

## ELECTION OF 1800

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In almost every action performed by the early United States government, precedents were set and new territory was reached. Many actions and methods of the United States had rarely been seen in the world before. Having very few examples upon which to rely, the early nation builders were forced to look to their personal experiences as well as the short past of this young country to guide their proceedings. Much of what was done was a direct reaction against the monarchy of England. The government of the United States was created so that, theoretically, every citizen would be represented in the government. Therefore, elections became imperative. Elections were to be an opportunity for the American people to have their voice heard in the government. So it would seem natural that the aspiring representative would strive for the recognition and approval of the people. He would announce his ideas and acknowledge, if not exaggerate, his own merits while condemning his opponent's extensive flaws. In other words, would-be representatives needed to campaign for votes. However, campaigning, as it is known today, was not always common or even acceptable. During the late eighteenth century, there was a general dislike of electioneering, justified by a hope

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that the candidates would be elected based on their skills as opposed to their promises. For example, in Massachusetts during the early 1790s, Jonathan Jackson went so far as to propose seriously that anyone found guilty of soliciting votes be forbidden from politics forever.<sup>1</sup> Even the legendary George Washington condemned campaigning in his farewell speech when he warned “against the baneful effects of the spirit of the party.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course, it was illogical to assume that this dissatisfaction with campaigning alone would prevent it from occurring. The Southern region of the United States had always had some form of campaigning. This electioneering was entirely on the local level and ranged from social barbecues coupled with speeches to coercion by the “friends” of the candidate who at times resorted to actually bringing the people to the polls.<sup>3</sup> In most of the country, however, campaigning was virtually nonexistent. On the presidential level, the lack of campaigns was due largely to the political situation rather than the attitudes of the time. The first two presidential elections held in the United States saw little or no campaigning due to the fact that Washington was running for office, and no one wished to campaign against this great and extremely popular war hero. During the election of 1796, it was again Washington who discouraged much campaigning as he delayed his retirement announcement for so long, leaving very little opportunity for the candidates to campaign.<sup>4</sup> Another factor that limited the presidential campaigning was the fact that during the late eighteenth century the state legislature was responsible for deciding how the electors of a particular state were to be chosen. At this time, only three states—New Hampshire, Georgia and Pennsylvania—used a popular election.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the lack of popular elections, as well as a great deal of apathy among the people, resulted in candidates who were not very concerned with appealing to the populace as a whole rather than the relatively small groups who determined the shape of the government. With the election of 1800, however, this all began to change.

The election of 1800 saw the first Democratic-Republican president come to power; that is, this was the first time the presidency changed from one party to another. Thomas Jefferson

won office through the extensive efforts of his party, first, to spark public interest in politics and, then, to gain that public's support. With this election, a new idea of campaigning began to appear, and rapidly the formerly unpopular act of electioneering became necessary, and a willingness to appeal to the public imperative. No longer was the election merely a matter for the small class of rich men who took an interest in the government. Elections now began to grow into a fervent power struggle that involved a much broader group of people than before. Much of this new campaigning took place on the local level. In reality, the state legislators still elected the President, so the Republicans especially sought to get as many of their local candidates elected as possible in order to gain control of the presidency. Moreover, party politics began to spread across the social and cultural map. The press was now a widely used medium, and this period saw extensive growth of partisan papers. All events were used as an excuse to advance one candidate or another. In some places, even the theater was used as a forum to promote political ideas. During the years leading up to this election, party lines hardened within the legislature and in general voter participation, and partisan activity increased. The people of the United States were becoming national citizens interested in the politics of the entire country, not simply the politics of their own state. Politicians, recognizing this, campaigned accordingly and sought public support.<sup>6</sup> Due largely to the political situations of the time, this momentous election, often called the Revolution of 1800, saw the two key political parties of the day more clearly defined while the political methods of the United States begin to evolve into what is typically seen today, as the candidates began to appeal to the people as a whole rather than to just a few small groups.

When the people are happy with their situations and the actions of the central government, it makes the job of the opposition very difficult. If people like the President, they are more likely to vote for him again in an upcoming election. However, if people are dissatisfied with the work of their President, another group, such as Jefferson and his opposition, can be much more appealing. Washington, as an already legendary war hero, had been

impossible to challenge as a presidential candidate. This made it difficult for an opposition to form. But this all changed in 1796 with John Adams as President, as the people of the United States did not feel the same loyalty for him that they had felt for Washington. When Adams became President, the Democratic-Republicans saw a chance for their opposition to gain votes. So, the election of 1800 would see the first pitched political battle between the Federalists and the Republicans. While this election is often referred to as the Revolution of 1800 because it revolutionized presidential politics, sentiments ran so high that there was in fact some chance of a real change. The divisions between the two parties and, in fact, much of the structure of two party campaigning we still see today arose in the context of Adams's handling of the complex foreign relations between the United States and France and England.

