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THE REVOLUTIONARY REPUBLIC

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR killed a higher percentage of Americans who fought in it than any other American conflict except the Civil War. It too was a civil war. People were more likely to fight neighbors during the Revolution than they were between 1861 and 1865, when the geographical line separating the two sides would be much sharper. Twice, in 1776 and 1780, the British might have won, but in both campaigns the Americans somehow rallied. They won only by bringing in France as an ally. France brought in Spain.

During the war, Americans began to think, more than before, in crude racial categories. Ideas about racial inferiority clashed sharply with claims of universal rights and human equality. As whites, blacks, and Indians redefined their differences, they often resorted to racial stereotypes. Most Indians and enslaved Africans hoped that Britain would win the war.

Even as the war raged and the economy disintegrated, Americans drafted state constitutions and eloquent bills of rights that reached far beyond the racism many of them felt. They knew they were attempting something daring—the creation of a stable, enduring republic. Some European monarchies were 1,000 years old. No republic had lasted that long. Educated people knew a great deal about the city-states of classical Greece and about republican Rome—how they had called forth the noblest sentiments of patriotism for a time and then decayed into despotisms. Still, once Americans broke with Britain, they warmly embraced republicanism and never looked back. They were able to build viable republican governments because they grasped the voluntaristic dynamics of their society. They knew they had to restructure their governments through persuasive means. The use of force against armed fellow citizens would be self-defeating.

CHRONOLOGY

1769	Spanish found San Diego
1775	Settlement of Kentucky begins
1776	Virginia becomes first state to adopt a permanent constitution and bill of rights ♦ British forces land on Staten Island ♦ Declaration of Independence ♦ Pennsylvania constitution creates unicameral legislature ♦ British win battle of Long Island; New York City falls ♦ Washington wins at Trenton
1777	Washington wins at Princeton ♦ Howe takes Philadelphia ♦ Burgoyne surrenders at Saratoga ♦ Congress completes Articles of Confederation
1778	Franco-American alliance
1779	Indians form alliances from the Gulf to the Great Lakes ♦ Spain declares war on Britain ♦ Continental dollar collapses
1780	Massachusetts constitution approved ♦ Pennsylvania adopts gradual emancipation ♦ British take Charleston, overrun South Carolina ♦ Gordon riots in London ♦ Arnold's treason exposed ♦ Americans win at King's Mountain
1781	Continental Army mutinies ♦ Americans win at Cowpens ♦ Congress creates executive departments ♦ Articles of Confederation ratified ♦ Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown
1782	Americans massacre 100 unarmed Indians at Gnadenhutten
1783	Peace of Paris recognizes American independence
1785	Congress passes Land Ordinance
1786	Virginia passes Statute for Religious Freedom ♦ Annapolis convention
1786–1787	Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts
1787	Northwest Ordinance ♦ Philadelphia Convention drafts federal Constitution
1787–1788	Eleven states ratify the Constitution
1789	First federal Congress sends Bill of Rights to the states for ratification
1799	New York adopts gradual emancipation
1804	New Jersey adopts gradual emancipation

The war demonstrated how weak Congress was, even after ratification of the Articles of Confederation in 1781. Congress could not pay its bills. It could not expel the British from their western military posts or defeat the Indians of the Ohio country. Yet in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, Congress announced plans to create new states and admit them to the Union as equals of the original 13.

Also in 1787, the Philadelphia Convention drafted a new Constitution for the United States. After ratification by 11 states, it went into effect in April 1789. The federal system it created became the most distinctive achievement of the Revolutionary generation.

HEARTS AND MINDS: THE NORTHERN WAR, 1776–1777

Because the men ruling Britain believed that the loss of the colonies would be fatal to British power, the price of patriotism escalated once independence became the goal. Britain raised more soldiers and larger fleets than ever before and more than doubled its national debt. Americans, too confident after their early successes, staggered under the onslaught.

The British Offensive

The first setback came in Canada. In May 1776, when a fresh British force sailed up the St. Lawrence River, the Americans, weakened by smallpox, had to retreat. By July, Sir Guy Carleton drove them back into northern New York, to Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. Both sides built ships to control that strategic waterway. Largely through Benedict Arnold's efforts, the Americans held, and Carleton returned to Canada for the winter.

Farther south, Richard, Viscount Howe, admiral of the British fleet, and his brother General William Howe prepared an awesome striking force on Staten Island. They also acted as peace commissioners, with power to restore whole colonies to the king's peace and to pardon individual rebels. They hoped to avoid using their huge army, but when they wrote George Washington to open negotiations, he refused to accept the letter because it did not address him as "General." To do so would have recognized the legitimacy of his appointment. Unable to negotiate, the Howes had to fight.

