farm families typically included seven children whose labor contributed to production. While husbands and older sons worked in fields away from the house, wives, daughters, and young sons maintained the barns and gardens near the house. Wives, of course, bore and reared the children as well. As in the colonial period, most farm families produced food and other products largely for their own consumption, adding small surpluses for bartering with neighbors or local merchants.

After the American Revolution, households in the most densely populated regions of the Northeast began to change. Relatively prosperous farm families, particularly in the mid-Atlantic states, increasingly directed their surplus production to meet the growing demands of urban customers for produce, meat, and dairy products. These families often turned to agricultural experts, whose advice their parents and grandparents had usually spurned. Accordingly, men introduced clover into their pastures, expanded acreage devoted to hay, and built barns to shelter their cows in cold weather and to store the hay. A federal census in 1798 revealed that about half the farms in eastern Pennsylvania had barns, usually of logs or framed but occasionally of stone. Consequently, dairy production rose as mid-Atlantic farmwomen, or “dairymaids,” by

1800 milked an average of six animals twice a day, with each “milch cow” producing about two gallons per day during the summer. Farmwomen turned much of the milk into butter for sale to urban consumers.

Poorer farm families, especially in New England, found less lucrative ways to produce for commercial markets. Small plots of land on New England’s thin, rocky soil no longer supported large families, leading young people to look elsewhere for a living. While many young men and young couples moved west, unmarried daughters more frequently remained at home, where they helped satisfy a growing demand for ready-made clothing. After the Revolution, enterprising merchants began catering to urban consumers as well as southern slave owners seeking to clothe their slaves as cheaply as possible. Making regular circuits through rural areas, the merchants supplied cloth for sewing to mothers and daughters in farm households. A few weeks later, they would return and pay the women in cash for their handiwork.

A comparable transition began in some artisans’ households. The shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts, had expanded their production during the Revolution when filling orders from the Continental Army. After the war, some more successful artisans began supplying leather to rural families beyond Lynn, paying them for the finished product. In this way, they filled an annual demand that rose from 189,000 pairs in 1789 to 400,000 in 1800.

Numerous other enterprises likewise emerged, employing men as well as women to satisfy demands that self-contained households could never have met on their own. For example, a traveler passing through Middleborough, Massachusetts, observed,

In the winter season, the inhabitants... are principally employed in making nails, of which they send large quantities to market. This business is a profitable addition to their husbandry; and fills up a part of the year, in which, otherwise, many of them would find little employment.

Behind the new industries was an ambitious, aggressive class of businessmen, most of whom had begun as merchants and now invested their profits in factories, ships, government bonds, and banks. Such entrepreneurs stimulated a flurry of innovative business ventures that pointed toward the future. The country’s first private banks were founded in the 1780s in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Philadelphia merchants created the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts in 1787. This organization promoted the immigration of English artisans familiar with the latest industrial technology, including Samuel Slater, a pioneer of American industrialization

who helped establish a cotton-spinning mill at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1790 (see Chapter 9). In 1791, investors from New York and Philadelphia, with Hamilton's enthusiastic endorsement, started the Society for the Encouragement of Useful Manufactures, which attempted to demonstrate the potential of large-scale industrial enterprises by building a factory town at Paterson, New Jersey. That same year, New York merchants and insurance underwriters organized America's first formal association for trading government bonds, out of which the New York Stock Exchange evolved.

For many Americans, the choice between manufacturing and farming was moral as well as economic. Hamilton's aggressive support of entrepreneurship and industrialization was consistent with his larger vision for America and contradicted that of Jefferson. As outlined in his Report on the Subject of Manufactures (1791), Hamilton admired efficiently run factories in which a few managers supervised large numbers of workers.

Manufacturing would provide employment opportunities, promote emigration, and expand the applications of technology. It would also offer "greater scope for the talents and dispositions [of] men," afford "a more ample

and various field for enterprise," and create "a more certain and steady demand for the surplus produce of the soil." Jefferson, on the other hand, idealized white, landowning family farmers as bulwarks of republican liberty and virtue. "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people," he wrote in 1784, whereas the dependency of European factory workers "begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." For Hamilton, capital, technology, and managerial discipline were the surest roads to national order and wealth. Jefferson, putting more trust in white male citizens, envisioned land as the key to prosperity and liberty for all. The argument over the relative merits of these two ideals would remain a constant in American politics and culture until the twentieth century.