From the beginning of his presidency, Adams had trouble with France. These disagreements and Adams's attempts to improve relations gave Jefferson the opportunity to rally his opposition. The French were upset with the United States for many reasons. They were angered when the United States closed their ports to French trade and remained inactive as the British captured ships carrying provisions for the French in their war against England. Soon, the French began to react by attacking American commerce. It was not long before they had captured nearly three hundred ships. Adams, eager to maintain peace, sent a commission of three men to negotiate with France. Elbridge Gerry, the only Republican, as well as Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and John Marshall, both ardent Federalists, were chosen to make a settlement. Upon their arrival in France, the diplomats were told that, if they were willing to pay a bribe as well as to extend a loan, all disagreements between the two countries would be dissolved. The three envoys indignantly refused. Once they discovered what happened, the American people were furious. In what became known as the X, Y, Z affair (as the three French diplomats who made this offer were known as Mr. X, Mr. Y and Mr. Z), the country began to prepare for war.

At first, this foreign crisis served Adams well. As often happens during times of danger, the former widespread opposition to Adams's foreign policy changed as people rallied behind their government in a wave of patriotism. Even many Republicans who had long fought Adams and his administration now eagerly supported him. In preparation for war, Congress revoked the treaty with France, set aside money for warships, created a Navy department, reactivated the Marine Corps, increased the size of the regular army, and confirmed Washington as commander-in-chief.

Support for the war did not last long, however, particularly as Adams's policies did not end British and French attacks upon American shipping. Jefferson and his supporters attacked Adams, blaming the Federalists for the dire state of affairs.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, the two parties formed over this division in foreign policy. The climate of fierce dispute influenced the nature of campaigning for the election of 1800. For example, since the Federalists were seen as sympathetic to the British, the Republicans accused them of adopting British characteristics and even did all they could to exacerbate the old fears of monarchy. The Federalists, appalled by the more violent aspects of the French Revolution, tried to associate the Republicans with the Terror, chaos and destruction they saw in France. With internal politics seen to mirror foreign disputes, the Federalists came to believe that political opposition might be treasonous.

As relations with France deteriorated and criticism of the government increased, the Federalists began to worry that the opposition, and in particular the opposition press, could not only seriously threaten their power but even compromise the stability of the government.<sup>8</sup> In response, the Federalist Congress passed in June of 1798 the Sedition Act. As a result, the election of 1800 became the only presidential election during which there was a law that made it illegal to criticize the sitting President. The President, of course, happened to be one of the candidates.<sup>9</sup> Opposition papers were closed, and many editors were jailed, but in reality this law did very little to silence the Federalists' opponents. Instead it

created martyrs and further supported the Democratic-Republican claims that the Federalists were plotting “the overthrow of our rights and the destruction of our liberties.”<sup>10</sup>

The Sedition Act rather than hurting the Republicans, as the Federalists had wished, in many ways helped them. As Republican leaders joined together to combat this Act, the party was strengthened, and, exploiting this controversy, Jefferson for the first time became the leader of the Republican Party. With the passage of the Sedition Act, Republicans, especially those in Virginia, resolved to strengthen state power in order to protect against illegal and oppressive actions of the federal government. The center of this resolve was the doctrine of state interposition. This idea was most aggressively expressed in Jefferson’s draft of the Kentucky Resolutions. He declared the Sedition Act, as well as the Alien Acts that had been passed along with it, unconstitutional and called for their nullification by the states. Jefferson stressed the differences between the abuse of delegated powers and the usurpation of undesignated powers. He declared that in the first instance “a change by the people” of those who held power was remedy enough. He declared, however, that “where powers are assumed which have not been delegated, a nullification of the act is the rightful remedy.”<sup>11</sup> He then concluded that the Alien and Sedition Acts were a clear usurpation of power and that the states should proceed by voiding them. In this resolution, it was clear that Jefferson supported, at the least, state nullification of federal law and, at the most, secession from the Union. Jefferson’s resolutions were given to John Breckinridge to introduce in Kentucky where there had been many public meetings condemning the Acts. Breckinridge was sworn to secrecy about Jefferson’s involvement. Jefferson’s first reason for this was that his involvement could have been considered improper, as he was a member of the current administration. Secondly, the Federalists already thought Jefferson was plotting against the government, and he felt that, if he were connected with the resolutions publicly, the Federalist opposition to them would increase. Before introducing the resolutions to the Kentucky legislature, Breckinridge made some major changes. Instead of Jefferson’s intention to bypass Congress

altogether, Breckinridge revised the document to support an appeal to Congress for the repeal of the Acts. Also, he deleted the sections that declared that the states had the right to nullify federal laws. With Breckinridge's alterations, the resolutions were adopted by the Kentucky legislature.

The Republicans next resolved to introduce something similar in Virginia, and Madison agreed to draw up a draft to introduce to the legislature. By late 1798, Jefferson began to worry that some Republicans, including Madison, were too concerned with Northern opinions. So, when Jefferson received a copy of Madison's resolutions he made several more radical revisions. He declared that the Virginia legislature should first proclaim the Acts null and void, and then call on the other states to do the same. With Jefferson's changes, the resolutions were introduced to and passed by the legislature. The Virginia legislature also passed an "Address to the People" which detailed the dangers of the Federalist system. The Virginia Republicans declared that the people must choose whether or not they would continue to accept a government that defied the restraints and hopes of Democratic-Republicanism.