Washington had moved his army from Boston to New York City, where he had about 19,000 men to face more than 30,000 redcoats and Hessians. Early successes had kept morale high among American forces and helped sustain the *rage militaire* (warlike enthusiasm) that had prompted thousands to volunteer in 1775 and 1776, including 4,000 veterans of 1775 who reenlisted for 1776. Although some men served in the Continental Army and others with state militia units, the difference between them was still minimal. Neither had formal military training, and the men in both served only for short terms.

Washington was reluctant to abandon any large city. Against conventional military wisdom, he divided his inferior force and sent half of it from Manhattan to Long Island. Most of the men dug in on Brooklyn Heights, just two miles from lower Manhattan, and waited for a frontal attack. The British invaded Long Island, a loyalist stronghold, and on August 27, 1776, sent a force around the American left flank through unguarded Jamaica Pass. While Hessians feinted a frontal assault, the flanking force crushed the American left and rear and sent the survivors reeling.

The Howes did nothing to prevent the evacuation of the rest of the American army to Manhattan, which occurred under the cover of a fierce nor'easter storm. Instead, on September 11 the British opened informal talks with several members

of Congress on Staten Island. The talks collapsed when the Americans insisted that the British recognize their independence before discussing other issues. Washington evacuated lower Manhattan. The British took New York City, much of which was destroyed on September 21 by fire, most likely set by Americans. The Howes then appealed directly to the people to lay down their arms and return to British allegiance within 60 days in exchange for a full pardon. In southern New York State, several thousand complied.

In October, the Howes drove Washington out of Manhattan and Westchester and then turned on two garrisons he had left behind. On November 16, the British forced 3,000 men to surrender at Fort Mifflin on the Manhattan side of the Hudson River. General Nathanael Greene, a lame Rhode Island Quaker who had given up pacifism for soldiering, saved his men on the New Jersey side by abandoning Fort Mifflin, including all of his supplies.

The Howes might have destroyed Washington's army on Long Island or Manhattan, but they probably knew what they were doing. British victories and the American reliance on short-term volunteers were destroying Washington's army. British success seemed to prove that no American force could stand before a properly organized British army. But to capture Washington's entire army would have been a political embarrassment, leading to massive treason trials, executions, and great bitterness. Instead, Britain's impressive victories demoralized Americans and encouraged them to go home, many taking their muskets with them. In September, 27,000 Americans stood fit for duty in the northern theater (including the Canadian border); by December, only 6,000 remained, most of whom intended to leave when their enlistments expired on December 31.

The Howes' strategy nearly worked. In December, British forces swept across New Jersey as far south as Burlington. They captured Charles Lee, next in command after Washington, and Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Several thousand New Jersey residents, including Stockton, took the king's oath. To seal off Long Island Sound from both ends, the Howes also captured Newport, Rhode Island. Many observers thought the war was all but over as sad remnants of the Continental Army crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, confiscating all boats along the way so that the British could not follow them. One general believed that the time had come to "bargain away the Bubble of Independency for British Liberty well secured." Even Jefferson began to think about terms on which a restoration of the monarchy might be acceptable.

The Trenton-Princeton Campaign

Washington knew he had to do something dramatic to restore morale and encourage his soldiers to reenlist. In mid-December, the New Jersey militia, which had been silent for weeks, showed him how by harassing British outposts and patrols in the Delaware valley, pushing the Hessian garrison at Trenton toward exhaustion. On Christmas night, 1776, Washington crossed the ice-choked Delaware and marched south, surprising the Trenton garrison at dawn, which was nearly blinded by another nor'easter. At small cost to the attackers, nearly 1,000 Hessians surrendered. The British sent their most energetic general, Charles, Earl Cornwallis, south with 8,000 men to "bag the fox"—Washington and the 5,000 Continentals and militia still with him. Cornwallis caught him at Trenton near sunset on January 2

but decided to wait until dawn before attacking. British patrols watched the Delaware to prevent another escape across the river, but Washington tried nothing of the kind. With his campfires burning, he muffled the wheels of his wagons and guns and stole around the British left flank, heading north. At dawn, he met a British regiment beginning its march from Princeton to Trenton. In the Battle of Princeton, the Americans, with a 5-to-1 edge in numbers, mauled yet another garrison.