White Women in the Republic

Alongside the growing importance of women's economic roles, whites' discussions of republicanism raised questions of women's rights and equality. Yet women did not gain political rights, except in New Jersey. That state's 1776 constitution, by not specifying gender and race, left a loophole that enabled white female and black property owners to vote,

which many began to do. More women voted during the 1790s, when New Jersey adopted laws that stipulated "he or she" when referring to voters. In a hotly contested legislative race in 1797, seventy-five women voters nearly gave the victory to a Federalist candidate. His victorious Republican opponent, John Conduct, would get his revenge in 1807 by successfully advocating a bill to disenfranchise women (along with free blacks).

Social change and republican ideology together fostered several formidable challenges to traditional attitudes toward women's rights. American republicans increasingly recognized the right of a woman to choose her husband—a striking departure from the continued practice among some elites whereby fathers approved or even arranged marriages. Thus in 1790, on the occasion of his daughter Martha's marriage, Jefferson wrote to a friend that, following "the usage of my country, I scrupulously suppressed my wishes, [so] that my daughter might indulge her sentiments freely."

Outside elite circles, such independence was even more apparent. Especially in the Northeast, daughters increasingly got pregnant by preferred partners, thus forcing their fathers to consent to their marrying to avoid a public scandal. In Hallowell, Maine, in May 1792, for example, Mary Brown's father objected to her marrying John Chamberlain. In December, he finally consented and the couple wed—just two days before Mary gave birth. By becoming pregnant, northeastern women secured economic support in a region where an exodus of young, unmarried men was leaving a growing number of women single.

White women also had fewer children overall than had their mothers and grandmothers. In Sturbridge, Massachusetts, women in the mid-eighteenth century averaged nearly nine children per marriage, compared with six in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Whereas 40 percent of Quaker women had nine or more children before 1770, only 14 percent bore that many thereafter. Such statistics testify to declining farm sizes and urbanization, both of which were incentives for having fewer children. But they also indicate that some women were finding relief from the near-constant state of pregnancy and nursing that had consumed their grandmothers.

As white women's roles expanded, so too did republican notions of male-female relations. "I object to the word 'obey' in the marriage-service," wrote a female author calling herself Matrimonial Republican, "...The obedience between man and wife is, or ought to be mutual." Lack of mutuality was one reason for a rising number of divorce petitions from women, from fewer than fourteen per

"Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people."

year in Connecticut before the Revolution, to forty-five in 1795.

A few women also challenged the sexual double standard that allowed men to indulge in extramarital affairs while their female partners, single or married, were condemned. Writing in 1784, an author calling herself “Daphne” pointed out how a woman whose illicit affair was exposed was “forever deprive[d] ... of all that renders life valuable,” while “the base [male] betrayer is suffered to triumph in the success of his unmanly arts, and to pass unpunished even by a frown.” Daphne called on her “sister Americans” to “stand by and support the dignity of our own sex” by publicly condemning seducers rather than their victims.

Gradually, the subordination of women, which most whites had always taken for granted, became the subject of debate. In “On the Equality of the Sexes” (1790), essayist and poet Judith Sargent Murray contended that the genders had equal intellectual ability and deserved equal education. Murray hoped that “sensible and informed” women would improve their minds rather than rush into marriage (as she had at eighteen).

Like many of her contemporaries, Murray supported the idea of **“republican motherhood.”** Advocates of republican motherhood emphasized the importance of educating white women in the values of liberty and independence to strengthen virtue in the new nation. It was the republican duty of mothers to inculcate these values in their sons—the nation’s future leaders—as well as their daughters. John Adams reminded his daughter that she was part of “a young generation, coming up in America... [and] will be responsible for a great share of the duty and opportunity of educating a rising family, from whom much will be expected.” Before the 1780s, only a few women had acquired an advanced education through private tutors. Thereafter, urban elites broadened such opportunities by founding numerous private schools, or academies, for girls. Massachusetts also established an important precedent in 1789 when it forbade any town to exclude girls from its elementary schools.