Reaction to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions was overwhelmingly critical. State after state condemned the resolutions. Many states declared that the state governments were not capable enough to pronounce federal laws unconstitutional. Even the defense of the resolutions by many Republicans was restrained, and many declared that they supported the opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts but not the resolution that the states could nullify them. States south of the Potomac, however, remained silent. Many felt that the intention of the resolutions was good, but that the methods proposed would bring about catastrophe. As controversial as the resolutions were, the call by the Virginia Republicans to prepare for militant provocations from the Federalists was more so. The Virginia legislature of 1798-1799 proceeded to reorganize the militia and purchase additional arms as well as build an armory in Richmond after a 25 percent increase in taxes. At this point, secession seemed imminently possible.

Throughout this time of crisis, the politics of the two groups began to become more and more different as two distinct parties were formed. During the conflict with France, the Federalists had sympathized with the British while the Republicans supported the French. During the crisis over the Alien and Sedition Acts, it became clear that the Republicans supported strong state governments as opposed to the Federalists who advocated a strong central government. As these parties formed, however, it was important that neither group appear too zealous in their opinions. The Federalists risked being thought of as monarchial and out to destroy American republicanism. For the Republicans, it became necessary politically that, while appearing firm in their declarations, they not appear hostile or treasonous in order to avoid labels suggesting they sought the destruction of the Union. It was necessary that they make it clear they had no intention to jeopardize the stability of the nation. Without these assurances, they could easily lose favor with the people.<sup>12</sup> The struggle over the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions also brought about a change in party tactics, particularly for the Republicans. Before, the parties had worked at a national level, but now campaign efforts turned more to the states. This tactic fit the Republican belief that the state legislatures were closer to the people and also reflected the fact that most electors were still selected by those legislators. While we have come to see presidential elections as increasingly nationalized, the election of 1800 would mostly be fought at the local level.

The first hints of campaigning began shortly after Adams's election in 1796. In order to win the presidency in 1800, the Republicans first had to establish the legitimacy of party politics as such. This was difficult because there was a general view that political parties were elitist and therefore both dangerous and treasonous. As the state legislators decided how electors were chosen, winning control of the state legislatures became a key political strategy. Local elections were held between April and November, and could actually determine who would become President. Prior to the election of 1800, six states altered their laws to give the maximum advantage to the controlling party. In four

of these states, the shift was made from a popular election to the choice of the legislators. In the end, only five states in 1800 chose their electors through a popular vote. In New York, manipulation of the electoral system was especially blatant. Early in 1800, the legislature was still under Federalist control, and the electors had been previously chosen by the legislature. But in April, the Republicans had surprising success in winning the majority of the state government. Hamilton then wrote to Governor Jay and tried to convince him to call back the lame-duck Federalist legislature so they could enact district elections. Jay, however, refused to perform such a highly partisan action.<sup>13</sup>

The Republicans began to employ the arts of electioneering in order to win the much-needed legislative seats. Party members pooled huge sums of money and did all they could to interest the public. The Republicans began to distribute handbills, host dinners and sponsor celebrations in the hopes of swaying public opinion. They spread their ideas and attempted to discredit Adams and his administration. Since they did not have enough states that were reliably Republican, they focused their attentions on converting solidly Federalist areas. Everything was done to increase voter participation with the hope that this would produce a strongly Republican result at the polls.

At this point, the Republicans began to adopt many of the practices that would mark campaigns for years to come. All public celebrations and events became an excuse to promote Republican legislative candidates. In Maryland, starting in March, candidates spent months speaking at militia musters, horse races and ox roasts hoping to win public support.<sup>14</sup> In areas where handwritten ballots were required, the Republican Party would supply either printed or handwritten tickets to either copy or drop directly into the voting box. For the vast number of people who could not read, they made ballots with symbols. The symbol for the Republican candidate was an American eagle while the symbol provided for the Federalist candidate was the arms of the English king.<sup>15</sup> Another Republican method was the mass meeting. Often these gatherings would be supplemented with barbecues and speeches.

Only after 1800 did the Federalists begin to use this campaign tactic. New England was the first location for these Federalist meetings. The Federalists felt the need to justify these gatherings by declaring the necessity to combat the “Jacobins.”<sup>16</sup>

In general, the Federalists refused to campaign directly. The Federalists, still largely unwilling to call themselves by that name, continued to hold the idea that candidates, as Samuel Goodrich said, should “not mingle with the mass: they might be suspected of electioneering.” And this was, of course, “too degrading for them.”<sup>17</sup> However, the Federalists had to find ways to counter Republican tactics. Even the death of George Washington became an excuse for political propaganda. Federalists hoped to use Washington’s death to increase support for their party. Although he was already buried in Virginia, there was a service and a huge parade in Philadelphia. The central image of this occasion was a striking white horse, celebrating the soldier-statesman. After Washington’s death, Abigail Adams refused to accept company not dressed in mourning clothes and many women all around the country followed her example. These mourners, no matter what their political beliefs, appeared to become public members of the Federalist Party. Despite their efforts to identify their party with the noble memory of George Washington, his death did very little to increase support for the Federalist Party.<sup>18</sup>