Washington's two quick victories had an enormous impact on the war, although they inspired few reenlistments. The Howes, who had seemed to possess a firm grasp of revolutionary warfare, blundered in not hounding Washington's remnant of an army to its destruction after Princeton, if that was still possible. Instead, afraid that Washington might pick off their outposts one at a time, they called in their garrisons and concentrated the army along the Raritan River from New Brunswick to the sea. As the British departed, the militia returned, asking who had sworn oaths to the king. Those who had taken the oath now groveled, as the price of acceptance, or fled to British lines. The Howes had encouraged **loyalists** to expose themselves and then abandoned them to the king's enemies. For the rest of the winter, the militia attacked and usually defeated British patrols foraging for supplies. By spring, Howe's forces were reduced to less than half the strength they had possessed in August. Many of the invaders had aroused fierce hatred by looting and raping their way across New Jersey. Together, the British and Hessians had lost the hearts and minds of the settlers. In 1777, few would be willing to declare for the Crown. The Revolution survived.

THE CAMPAIGNS OF 1777 AND FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Britain's thoughtful strategy of 1776 gave way to incoherence in 1777. The Howes again had a plan for winning the war, but it required 20,000 reinforcements that did not exist. Instead, Lord George Germain, Britain's war minister, ordered the Howes to take Philadelphia. He also sent John Burgoyne, a poet and playwright as well as a general, to Canada with orders to march his army south and link up with the garrison of New York City, commanded by Sir Henry Clinton. A small force under Barry St. Leger was to march down the Mohawk valley and threaten Albany from the west. When few reinforcements reached the Howes, they rejected an overland march to Philadelphia as too risky and decided to invade by sea, a decision that allowed Washington to shift men north to oppose Burgoyne.

The British campaign made little sense. If the point of Burgoyne's march was to move his army to New York City, he should have gone by sea. If the point was to force a battle with New Englanders, his army should have been larger. And if Howe's army—Britain's largest—would not challenge Washington's, who would?

The Loss of Philadelphia

After Trenton and Princeton, Washington demanded stricter discipline and longer terms of enlistment. Congress responded by raising the number of lashes a soldier could receive from 39 to 100 and by promising a cash bonus to anyone enlisting for three years, and a land bounty to anyone serving for the duration. Congress never came close to raising the 75,000 men it hoped for, but these new policies did create a



MAP 6.1 Revolutionary War in the Northern States

This map shows the campaigns in New York and New Jersey in 1776–77, in northern New York and around Philadelphia in 1777, and at Monmouth, New Jersey, in 1778. The inset shows Washington’s Trenton and Princeton campaigns after Christmas 1776.

solid foundation for a more experienced army. Longer terms made military training a real possibility, which in turn made the Continentals much more professional than the militia.

The Continental Army acquired its own distinctive character. The men who signed up were often poor. About half of the New Jersey Line came from families that were not on the tax rolls. Some recruits were British deserters. Short-term

militiamen, by contrast, usually held a secure place in their communities and were more likely than the Continentals to be church members. As the 1777 recruits came in, the two northern armies, swelled by militia, grew to about 28,000 men fit for duty—17,000 in northern New York and 11,000 under Washington.

The Howes sailed south from New York with 13,000 men. When river pilots could not guarantee a safe ascent up the Delaware against American fire, the fleet sailed on to Chesapeake Bay and on August 24 landed the troops at Head of Elk, Maryland. The British marched toward Philadelphia through southeastern Pennsylvania, a region thickly populated with loyalists and neutral Quakers. A few militia turned out to help Washington, but most residents, aware of the atrocities committed in New Jersey in 1776, fled rather than greet the invaders as liberators. The British burned many of their abandoned farmhouses.

After his experience in New York, Washington was wary of being trapped in a city. Instead of trying to hold Philadelphia, he took up strong positions at Brandywine Creek along the British marching route but left open a line of retreat. On September 11, Howe again outmaneuvered him, drove in his right flank, and forced him to retreat. Congress fled to Lancaster. The British occupied Philadelphia on September 26.

After failing to destroy a British outpost at Germantown, Washington headed west to Valley Forge, where the army endured a miserable winter. There, Frederick Wilhelm, Baron von Steuben, a Prussian serving with the Continental Army who would soon become a major general, devised a drill manual for Americans based on Prussian standards. Through his efforts, the Continentals became far more soldierly. Other European volunteers also helped. From France came the Marquis de Lafayette and Johann, Baron de Kalb. The Poles sent Thaddeus Kosciuszko (a talented engineer) and Casimir, Count Pulaski. De Kalb and Pulaski were killed in American service. By the last years of the war, perhaps one-fifth of all Continental officers were professional soldiers from Europe, who gave the American officer corps an aristocratic tone that sometimes alarmed civilians.

Saratoga

In northern New York, Fort Ticonderoga fell to Burgoyne on June 2, 1777, but little went right for the British after that. Colonel St. Leger, with 900 soldiers and an equal number of Indians, reached Fort Schuyler in the Mohawk valley in August and defeated 800 militia at Oriskany, but when Benedict Arnold approached with an additional 1,000 men, the Indians fled and St. Leger withdrew to Oswego.