Although the great struggle for female political equality would not begin until the next century, assertions that women were intellectually and morally men’s peers, and that republican mothers played a vital public role, provoked additional calls for equality beyond those voiced by Abigail Adams and a few other women during the Revolution (see Chapter 6). In 1793, Priscilla Mason, a student at a female academy, blamed “*Man*, despotic man” for shutting women out of the church, the courts, and government. In her graduation speech, she urged that a women’s senate be established by Congress to evoke “all that is human—all that is *divine* in the soul



ADVOCATING WOMEN’S RIGHTS, 1792 In this illustration from an American magazine for women, the “Genius of the Ladies Magazine” and the “Genius of Emulation” present Liberty with a petition based on British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. (Library Company of Philadelphia)

of woman.” Mason pointed out that while women could be virtuous wives and mothers, the world outside their homes still offered them few opportunities to apply their education. And neither she nor anyone else at the time challenged prohibitions against married women’s ownership of property.

John Adams reminded his daughter that she would “be responsible for a great share of the duty and opportunity of educating a rising family.”

Land and Culture: Native Americans

Native Americans occupied the most tenuous position in American society. By 1800, Indians east of



MAP 7.3 AMERICAN EXPANSION AND INDIAN LAND CESSIONS, 1768–1800 As the U.S. population grew, Native Americans were forced to give up extensive homelands throughout the eastern backcountry and farther west in the Ohio and Tennessee River valleys.

the Mississippi had suffered severe losses of population, territory (see Map 7.3), and political and cultural self-determination. Thousands of deaths had resulted from battle, famine, and disease during successive wars since the 1750s and from poverty, losses of land, and discrimination during peacetime. From 1775 to 1800, the Cherokee population declined from sixteen thousand to ten thousand, and Iroquois numbers fell from about nine thousand to four thousand. During the same period, Native Americans lost more land than the area inhabited by whites in 1775. Settlers, liquor dealers, and criminals trespassed on Indian lands, often defrauding, stealing, or inflicting violence on Native Americans and provoking them to retaliate. Indians who sold land or worked for whites were often paid in the unfamiliar medium of cash and then found little to spend it on in their isolated communities except alcohol.

While employing military force against Native Americans who resisted U.S. authority, Washington and Secretary of War Knox recognized that American citizens' actions often contributed to Indians' resentment. Accordingly, they pursued a policy similar to Britain's under the Proclamation of 1763 (see Chapter 5) in which the federal government sought to regulate relations between Indians and non-Indians. Congress enacted the new policy gradually in a series of **Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts** (1790–1796). (Thereafter, Congress periodically renewed and amended the legislation until making it permanent in 1834.) To halt fraudulent land cessions, the acts prohibited transfers of tribal lands to outsiders except as authorized in formal treaties or by Congress. Other provisions regulated the conduct of non-Indians on lands still under tribal control. To regulate intercultural trade and reduce abuses, the acts

required that traders be licensed by the federal government. (But until 1802, the law did not prohibit the sale of liquor on Indian lands.) The law also defined murder and other abuses committed by non-Indians against Indians on tribal lands as federal offenses. Finally, the legislation authorized the federal government to establish programs that would “promote civilization” among Native Americans as a replacement for traditional culture. By “civilization,” Knox and his supporters meant Anglo-American culture, particularly private property and a strictly agricultural way of life, with men replacing women in the fields. By abandoning communal landownership and seasonal migrations for hunting, gathering, and fishing, they argued, Indians would no longer need most of the land they were trying to protect, thereby making it available for whites. But before 1800, the “civilization” program was offered to relatively few Native Americans, and the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts went largely unenforced.

Among the most devastated Native Americans in the 1790s were the Seneca Iroquois of western New York and Pennsylvania. Most surviving Iroquois had moved to Canada after the Revolution, and those like the Seneca who stayed behind were pressured to sell, or were simply defrauded of, most of their land, leaving them isolated from one another on tiny reservations. Unable to hunt, trade, or wage mourning wars, Seneca men frequently resorted to heavy drinking, often becoming violent. All too typical were the tragedies that beset Mary Jemison, born a half-century earlier to white settlers but a Seneca since her wartime capture and adoption at age ten. Jemison saw one of her sons murder his two brothers in alcohol-related episodes before meeting a similar fate himself.