Stump oratory was another popular campaign method. Often at these party-sponsored gatherings, the people were forced to endure a great deal of stump oratory. The candidates would rise and present animated speeches in which they vehemently attacked their opponents and sought to gain support for themselves through splendid accounts of their magnificent characters and extraordinary talents. These speeches were often completely uninhibited. In the South, it was not uncommon for a speaker to accuse his rival of being at the head of a slave rebellion, and in New England, a Republican was recorded to have said of the Federalists; “they advocated the Boston Massacre,—they approve the sanguinary killing of AMERICAN SEAMEN. They thirst for the blood of Republicans.” In this case, the election was over before

the accused could defend themselves. There was nothing to stop the candidate from accusing his opponent of every kind of outrageous action if he was not present at the meeting. If one's opponent happened to be in the crowd, however, it sometimes happened that the speaker was forced to prove his accusation through a fistfight or a race.<sup>19</sup>

One of the striking features about the election of 1800 was the new and vital role played by the press. Much of the Republican opposition lay with the press. Pamphlets, and increasingly the newspapers, were becoming the major form in which political ideas were expressed. Culturally, candidates who campaigned for themselves directly were looked down upon. Therefore, the newspapers began to be responsible for promoting one party and attacking the other as well as for a general encouragement of voting.<sup>20</sup> In the election of 1800, the press was an example of how involved the public became with the election. Newspapers were often accountable for both raising interest in events as well as informing the public about current political situations. Without the press, the candidates' appeal to the public would never have been so widespread and public involvement in the election of their President never as extensive.

These newspapers were owned privately by men who called themselves printers. They wrote and often helped to set and print their work. Their shops were attached to their houses, with the workroom visible from the street and the windows filled with their handiwork. In 1789 there were about ninety newspapers in the United States, but by 1800 there were around two hundred.<sup>21</sup> So-called "electioneering papers" were highly partisan and entirely political. The *American* in Baltimore, for example, even made propaganda out of billing notices.<sup>22</sup> In general, the Federalist press did not thrive as much as the Republican press did. Even though two thirds of the printers of the time were Federalists, they were not so strongly partisan and often chose to reflect the opinion of the public over the opinion of the leading Federalists. Many Federalists felt that journalism was a disreputable and vulgar occupation. Timothy Dwight said that just reading newspapers was

equal to “tavern haunting, drinking, swearing, gambling and pertness.”<sup>23</sup> Many of these old-school Federalists could not understand why the press was concerned with politics at all. Eventually, however, the Federalists acknowledged the value of the press and began to utilize their enemy’s methods. To do so, the Federalists claimed that they wished to elevate and purify the press. The first Federalist electioneering paper was the *New England Palladium*, and there were others such as the *Gazette of the United States* and the *Porcupine Gazette*.<sup>24</sup>

Jefferson, by contrast, believed that if the people were informed the government could more adequately reflect their wishes. And the Republicans believed the best way to inform the people was through the press. Later, when Jefferson had become the leader of a structured opposition party, he further emphasized the importance of the press by declaring that newspapers and pamphlets were more important than party organization.<sup>25</sup>

The public’s perception of the merits of political figures became more and more important in shaping political campaigns. The press, therefore, focused largely on grossly exaggerating the talents and exceptional ability of their candidates. In 1800 the Republicans sought to circulate via the press the major ideas of their political platform as well as to promote Jefferson’s character. In Pennsylvania, thousands of pamphlets were distributed along with biographies of the noble life of Thomas Jefferson. The Republicans swore to follow the Constitution and state’s rights, to oppose monarchy, to reduce the national debt and the military, to carry out peaceful commerce with foreign nations, to have no political connections, and to uphold the freedom of religion and the press.<sup>26</sup> In contrast some printers portrayed Washington as a thief, Hamilton as a seducer and Adams as a senile old Monarchist.

Political cartoons were another weapon used by the press. For example, a Republican cartoon shows a cow with Adams as the head, Charles C. Pinckney and Rufus King as the tail, Hamilton milking the cow and John Jay with his treaty knocking over the bucket. While there were certainly negative portrayals of many political figures including Washington, they were all treated kindly

compared to Jefferson. Today, it is nearly impossible to find a pro-Jefferson cartoon. One example attempts to label Jefferson as a radical supporter of the French revolution showing him kneeling at the “Altar of Gallic Despotism,” throwing the Constitution into the flames.<sup>27</sup>