Burgoyne's army of 7,800, advancing from Ticonderoga toward Albany, was overwhelmed in the upper Hudson valley. As his supply line to Canada grew longer, American militia swarmed behind him to cut it. When he detached 700 Hessians to forage in the Green Mountains, they ran into 2,600 militia that had been raised by John Stark of New Hampshire. On August 16 at Bennington, Vermont, Stark killed or captured nearly all of them. A relief force of 650 Hessians was also mauled. By the time Burgoyne's surviving soldiers reached the Hudson and started toward Albany, the Americans under Horatio Gates outnumbered them 3 to 1. The British got as far as Bemis Heights, 30 miles north of Albany, but failed to break through in two costly battles, with Arnold again distinguishing himself. Burgoyne retreated 10 miles to **Saratoga**, where he surrendered his entire army on October 17.

French Intervention

In May 1776, Louis XVI authorized secret aid to the American rebels. A French dramatist, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, author of *The Barber of Seville* (1775) and later *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), set up the firm of Roderigue Hortalez and Company to smuggle supplies through Britain's weak blockade of the American coast. (The British navy had committed most of its ships to transport and supply the army.) Without this aid, the Americans could not have continued the war.

In December 1776, Benjamin Franklin arrived in France as an agent of Congress. Although the French court could not officially receive him without risking a declaration of war by Britain, the 70-year-old Franklin took Parisian society by storm. He adopted simple clothes, replaced his wig with a fur cap, and played to perfection the role of an innocent man of nature that French *philosophes* associated with Pennsylvania. Through Beaumarchais, he kept the supplies flowing and organized privateering raids on British commerce, which the French court claimed it could not stop.

The fall of Philadelphia alarmed Foreign Minister Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes. He feared that Congress might give up unless France entered the war. But Burgoyne's defeat convinced Louis that the Americans could win and that intervention was a good risk. Franklin and Vergennes signed two treaties in February 1778. One, a commercial agreement, granted Americans generous trading terms with France. In the other, France made a perpetual alliance with the United States, recognized American independence, agreed to fight until Britain conceded independence, and disavowed all territorial ambitions on the North American continent. Americans could not have hoped for more. Vergennes also brought Spain into the war a year later.

Franklin's treaties stunned London. Lord North proposed a plan of conciliation that conceded virtually everything but independence and sent a distinguished group of commissioners under Frederick Howard, Earl of Carlisle, to present it to Congress and block the French alliance. In 1775, such terms would have resolved the imperial crisis, but in June 1778, Congress, recognizing them as signs of British desperation, rejected them out of hand.

Americans now expected a quick victory, while the British regrouped. George III declared war on France, recalled the Howe brothers, and ordered General Clinton to abandon Philadelphia. Wary of being caught at sea by the French, Clinton marched overland to New York in June 1778. Washington's newly disciplined army attacked his rear at Monmouth, New Jersey, and almost drove the British from the field, but the redcoats rallied and won a draw. Fearing a French invasion of the British Isles while most of the Royal Navy was in American waters, the British redeployed their forces on a global scale. They stood on the defensive in America through most of 1778 and 1779 and even evacuated Newport, but loyalists, based in New York City or Long Island, often raided Connecticut and New Jersey.

Spanish Expansion and Intervention

Like France, Spain was eager to avenge old defeats against Britain. The Spanish king, Charles III (1759–88), had endured the loss of Florida shortly after ascending the throne but had received Louisiana from France in compensation.

HISTORY THROUGH FILM

Mary Silliman's War (1993)

Directed by Stephen Surjik.

Starring Nancy Palk (Mary Silliman), Richard Donat (Selleck Silliman), Paul Boretski (David Holly), Joanne Miller (Amelia), Elias Williams (Peter), and Allan Royal (Thomas Jones).

Strong movies about the Revolutionary War are hard to find. *Mary Silliman's War* is the rare exception. It rests on the outstanding research of Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr., in their co-authored book, *The Way of Duty: A Woman and her Family in Revolutionary America* (1984), a study of the life of an articulate woman, Mary Fish Noyes Silliman Dickinson, a woman who was widowed three times in the course of a long life (1736–1818). She left behind numerous letters and journals that make possible the reconstruction and dramatization of her life. Steven Schechter, who co-produced the film, did more research of his own and wrote most of the screenplay. It picks up Mary's story in 1779 when she was living in Fairfield, Connecticut, with her

second husband, Gold Selleck Silliman, and their children. Selleck commanded the militia that had to respond to emergencies, and he also served as the county's prosecuting attorney in his civilian capacity. In the northern states, the Revolutionary War after Burgoyne's surrender had become mostly a series of destructive raids, with the British and loyalists based on Long Island and the patriots on the mainland. For good reason, both sides worried about traitors and spies in their midst.