In 1799, a Seneca prophet, **Handsome Lake**, emerged and led his people in a remarkable spiritual revival. Severely ill, alcoholic, and near death, he experienced a series of visions, which Iroquois and many other Native American societies interpreted as prophetic messages. As in the visions of the Iroquois prophet Hiawatha in the fourteenth century (see Chapter 1), spiritual guides appeared to Handsome Lake and instructed him in his own recovery and in that of his people. Invoking Iroquois religious traditions, Handsome Lake preached against alcoholism and sought to revive unity and self-confidence among the Seneca. But whereas many Indian visionary prophets rejected all white ways, Handsome Lake welcomed civilization, as introduced by Quaker missionaries (who did not attempt to convert Native Americans) supported by federal aid. In particular, he urged a radical shift in gender roles, with Seneca men

displacing women not only in farming but also as heads of their families. At the same time, he insisted that men treat their wives respectfully and without violence.

The most traditional Senecas rejected Handsome Lake’s message that Native men should work like white farmers. While many Seneca men welcomed the change, women often resisted because they stood to lose their control of farming and their considerable political influence. Some of Handsome Lake’s supporters accused women who rejected his teachings of witchcraft, and even killed a few of them. The violence soon ceased and Handsome Lake’s followers formed their own church, complete with traditional Iroquois religious ceremonies. The Seneca case would prove to be unique; after 1800, missionaries would expect Native Americans to convert to Christianity as well as adopt “civilization.”



RED JACKET, SENECA IROQUOIS CHIEF (CA. 1750–1830) Red Jacket was an eloquent defender of Seneca traditions against the efforts of both Christian missionaries and Handsome Lake to change Seneca religion and culture. (*Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma*)

African-American Struggles

The Republic's first years marked the high tide of African-Americans' Revolutionary-era success in bettering their lot. Blacks and even many whites recognized that the ideals of liberty and equality were inconsistent with slavery. By 1790, 8 percent of all African-Americans had been freed from slavery.

Ten years later, 11 percent were free (see Figure 7.1). Various state reforms meanwhile attempted to improve the conditions of those who remained enslaved. In 1791, for example, the North Carolina legislature declared that the former "distinction of criminality between the murder of a white person and one who is equally an human creature, but merely of a different complexion, is disgraceful to humanity" and authorized the execution

of whites who murdered slaves. Although more for economic than humanitarian reasons, by 1794 most states had outlawed the Atlantic slave trade.

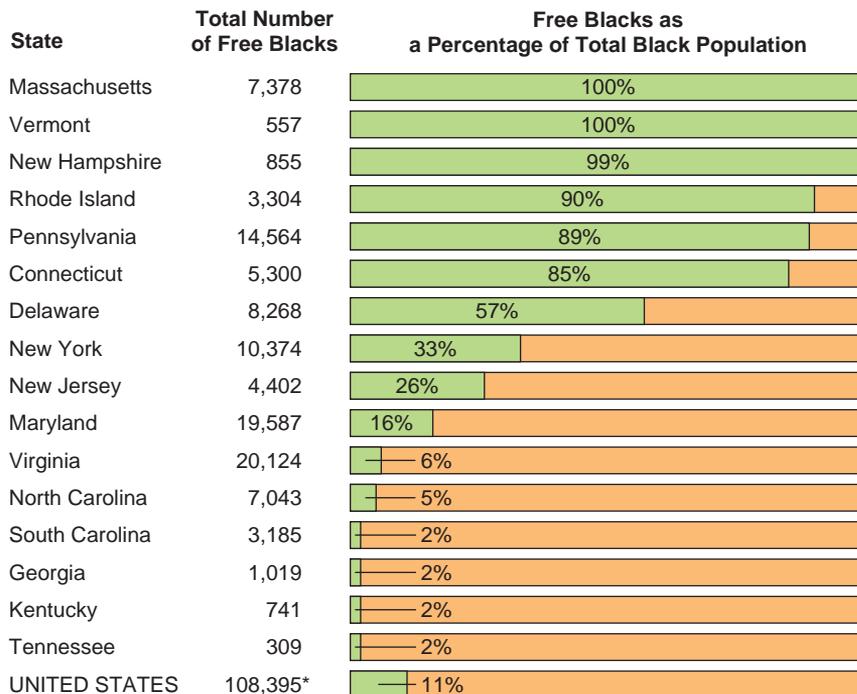
Hesitant measures to ensure free blacks' legal equality also appeared in the 1780s and early 1790s. Most states dropped restrictions on