One of the major forms of propaganda used by the press was a general attempt to denounce the opponents of the respective parties. One of the most effective ways of doing this was to play on the people’s fear or hatred. Rather than appeal to reason, it seemed more effective to create labels that produced, without evidence, popular rejection of groups or ideas. One tactic used by both parties involved denying that they were really members of a party. There had long been an aversion towards political parties, rooted in a belief that they were treasonous and reminiscent of the English system. When a candidate used the term “party” to describe his supporters and himself he usually referred to a group of honorable men who sought power for no other reason than to enhance the common good. The term “party,” however, could also be used as a grave insult. When a candidate was accused of being partisan by his opponent, he was labeled as a selfish and power-hungry monster whose only interests were to expand his own welfare.<sup>28</sup>

When the Republicans used labels, they did so mostly to praise their own party and discredit the Federalists. Philip Freneau of the *National Gazette* was one of the first to accuse his opponents of monarchism. He constantly criticized Hamilton, interpreting his every move as a step towards monarchy. The terms “aristocrat” and “monarchist” were constantly used when describing Federalist leaders.<sup>29</sup> This language successfully appealed to the “Anglophobia” of many Americans as well as to the old fear that a throne would be created in the United States. There was concern among some that the Adams administration was secretly attempting to align England and the United States by corrupting the republican ideals and establishing monarchical practices. The Republicans of course, did nothing to discourage these beliefs as they profited immensely from them.

The Republicans also returned to the language of the American Revolution. They attempted to associate themselves with the patriots by using language such as natural rights, popular sovereignty, and “vigilance” toward government power. This was an effort to legitimize the Republican opposition and to identify themselves as the true defenders of the ideas of the Revolution. They also proposed returning to the old party names of “Whig” and “Tory.” “Whig” for the opposition Republicans and “Tory,” having obviously negative connotations, for the Federalists.<sup>30</sup> The newspaper *Argus* of New York supported these claims by stating that half of the celebrants at Washington’s birthday would have only a few years earlier gladly seen him dead. While these labels were clearly exaggerated, there were some claims that were completely ridiculous. For example, there was an account of the “disease of Federalism.” In 1798, a “scientific” investigation was performed in which the patient was forced to wear a black cockade, an emblem from the Revolution identified with the Federalists, for four days and nights. On the first day, the patient reportedly sang “Hail Columbia” and strutted down the streets with a club. The second day, he damned the revolutionary French and exalted the English. On the third day, he spoke of an established church and was thrilled at being a native American. On the fourth day, he apparently lost all reason and continually muttered curses against the French, Jacobins and democrats. He then proceeded to stab one of the “scientist’s” servants and attempted to set the house on fire. The patient was then freed from the cockade and placed into the oven, which was heated to 288 degrees F. This liberated a vapor, which was labeled as “federo” gas after it was combined with gold dust and thrown into the air. The recovered patient then promptly deserted the army.<sup>31</sup> Such stories were printed in papers and were used to spark the interest of the people with the hope that they would form a distrust of the Federalists.

Adams was personally attacked as a monarchist for his book written in England, entitled *Defense of the Constitutions of the Government of the United States of America*. In his book, which often took a very aristocratic tone, he wrote that the Americans should

be praised rather than criticized for modeling their government on the British constitution. He also wrote of the noble qualities of the English constitution, all of which was used to paint him as a British sympathizer and therefore a monarchist.<sup>32</sup>

The Federalists also used labels in an attempt to deprecate the Republican Party. They hoped to portray the Republicans as radicals attempting to throw the government into anarchy and violence. They used the term “Jacobin” from the French Revolution, citing many definitions of this label, all of which depicted the Republicans as irresponsible fanatics who only wanted to see destruction and chaos.<sup>33</sup> Jefferson was personally attacked as well, and often more severely. He was called an atheist, a coward, an impractical visionary, and a Jacobin who would proceed to destroy public credit and leave the nation defenseless. He was denounced for criticizing Washington. He was declared treasonous for organizing a party with the sole intention of taking over the government. He was condemned for sexual immorality with his slaves and accused of using fraudulent financial procedures.<sup>34</sup>

As partisan fever spread, political strategy began to seep into everything. Adams used a trip from Philadelphia to Washington to make speeches about his contribution to independence and to defend his foreign policy. Jefferson once told Monroe that he planned to avoid Richmond on a trip home because he knew that there was a “hatred of ceremony” in that city. Jefferson said that he recognized the value of this method to rally support, but as the Federalists used it, he refused to do the same.<sup>35</sup> Although he did nothing to promote himself, his very avoidance catered to the desires of a particular area which prevented a possible disillusionment with the “democratic” candidate.