As the film opens, Selleck is successfully prosecuting two loyalist townsmen. When they are sentenced to death, Mary objects that the war is turning neighbor against neighbor, but Selleck will not relent. In retaliation, the loyalists stage a night raid on the Silliman home, capture Selleck, and take him to New York City, the headquarters of the British army. The message seemed clear: If the Fairfield loyalists were to be hanged, Selleck would also die. Thomas Jones, a magistrate and perhaps the most prominent loyalist living on Long Island, had known Selleck since their undergraduate days at Yale College. He

Spanish rule there did not begin well. In 1769, Spain suppressed a small revolt against its restrictions on trade, but in later years, when its trade policy became more favorable, Louisiana enjoyed a level of prosperity it had never known before. The province attracted 2,000 immigrants from the Canary Islands, perhaps 3,000 Acadian refugees, and other French settlers from the Illinois country.

Spaniards also moved into California, partly in response to the migration of Russian hunters into Alaska. Spain founded San Diego in 1769. In the next few years, Spaniards explored the Pacific coastline as far north as southern Alaska, set up an outpost at San Francisco Bay, and built a series of Franciscan missions under Junípero Serra. With little danger from other Europeans, Spain sent relatively few soldiers to California. In fact, its California frontier embodied many aspects of the earlier Florida missions. For the last time in the history of North America, missionaries set the tone for a whole province. As in Florida earlier, Indians died in appalling numbers from European diseases, and many bristled under the severe discipline of the missions.



Mary Fish Silliman at age 58, four years after the death of her second husband, Gold Selleck Silliman.

acted as an intermediary. When Washington refused to exchange a captured British officer for Selleck, who was not an officer in the Continental Army, Mary had to face an unpleasant dilemma. An American privateer, Captain David Holly, offered to raid Long Island, capture Judge Jones, and force the British to negotiate an exchange. Mary disliked privateers and did not approve of Holly, but after the British raided Fairfield and burned most of the town, she consented. The rest of the story explores the consequences of this decision. Mary's deep religious convictions are emphasized throughout the film.

The screenplay telescopes the chronology of these events somewhat, invents a romance between Amelia (a servant in the Silliman household) and Captain Holly, and uses the slave Peter to illustrate the dilemmas that enslaved Africans faced during the war. But the central plot follows a drama that is well documented in the historical record and exposes a side of the Revolutionary War that few Americans are even vaguely aware of. The struggle was a long, brutal conflict that brought liberty to many and equality to smaller numbers but also turned some neighbors against others.

Charles III saw the danger of one imperial power urging the subjects of another to revolt and never made an alliance with the United States, but in 1779 he joined France's war against Britain, hoping to retake Gibraltar and stabilize Spain's North American borders. Britain held Gibraltar, but Spain took West Florida. In 1783, Britain ceded East Florida as well, giving Spain, for the first time in a century, control of the entire coastline of the Gulf of Mexico.

THE RECONSTITUTION OF AUTHORITY

In 1776, the prospect of independence touched off intense debate among Americans on constitutionalism. They agreed that every state needed a written constitution to limit the powers of government in terms more explicit than the precedents, statutes, and customs that made up Britain's unwritten constitution. They moved toward ever fuller expressions of popular sovereignty—the theory that all power must be



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San Diego de Alcalá. *This mission, the first California mission established by Spain in California, was founded on July 16, 1769.*

derived from the people. For four years, these lively debates sparked a learning process until, by 1780, Americans knew what they meant when they insisted that the people of a republic must be their own governors.

John Adams and the Separation of Powers

No one learned more from this process than John Adams. When Thomas Paine advocated a simple, unicameral legislature to carry out the people's will, Adams took alarm. He replied in *Thoughts on Government*, a tract that influenced the men drafting Virginia's constitution, which other states then imitated. In 1776, Adams was already moving away from the British notion of a "mixed and balanced" constitution, in which government by King, Lords, and Commons embodied the distinct social orders of British society. He was groping toward quite a different notion, the **separation of powers**. Government, he affirmed, should be divided into three branches—an executive armed with veto power, a legislature, and a judiciary independent of both. The legislature, he insisted, must be bicameral, so that each house could expose the failings of the other. A free government need not embody distinct social orders to be stable. It could uphold republican values by being properly balanced within itself.