African-Americans' freedom of movement and protected their property. By 1796, all but three of the sixteen states either permitted free blacks to vote or did not specifically exclude them. But by then a countertrend was reversing many of the Revolutionary-era advances. Before the 1790s ended, abolitionist sentiment ebbed among whites, slavery became more entrenched, and free blacks faced new obstacles to equality.

Federal law led the way in restricting the rights of blacks and other nonwhites. When Congress passed the first Naturalization Act (1790), it limited eligibility for U.S. citizenship to "free white aliens." The federal militia law of 1792 required whites to enroll in local units but allowed states to exclude free blacks, which state governments increasingly did. The navy and the marine corps forbade nonwhite enlistments in 1798. Delaware stripped free, property-owning black males of the vote in 1792, and by 1807 Maryland, Kentucky, and New Jersey had followed suit. Free black men continued to vote and to serve in some militia units after 1800 (including in the slave states of North Carolina and Tennessee), but the number of settings in which they were treated as the equals of whites dropped sharply.

Despite these disadvantages, some free blacks became landowners or skilled artisans, and a few gained recognition among whites. Among the best known was Benjamin Banneker of Maryland, a self-taught mathematician and astronomer. In 1789, Banneker was one of three surveyors who

The former "distinction of criminality between the murder of a white person and one who is equally an human creature, but merely of a different complexion, is disgraceful to humanity."



* Total includes figures from the District of Columbia, Mississippi Territory, and Northwest Territory. These areas are not shown on the chart.

FIGURE 7.1 NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF FREE BLACKS, BY STATE, 1800

Within a generation of the Declaration of Independence, a large free black population emerged that included every ninth African-American. In the North, only in New Jersey and New York did most blacks remain slaves. Almost half of all free blacks lived in the South. Every sixth black in Maryland was free by 1800.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

laid out the new national capital in Washington, D.C., and after 1791 he published a series of widely read almanacs. Sending a copy of one to Thomas Jefferson, Banneker chided the future president for holding views of black inferiority that contradicted his words in the Declaration of Independence (see [Going to the Source](#)). In a brief reply, Jefferson expressed hope that blacks' physical and mental condition would be raised "as far as the imbecility of their present existence ... will admit." (At the time, "imbecility" referred to non-mental as well as mental limitations.) The two men's exchange was published a year later.

In the face of growing constrictions on their freedom and opportunities, free African-Americans in the North turned to one another for support. Self-help among African-Americans flowed especially through religious channels. During the 1780s, two free black Christians, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, formed the Free African Society of Philadelphia, a community organization whose members pooled their scarce resources to assist one another and other blacks in need. After the white-dominated Methodist church they attended restricted black worshipers to the gallery, Allen, Jones, and most other black members withdrew and formed a separate congregation. Comparable developments in other northern communities eventually resulted in the formation of a new denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (discussed in Chapter 9).

In 1793, Philadelphia experienced a yellow fever epidemic in which about four thousand residents died. As most affluent whites fled, Allen and Jones organized a relief effort in which African-Americans, at great personal risk, tended to the sick and buried the dead of both races. But their only reward was a vicious publicity campaign wrongly accusing blacks of profiting at whites' expense. Allen and Jones vigorously defended the black community against these charges while condemning slavery and racism.

Another revealing indication of whites' changing racial attitudes occurred in 1793 with passage of the [Fugitive Slave Law](#). This law required judges to award possession of an escaped slave upon any formal request by a master or his representative. Accused runaways not only were denied a jury trial but also were sometimes refused permission to present evidence of their freedom. Slaves' legal status as property disqualified them from claiming these constitutional privileges, but the Fugitive Slave Law denied free blacks the legal protections that the Bill of Rights guaranteed them as citizens. Congress nevertheless passed this measure without serious opposition. The law marked a striking departure from the atmosphere of the 1780s, when

state governments had moved toward granting free blacks legal equality with whites.