Politics even began to appear in the church. In fact, some of Jefferson’s severest critics were members of the clergy. The ideas of Rationalism, Deism, Skepticism, and Atheism had all become common, and Adams actually had virtually the same religious beliefs as Jefferson, although the church never criticized him. But the churches were growing more sensitive to threats toward themselves, and Jefferson already had a reputation as an

enemy of religion. Echoing the beliefs of many members of the clergy, Reverend William Linn said that the only reason he did not like Jefferson was that he did not believe in the Holy Scriptures. He went on to say that, if elected, Jefferson “would give us an unfavorable character with foreign nations...destroy religion, introduce immorality, and loosen all the bonds of society.”<sup>36</sup> In many New England churches, sermons were given in which Jefferson’s name was vilified. For example, Reverend Jedidiah Champion of Litchfield, Connecticut, closed a prayer with the words, “O Lord: wilt Thou bestow upon the Vice President a double portion of Thy grace, for Thou knowest he needs it.”<sup>37</sup> The clergy’s dislike of Jefferson was very helpful to the Federalists. The people would surely believe what their particular church, as one of the most trusted institutions, had to say. Even Hamilton declared that he would thwart Jefferson’s presidential ambitions because he wished to prevent an atheist and a fanatic from gaining power. Jefferson, maintaining the attitude that religion had no part in politics, refused to defend himself against these libelous assertions.<sup>38</sup>

Politics began to influence cultural activities as well, and theater, for example, became another forum open to political campaigning. One of the best examples of this took place between two rival theaters in Boston, Massachusetts. All theaters in Boston had been outlawed in 1752, but by 1792 actors began to perform anyway. In 1794, a group of Federalists built the Federal Street Theater. Although they tried to appeal to all audiences, politics soon began to disrupt performances. Before a production, the orchestra was asked to play popular songs. These songs were often partisan, and on many occasions the audience became unruly. In addition, the actors of the Federal Street Theater, who were largely British, were encouraged to make jokes at the expense of France, much to the displeasure of Republican audience members. To counter this pro-British, Federalist theater, in 1796, the Haymarket Theater was built with financial help from Republicans. These two theaters began to develop highly partisan followings. If the Federal Street Theater failed to sell out, they would give away the extra tickets in exchange for promises from the recipients that they would not attend the performances of the other theater. After only

a week, however, the Federalist theater, which appealed largely to the Boston elite, was forced to lower prices in the pit and the gallery. Competition grew, and both theaters chose plays with the intention of annoying the other theater's partisan audiences.

In 1797, a play called *Bunker Hill* by William Burk was performed first in the Haymarket in Boston and then in New York. The play was a very patriotic story about Joseph Warren. Set during the Revolution, the play appealed to a wide audience. Adams, however, when he saw the play in New York, did not like it. While on the surface, this play seemed to be merely highly patriotic, it was in fact an extremely partisan work. The play was dedicated to Aaron Burr who was Jefferson's future vice president and the man who had helped Burk escape charges of sedition. The play depicted a melodramatic account of General Warren and his role in the battle of Bunker Hill. In the play, General Warren is a selfless leader who, rather than staying behind the front line, is fighting with his men. Later, as they retreat, he stays behind to supervise the departure and is mortally wounded by the British. The play clearly intended to portray the British and their monarchy as the enemy of all good Americans. Burk also used this play to depict the differences between British and American values. Burk created a scene where Warren is offered a pardon, as a British officer attempts to negotiate peace, to attack the British justice system. Warren addresses the officer:

What are your boasted English laws to us,  
 Or any laws, which sanctify injustice?  
 Is it an English law, to rob the weak,  
 To wring his pittance from the shiv'ring poor,  
 To levy taxes like a Russian czar...<sup>39</sup>

Although attacking the British follows Republican ideas, Burk more directly advocated Republican values as well. He promoted individual rights and, playing on the rhetoric of the day that identified the Federalists as monarchists, attacked monarchy as a governmental system. The final scenes of the play depicting Warren's magnificent funeral were full of Republican symbols and slogans. Many of the banners displayed held sayings reminiscent

of the French Revolution. By setting his play in a nationalistic setting and making his main character a popular Massachusetts hero, Burk assured a wider audience. By placing Republican ideals amid the patriotic events of the Revolution, Burk meant to use his play to legitimize Republican principles.<sup>40</sup>

Not all political tactics were completely honest of course. It was not uncommon for the electorate to be bribed and intimidated into voting for one party or another. The “friends of law and order” was a group of men whose sole purpose was to solicit votes through coercion or economic pressure for the Federalist candidate. Threats of loss of business were often ample encouragement for tradesmen. Economic intimidation was not uncommon. In Norfolk, merchants refused to employ men unless they voted for the Federalist candidates. Also, during some of Pennsylvania’s local elections in 1798, voters were bribed at the poll so that they would vote with the leading Federalists. The outcome could also be affected after the votes had been cast. As the dominant political group was often responsible for counting votes, it was not uncommon for large numbers of ballots to be thrown out because of minor “errors.” For example, in Boston, Benjamin Austin, Jr., a Republican, lost fifty votes in a close election because voters had not added “Jr.” to the end of his name. At times the Federalists would run two candidates, with no intention of supporting the second, in an effort to split the Republican vote, or they would delay announcing a candidate so that the Republicans were forced to run two candidates against one another. Voting multiple times was another tactic. In Pennsylvania, it was reported that the Federalist candidate received 2,065 votes in an area with only 1,100 qualified voters. The Republicans were not entirely innocent, of course. While Federalist foreign policy was popular, they ignored the topic and ran their candidates under the name “Federal Republican” or “Constitutional Federalist” as opposed to a “Federal Aristocratic Ticket” in an effort to confuse voters.<sup>41</sup>