Governments exist to promote the happiness of the people, Adams declared. Happiness depends on "virtue," both public and private. **Public virtue** meant "patriotism," the willingness of citizens to value the common good above their personal interests and even to die for their country. The form of government that

rests entirely on virtue, Adams argued, is a republic. Americans must elect legislatures that would mirror society. Britain had put the nobility in one house and the commoners in another, but in America, everyone was a commoner. America had no social orders. In what sense, then, could any government reflect American society? Without facing the implications of his argument, Adams came close to saying that the legislature should represent the “interests” of its citizens. Should citizens enter politics to pursue selfish interests? What then of selfless patriotism?

In 1776, Adams knew only that the legislature should mirror society. **Unicameral legislatures**, which Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Vermont all adopted, horrified him: “A single assembly, possessed of all the powers of government, would make arbitrary laws for their own interest, execute all laws arbitrarily for their own interest, and adjudge all controversies in their own favor,” he warned. Adams had not yet found a way to distinguish between everyday legislation and the power to create a constitution. While struggling to define what a republic ought to be, he and his admirers could not yet escape two assumptions on which European politics rested—that government must be sovereign, and that it alone could define the rights of the people. A few ordinary settlers had already spotted the dangers of those assumptions. As the citizens of Concord, Massachusetts, warned in October 1776, “A Constitution alterable by the Supreme Legislative [Power] is no Security at all to the Subject against any Encroachment of the Governing part on ... their Rights and Privileges.”

This concern would eventually prompt Americans, including Adams, to invent the embodiment of **popular sovereignty** in its purest form, the constitutional convention. But meanwhile, in 1776, most Americans still assumed that governments must be sovereign. In the early state constitutions, every state lodged **sovereign power** in its legislature and let the legislature define the rights of citizens. In 1776, the American reply to Britain’s sovereign Parliament was 13 sovereign state legislatures—14, with Vermont.

The Virginia Constitution

In June 1776, Virginia became the first state to adopt a permanent, republican constitution. The provincial congress (called a “**convention**” in Virginia), which had assumed full legislative powers, affirmed “that the legislative and executive powers ... should be separate and distinct from the judiciary,” but then wrote a constitution that made the legislature supreme. It chose the governor, the governor’s council, and all judges above the level of justice of the peace. The governor had no veto and hardly any patronage. The lower house faced annual elections, but members of the upper house served four-year terms.

George Mason drafted a declaration of rights that the Virginia delegates passed before approving the constitution, on the theory that the people should define their rights before empowering the government. The convention’s amended text affirmed human equality but, unlike Mason’s original version, was carefully worded to exclude enslaved people. Mason upheld the right to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness, condemned hereditary privilege, called for rotation in office, provided guarantees for trial by jury and due process, and extolled religious liberty. Legally, Virginia’s bill of rights was merely a statute, with no more authority than any other law, but it was eloquent, and many states copied it.

Other states adopted variations of the Virginia model. Because America had no aristocracy, uncertainty about the proper makeup of the upper house was widespread. Some states imposed higher property qualifications on “senators” than on “representatives.” In three states, the lower house elected the upper house. Maryland chose state senators through an **electoral college**, but most states created separate election districts for senators. Most states also increased the number of representatives in the lower house. Inland counties, which were underrepresented in most colonial assemblies, became better represented, and men of moderate wealth won a majority of seats in most states, displacing the rich, who had won most late colonial elections. Most states also stripped the governor of patronage and of such royal prerogatives as the power to dissolve the legislature. At this stage, only New York empowered the governor—in conjunction with a Council of Revision—to veto bills.

The Pennsylvania Constitution

In June 1776, Pennsylvania radicals overthrew Crown, proprietor, and assembly, rejected the leadership of both the old Quaker and Proprietary parties, and elected artisans to office in Philadelphia and ordinary farmers in rural areas. Until 1776, most officeholders had been Quakers or Anglicans. Now, Scots-Irish Presbyterians and German Lutherans or Calvinists replaced most of them and drafted a new constitution in their own quest for legitimacy.

Pennsylvania also came closer than any other state to recognizing the constitutional dangers of resting sovereignty solely in the government—and government’s arm, the legislature—rather than in the citizens. The radicals summoned a special convention whose only task was to write a constitution. That document established a unicameral assembly and a plural executive of 12 men, one of whom would preside and thus be called “president.” All freemen who paid taxes, and their adult sons living at home, could vote. Elections were annual, voting was by secret ballot, legislative sessions were open to the public, and no representative could serve for more than four years out of any seven. All bills were to be offered to the public for discussion before passage. Only at the next legislative session could they be passed into law, except in emergencies. Pennsylvania also created a Council of Censors to meet every seven years to determine whether the constitution had been violated. It could also recommend amendments.