The slave revolution on Saint Domingue (which victorious blacks would rename Haiti in 1802) heightened slave owners' fears of violent retaliation by blacks. In August 1800, such fears were kindled when a slave insurrection broke out near Richmond, Virginia's capital. Amid the election campaign that year, in which Federalists and Republicans accused one another of endangering liberty and hinted at violence, a slave named Gabriel calculated that the split among whites afforded blacks an opportunity to gain their freedom. Having secretly assembled weapons, he and several other African Americans organized a march on Richmond by more than a thousand slaves. The plot of [Gabriel's Rebellion](#) was leaked on the eve of the march. Obtaining confessions from some participants, the authorities rounded up the rest and executed thirty-five of them, including Gabriel. "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British officers and put to trial by them," said one rebel before



ABSALOM JONES, BY RAPHAEL PEALE, 1810 Born a slave, Jones was allowed to study and work for pay; eventually he bought his freedom. He became a businessman, a cofounder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and a stalwart in Philadelphia's free black community. (*Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Absalom Jones School, 1971*)

Benjamin Banneker to Thomas Jefferson

The following excerpt is from a letter that Benjamin Banneker wrote to Thomas Jefferson, dated August 19, 1791. Banneker

issued the most forceful challenge of the time to Jefferson's positions on race and slavery.

Sir, I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and in that color which is natural to them of the deepest dye; and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical thralldom, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my brethren are doomed, but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruition of those blessings, which proceed from that free and unequalled liberty with which you are favored; and which, I hope, you will willingly allow you have mercifully received, from the immediate hand of that Being, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect Gift.

Sir, suffer me to recall to your mind that time, in which the arms and tyranny of the British crown were exerted, with every powerful effort, in order to reduce you to a state of servitude: look back, I entreat you, on the variety of dangers to which you were exposed; reflect on that time, in which every human aid appeared unavailable, and in which even hope and fortitude wore the aspect of inability to the conflict, and you cannot but be led to a serious and grateful sense of your miraculous and providential preservation; you cannot but acknowledge, that the present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy you have mercifully received, and that it is the peculiar blessing of Heaven.

This, Sir, was a time when you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery, and in which you had just apprehensions of the horrors of its condition. It was now that your abhorrence thereof was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and remembered in all succeeding ages: "We hold these truths to

be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Here was a time, in which your tender feelings for yourselves had engaged you thus to declare, you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great violation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings, to which you were entitled by nature; but, Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of Mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of these rights and privileges, which he hath conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.

I suppose that your knowledge of the situation of my brethren, is too extensive to need a recital here; neither shall I presume to prescribe methods by which they may be relieved, otherwise than by recommending to you and all others, to wean yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you have imbibed with respect to them, and as Job [a figure in the Bible] proposed to his friends, "put your soul in their souls' stead;" thus shall your hearts be enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards them; and thus shall you need neither the direction of myself or others, in what manner to proceed herein.

Source: American Multiculturalism Series. Unit One. Documenting the African American Experience, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

QUESTIONS

1. How does Banneker use Jefferson's words in the Declaration of Independence in his argument with Jefferson?
2. How does Banneker characterize Jefferson's ownership of slaves?



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e for additional primary sources on this period.

his execution. “I have ventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and I am a willing sacrifice to their cause.” In the end, Gabriel’s Rebellion only confirmed whites’ anxieties that Haiti’s revolution could be replayed on American soil.

A technological development also strengthened slavery. During the 1790s, demand in the British textile industry stimulated the cultivation of cotton in coastal South Carolina and Georgia. The soil and climate were ideal for growing long-staple cotton, a variety whose fibers could be separated easily from its seed by squeezing it through rollers. In the South’s upland and interior regions, however, the only cotton that would thrive was the short-staple variety, whose seed stuck so tenaciously to the fibers that rollers crushed the seeds and ruined the fibers. It was as if growers had discovered gold only to find that they could not mine it. But in 1793, a New Englander, Eli Whitney, invented a cotton gin that successfully separated the fibers of short-staple cotton from the seed. Quickly copied and improved upon by others, Whitney’s invention removed a major obstacle to the spread of cotton cultivation.