Manipulation of the electoral system was not limited to the states, however. In January of 1800, Senator James Ross of Pennsylvania introduced a bill that provided for a situation in which the

legality of the electoral vote was questioned. He proposed that a committee of six senators, six congressmen and a chairman nominated by the Senate and elected by the House be formed. This committee, which at this time would have been controlled by the Federalists, would be given the final decision on any conflict over electoral votes. The bill passed the Senate but died when the two houses could not agree on amendments, leaving the procedure for dealing with disputed electoral votes unclear.<sup>42</sup>

With most legislative elections completed by May of 1800, the results of the campaigning became clear. By this time, it was known that the Republicans would control New York and had a good chance of controlling Pennsylvania. New England, apart from Rhode Island, was thought to be solidly Federalist. With its legislature to be elected in October, New Jersey was projected to be a close contest, and Maryland was predicted to be divided due to its district system. Virginia, Georgia and Tennessee were all solidly Republican but North Carolina might still produce a few Federalist votes. The real question was South Carolina, where party lines were not as clearly defined and an engaging candidate could still affect the outcome. Under such situations, the parties chose their candidates. The Republicans chose Jefferson and Aaron Burr almost immediately, but the Federalists were at first split in their allegiance to Adams. While the Federalists were still selecting their candidate, the Republicans began to promote their nominee even to the most solidly Federalist areas, and the stage of local campaigning continued.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most dramatic events of the campaign was prompted by Hamilton's hatred of Adams. Hamilton was hoping to convince the majority of the Federalists to rally behind Pinckney instead of Adams. A Republican newspaper quoted Hamilton as saying, "If Mr. Pinckney is not elected President, a revolution will be the consequence, and within the next four years I will lose my head or be the leader of a triumphant army!"<sup>44</sup> Towards the end of the campaign, Aaron Burr discovered a pamphlet which Hamilton had written negatively describing the President's life. The pamphlet was intended to be privately distributed to Federal-

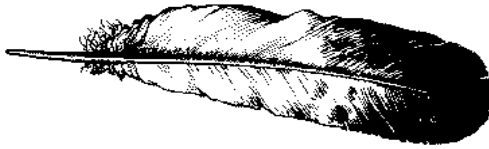
ist electors with the hope that they would withhold votes from Adams. As soon as the pamphlets were printed, Burr got hold of a copy and had its contents printed in the newspapers, much to the joy of the Republicans.<sup>45</sup>

The internal campaign did not, however, settle matters, even though the Republicans had come out on top. By mid-December, all the electoral votes had been cast, and it became clear that Jefferson and Burr had tied. When he was nominated as the candidate for Vice President, Burr demanded an assurance that no votes would be diverted from him. In the electoral system created by the Constitution, the electors might need to throw away some of their votes on the other party's candidates in order to prevent a tie between their Presidential candidate and their Vice Presidential candidate. In the election of 1796, this precaution had been taken, and Burr was still upset over the ballots he felt he was cheated out of. So in the election of 1800, the states that voted Republican split their electoral votes evenly, resulting in the tie. This thrust the presidential election into the Federalist lame-duck House of Representatives. Jefferson now realized that the Federalists could still block his election. The Republicans could count on only eight states for Jefferson, one less than the required nine. The Federalists were determined that Burr would be elected, or they would see the presidency passed on to a chosen official. The Republicans were equally firm in their support of Jefferson. On February 11, the House began to cast their ballots. Eight states voted for Jefferson, six for Burr and two were split. Over the following days, numerous votes yielded no change. The Federalists, who met numerous times, remained constant, and Jefferson feared they intended to maintain the deadlock and then appoint a President by law. Jefferson wrote to Monroe that, if that happened, arms would be taken up and that such a declaration would not be followed. The Republicans also threatened to call another constitutional convention to restructure the government, and there were rumors that Virginia and Pennsylvania were preparing for military action. After thirty-six ballots, the Federalists finally released enough votes to give Jefferson the presidency on February 17. This Federalist concession was due largely to the efforts of

Congressman James Bayard from Delaware. He successfully convinced enough Federalists from Maryland and Vermont to cooperate so that those states moved to favor Jefferson. The end results left Jefferson with ten votes and Burr four, and Delaware and South Carolina cast blank votes.<sup>46</sup>