The Pennsylvania constitution generated intense conflict in late 1776 as the British army drew near. In this emergency, the convention that drafted the constitution also began to pass laws, destroying any distinction between itself and the legislature it was creating. Likewise, the convention and the legislatures that succeeded it rarely delayed the enactment of a bill until after voters were able to discuss it. The war lent a sense of emergency to most measures. Even more alarming, many residents condemned the new constitution as illegitimate. The men driven from power in 1776 never consented to it and saw little reason to accept it. The radicals, calling themselves Constitutionals, required all citizens to uphold the constitution and then disenfranchised those who refused to support it, such as Quakers.

These illiberal measures gave radicals a majority in the legislature into the 1780s and kept voter turnout low in most elections, although some men (mostly

leaders of the old Proprietary Party) took the new oath only to form an opposition party. Called Anticonstitutionalists at first (that is, opponents of the 1776 constitution), they soon took the name Republicans. After the war, as the disenfranchised regained the right to vote, Republicans won a solid majority in the legislature, secured ratification of the federal Constitution, and then, in 1790, replaced the 1776 state constitution with a new one that created a bicameral legislature and an elective governor with a veto that could be overridden.

Massachusetts Redefines Constitutionalism

Another bitter struggle occurred in Massachusetts. After four years of intense debate, Massachusetts found a way to lodge sovereignty with the people and not with government—that is, a way to distinguish a constitution from simple laws.

In response to the Massachusetts Government Act passed by Parliament in 1774, the colonists had prevented the royal courts from sitting. In the three western counties of Worcester, Hampshire, and Berkshire, they had ousted from office a group of wealthy, intermarried families (called “river gods” in Connecticut valley towns), most of whom became loyalists. The courts remained closed until the British withdrew from Boston in March 1776 when the provincial congress moved into the city and reestablished itself as the General Court under the royal charter of 1691. The legislature then reapportioned itself. Under the old system, most towns elected a single representative. A few (such as Salem) chose two. Only Boston could elect four. The new system let towns choose representatives in proportion to population. It rewarded the older, populous eastern towns at the expense of the lightly settled western towns.

When the General Court also revived royal practice by appointing its own members as county judges and justices of the peace, the western counties exploded. Denouncing the “antient Mode of Government among us which we so much detest and abhor,” they attacked the reapportionment act and refused to reopen the courts in Hampshire and Berkshire counties. Most of Berkshire’s radicals were Baptists in religion and Lockians in politics. They insisted on contracts or compacts as the basis of authority in both church and state and kept using county conventions in place of the courts. To Berkshire Constitutionalists, a **convention** was the purest expression of the will of the people, superior to any legislature. These uneducated farmers set the pace in demanding a formal constitution for the state.

In fall 1776, the General Court asked the towns to authorize it to draft a constitution. By a 2-to-1 margin, the voters agreed, a result that reflected growing *distrust* of the legislature. Six months earlier, hardly anyone would have questioned this procedure. The legislature drafted a constitution over the next year and then, in an unusual precaution, asked the towns to ratify it. The voters rejected it by the stunning margin of 5 to 1. Many voters, angry about a particular clause, condemned the entire document. Chastened, the General Court urged the towns to postpone the question until after the war. Hampshire County reopened its courts in April 1778, but Berkshire County threatened to secede from the state unless the legislature called a constitutional convention. These farmers insisted that they were now in a “state of nature,” subject to no legitimate government. They might even join another state that had a proper constitution. With Vermont already seceding from New York, theirs was no idle threat.

The General Court gave in, and a convention met in Boston in December 1779. John Adams drafted a constitution that the convention used as its starting point. A constitution now had to be drafted by a convention that was elected for that specific purpose, and then ratified by the people. The people would then be the source of all legitimate authority.

Since 1776, Adams's thoughts on the separation of powers and bicameralism had matured. Like the Virginia constitution, the Adams draft began with a bill of rights. Both houses would be elected annually. The House of Representatives would be chosen by the towns, as reapportioned in 1776. Senators would be elected by counties and apportioned according to property values, not population. The people would elect the governor who would have a veto that two-thirds of both houses could override. Property qualifications rose as a man's civic duties increased. For purposes of ratification only, all free adult males were eligible to vote. Everyone (that is, all free men) would have a chance to consent to the basic social compact. Men had to vote on each article separately, not on the whole document.

During spring 1780, town meetings began the ratification process. The convention tallied the results and declared that the constitution had received the required two-thirds majority, but it juggled the figures on two articles, both involving religion, to get this result. Those articles provided for the public support of ministers and required the governor to be a Christian. Baptists objected to all taxes for the support of religion, and many Protestants wanted to bar Catholics from the governorship. The new constitution, although often amended, is still in force today, making it the world's oldest written constitution. Starting with New Hampshire in 1784, other states adopted the Massachusetts model.

