

Political Cartoons: The Jeffersonian Vision



Lampooning Jefferson for expanding on the Louisiana Purchase

Thomas Jefferson's plan in 1805 to build on the Louisiana Purchase by buying West Florida from Spain is lampooned in this cartoon. Induced by the sting of the hornet Napoleon, Jefferson vomits gold coins before a dancing Spanish representative holding maps of East and West Florida and carrying French Minister Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand's instructions in his pocket. West Florida was captured by the United States during the War of 1812, and East Florida was acquired by treaty in 1819 during James Monroe's administration.

Source: Library of Congress, Jefferson Papers Collection at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffwest.html>.



MAD TOM IN A RAGE (Anonymous, 1801).

Party warfare of Federalist and Republicans engendered the utmost bitterness. To show Jefferson as a madman and drunkard leagued with the devil in pulling down the Federal Government was not going too far for the robust taste of the period. In his admirable first inaugural address, Jefferson pledged himself to preserve the national government "in its whole Constitutional vigor." But the two parties were divided by an impassable chasm in ideas of what the Constitution meant. Under Washington and Adams the Federalists had established numerous precedents for far-reaching exercise of national authority. The government, with Hamilton as guide, had taken strong measures to establish national credit, suppressed the Whiskey Rebellion, braved the anger of the public in making a wise treaty with Great Britain, and passed the Alien and Sedition laws, which carried Federal police authority to an extreme point. Jefferson wished to reduce the powers of the Federal Government; he said so in his inaugural. Those who believed that national safety depended upon Federal vigor feared he would tear down the structure reared by the two first presidents. Actually, Jefferson was destined to stretch national authority to new limits, in extraordinary invasions of what had been deemed the rights of states and individuals. The Louisiana Purchase, the Non-Intercourse Act, and the Embargo all flew in the teeth of his original theories.

From: Nevins, Allen and Frank Weitenkamp. 1944. "A Century of Political Cartoons: Caricature in the United States from 1800 to 1900." New York: Octagon Books.