In the end, the Revolution of 1800 concluded with a peaceful change in power. Despite all the threats, no violence occurred. But it could have very easily ended differently. Even if an overthrow of the government was unnecessary, many changes did take place, especially in the way the President of the United States was elected. The contest for the presidency was no longer a dispute between two men; it had grown into a battle between two well-developed political parties. These newly dominant political parties were highly influential in all aspects of the election. Partisan legislatures were able easily to manipulate the electoral system, allowing them virtually to determine the outcome of the election. Because of this, the election of 1800 relied more than ever on state elections, which rapidly became the focus of campaigning efforts. There was also a general increase in partisan activity and appeals were made through the media, as pamphlets and newspapers were printed and distributed all around the country. With the election of 1800, national events—foreign disputes and the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts—both demonstrated the importance of controlling the presidency and the federal government, and created the divisive atmosphere in which truly partisan politics could arise. As party politics became more definite, the Republicans and Federalists were able to use their parties to make their views known to the world. The previously discouraged practice of campaigning now became both useful and necessary: to the Republicans because they saw in the turmoil of the foreign affairs with France and the oppression of the Alien and Sedition Acts a chance to shift public sentiment in the favor of the opposition; and to the Federalists because they found new campaign tactics necessary in order to maintain the support they once had. The election of 1800 not only began the electoral process seen today, but it set the precedent of allowing an opposition party to flourish and to gain power. Much of what our country has come to stand for is

freedom, and especially a freedom of expression. A large part of what makes the election of 1800 so momentous was the fact that, in a time when the freedoms we take for granted today were still new and largely untried, the opposition was allowed to survive and to succeed without being deemed treasonous.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> David Hackett Fischer, The Revolution of American Conservatism: the Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) p. 91
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in Bernard A. Weisberger, America Afire: Jefferson, Adams, and the Revolutionary Election of 1800 (New York: William Morrow, 2000) p. 169
- <sup>3</sup> Jeffrey L. Pasley, "The Tyranny of American Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001) pp. 4-5
- <sup>4</sup> Weisberger, p. 164
- <sup>5</sup> Richard P. McCormick, The Presidential Game: the Origins of American Presidential Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 53
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph Charles, The Origins of the American Party System (Williamsburg: The Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1956) p. 92
- <sup>7</sup> Stefan Lorant, The Presidency: A Pictorial History of the Presidential Elections From Washington to Truman (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951) pp. 43-50
- <sup>8</sup> James Roger Sharp, American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 218
- <sup>9</sup> Weisberger, p. 200
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Simon Collinson, "President or King?," History Today 50 (November 2000) p. 14
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in Sharp, p. 195
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-206
- <sup>13</sup> McCormick, p. 60
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67
- <sup>15</sup> Fischer, p. 94
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Fischer, p. 95
- <sup>18</sup> Simon P. Newman, Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) pp. 69-73
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103
- <sup>20</sup> Pasley, p. 4
- <sup>21</sup> Weisberger, p. 201
- <sup>22</sup> Fischer, p. 134
- <sup>23</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 134
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-136; and Charles, p. 91

- <sup>25</sup> Charles, p. 84
- <sup>26</sup> McCormick, p. 65
- <sup>27</sup> Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) p. 61; and Fischer, p. 130
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 232
- <sup>29</sup> Donald H. Stewart, The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969) pp. 487-489
- <sup>30</sup> Collinson, pp. 11-13
- <sup>31</sup> Stewart, pp. 490-493
- <sup>32</sup> Collinson, p. 14
- <sup>33</sup> Stewart, pp. 491-492
- <sup>34</sup> McCormick, p. 66
- <sup>35</sup> Sharp, p. 233
- <sup>36</sup> Quoted in Fred C. Luebke, "The Origins of Jefferson's Anti-Clericalism," Church History 32 (September 1963) p. 438
- <sup>37</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p. 346
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 346-349
- <sup>39</sup> Burk, Bunker Hill quoted in: Steve Wilmer, "Federalist and Republican Theatre in the 1790s," Theatre Symposium 5 (1997) p. 85
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-87
- <sup>41</sup> Stewart, pp. 509-511
- <sup>42</sup> McCormick, pp. 60-62
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-63
- <sup>44</sup> Quoted in Lorant, p. 50
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51
- <sup>46</sup> McCormick, pp. 68-69

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23 August 2002

Will Fitzhugh  
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Dear Mr. Fitzhugh,

As you requested, I am including a small photograph of myself for the new CD-ROM project. I apologize for the delay, but I have been away all summer and just returned home.

Much has changed since I received the Ralph Waldo Emerson award a few years ago [2000], so I will give you an update on my activities and my newfound aspirations. I am currently a senior at Princeton University. My last three years at Princeton have been incredible in all respects. My professors and peers are a constant source of inspiration, and the academic challenges are never-ending. I am a politics major and am pursuing minors in political theory and French. In addition to my academic career, I have played on the varsity women's squash team since my freshman year. This year I am looking forward to my leadership position as co-captain. Senior year will be a special time; it is culmination to my college experience and also a transition period when I will make decisions regarding my post-college career. Since I enjoyed the legal courses at Princeton, I am applying to law schools this fall. Once again, my writing and analytical skills will be put to the test!

I want to commend and thank you for your work with *The Concord Review*. I am convinced that success at the college level depends on solid writing skills. *The Concord Review* is a perfect way to encourage high school students to pursue excellence in writing and prepare them for the demands of college.

Thank you again. And best of luck with the new CD-ROM project!

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Shingleton  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Phillips Academy, Andover, Class of 1999  
Princeton Class of 2003  
[Essay on Abigail Adams, Emerson Prize 2000]