It gave a new lease on life to plantation slavery and undermined the doubts of those who considered slavery economically outmoded.

By 1800, free blacks had suffered noticeable erosion of their post-Revolutionary gains, and southern slaves were farther from freedom than a decade earlier. Two vignettes poignantly communicate the plight of African-Americans. By arrangement with her late husband, Martha Washington freed the family’s slaves a year after George died. But many of the freed blacks remained impoverished and dependent on the Washington estate because Virginia law prohibited the education of blacks and otherwise denied them opportunities to realize their freedom. Meanwhile, across the Potomac at the site surveyed by Benjamin Banneker, enslaved blacks were performing most of the labor on the new national capital that would bear the first president’s name. African-Americans were manifestly losing ground.

“I have ventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and I am a willing sacrifice to their cause.”

CHRONOLOGY

1788–1800

1788	First election under the Constitution.	1793 (Cont.)	Citizen Genet arrives in United States. First Democratic societies established.
1789	First Congress convenes in New York. George Washington inaugurated as first president. Judiciary Act. French Revolution begins.	1794	Whiskey Rebellion. Battle of Fallen Timbers.
1790	Alexander Hamilton submits Reports on Public Credit and National Bank to Congress. Treaty of New York. Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes.” First Indian Trade and Intercourse Act.	1795	Treaty of Greenville. Jay’s Treaty.
1791	Bank of the United States established with twenty-year charter. Bill of Rights ratified. <i>National Gazette</i> established. Slave uprising begins in Saint Domingue. Society for the Encouragement of Useful Manufactures founded.	1796	Treaty of San Lorenzo. Washington’s Farewell Address. John Adams elected president.
1792	Washington reelected president.	1798	XYZ Affair. Alien and Sedition Acts. Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution ratified.
1793	Fugitive Slave Law. France at war with Britain and Spain.	1798–1799	Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions.
		1798–1800	Quasi-War between United States and France.
		1799	Russia establishes colony in Alaska. Fries Rebellion in Pennsylvania. Handsome Lake begins reform movement among Senecas.
		1800	Gabriel’s Rebellion in Virginia. Thomas Jefferson elected president.

CONCLUSION

Although American voters were largely united when Washington took office in 1789, they soon became divided along lines of region, economic interest, and ideology. Hamilton pushed through a series of controversial measures that strengthened federal and executive authority as well as north-eastern commercial interests. Jefferson, Madison, and many others opposed these measures, arguing that they favored a few Americans at the expense of the rest and that they threatened liberty. At the same time, Spain and Britain resisted U.S. expansion west of the Appalachians, and the French Revolution sharply polarized voters between those who favored and those who opposed it. During the mid-1790s, elites formed two rival political parties—the Federalists and the Republicans.

Only with the peaceful transfer of power from Federalists to Republicans in 1800 could the nation's long-term political stability be taken for granted.

The election of 1800 ensured that white male property owners would enjoy basic legal and political rights. Without such rights, other Americans could only hope to enjoy someday the “liberty” and “equality” debated in the political mainstream. While educated white women defined a public if subservient role for themselves as “republican mothers,” free African-Americans, and Native Americans such as Handsome Lake, focused on strengthening their own communities apart from whites. Other Native Americans along with enslaved blacks struggled just to survive and, in a few cases, resorted to violence in hopes of gaining some measure of freedom.

KEY TERMS

Judiciary Act (p. 189)

Bill of Rights (p. 189)

Alexander Hamilton (p. 190)

Reports on the Public Credit (p. 190)

Report on a National Bank (p. 191)

Whiskey Rebellion (p. 192)

Alta California (p. 194)

Citizen Genet (p. 199)

Treaty of Greenville (p. 200)

Jay's Treaty (p. 200)

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election of 1796 (p. 202)

Alien and Sedition Acts (p. 203)

Virginia and Kentucky

Resolutions (p. 205)

election of 1800 (p. 206)

republican motherhood (p. 209)

Indian Trade and Intercourse

Acts (p. 210)

Handsome Lake (p. 211)

Fugitive Slave Law (p. 213)

Gabriel's Rebellion (p. 213)

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