Confederation

Before independence, hardly anyone had given serious thought to how an American nation ought to be governed. Dozens of colonists had drafted plans for conciliation with Britain, but through 1775, only Franklin, Connecticut's Silas Deane, and an anonymous newspaper essayist had presented actual plans for an American union. Franklin's was an updated version of the Albany Plan of 1754. These plans attracted no public comment. Colonists passionately debated the empire and their state constitutions, but not how to govern America.

Congress began discussing the American union in summer 1776. It had been voting by state since the First Continental Congress in 1774. Delegates from large states favored representation according to population, but no census existed to give precise numbers, and the small states insisted on being treated as equals. So long as Britain was ready to embrace any state that defected, small states had great leverage: The tail could wag the dog. In an early draft of the Articles of Confederation, John Dickinson rejected proportional representation in favor of state equality. He enumerated the powers of Congress, which did not include levying taxes or regulating trade. To raise money, Congress would have to print it or requisition specific amounts from the states. Congress then split over how to apportion these requisitions. Northern states wanted to count slaves in computing the ratios. Southern states wanted apportionment based on each state's free population. Western lands were another divisive issue. States with fixed borders pressured

states with boundary claims stretching into the Ohio or Mississippi valleys to surrender their claims to Congress. Many speculators favored the land cessions. Congress could not resolve these issues in 1776.

Debate resumed after Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton. Thomas Burke of North Carolina introduced a resolution that eventually became part of the Articles of Confederation: "Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled." Acceptance of Burke's resolution, with only Virginia dissenting, ensured that the Articles would contain a firm commitment to state sovereignty. Only after Saratoga was Congress able to complete the Articles. In the final version, it was given no power over western land claims, and requisitions would be based on each state's free population. In 1781, Congress urged that each slave be counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of apportioning requisitions, but this amendment was never ratified.

In November 1777, Congress asked the states to ratify the Articles by March 10, 1778, but only Virginia met the deadline. Most states tried to attach conditions, which Congress rejected, but by midsummer, 10 had ratified. The three dissenters, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland, without western land claims, were small states that feared the large states. Maryland held out for more than three years, until Virginia agreed to cede its land claims north of the Ohio River to Congress. The Articles finally went into force on March 1, 1781.

By 1780, Congress had lost most of its power. Prominent members, such as Jefferson and Samuel Adams, had returned home to help reshape their state governments. Others, such as Washington, had taken army commands, and some, including Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay, had departed on diplomatic assignments. The effort to manage everything through congressional committees created impossible bottlenecks. In 1776, the states had looked to Congress to confer legitimacy on their governments, especially in the middle states, but as the states adopted their own constitutions, their legitimacy, based on the people, became stronger than that of Congress. More alarming, by then Congress simply could not pay its bills.

THE CRISIS OF THE REVOLUTION, 1779–1783

Americans expected a quick victory under the French alliance. Instead, the struggle turned into a grim war of attrition, testing which side would first exhaust its resources or lose the will to fight. Loyalists became much more important to the British war effort, both as a source of manpower and as a major justification for continuing the war. Most settlers, argued Lord North, were still loyal to Britain. They could turn the contest around. To abandon them would be dishonorable and might lead to a bloodbath. The British looked to the Deep South as the likeliest recruiting ground for armed loyalists. The Carolinas, bitterly divided by the regulator movements and vulnerable to massive slave defections, seemed a promising source.

The Loyalists

Loyalists embraced English ideas of liberty. Most of them had objected to the Stamp Act and other British measures but doubted that Parliament intended to undermine government by consent in the

colonies. They also thought that creating a new American union was a far riskier venture than remaining part of the British Empire. For many, the choice of loyalties was painful. Some waited until the fighting reached their door before deciding which soldiers to join and which to shoot at. The loyalists then learned a stark truth: They could not fire at their neighbors and expect to retain their homes except under the protection of the British army. The British, in turn, were slow to take advantage of the loyalists. At first, British officers regarded loyalist military potential with the same disdain that they bestowed on the patriots. But after Saratoga, loyalists, who stood to lose everything in an American victory, showed that they could be impressive soldiers.

About one-sixth of the white population chose the British side in the war, and 19,000 men joined one of some 40-odd loyalist military units, mostly after 1778, when Britain grew desperate for soldiers. Unlike most patriots, loyalists served long terms, even for the duration. They could not go home unless they won. By 1780, the number of loyalists under arms may have exceeded the number of Continentals by almost two to one. American states retaliated by banishing prominent loyalists under pain of death and by confiscating their property.

Loyalist Refugees, Black and White

When given the choice, most slaves south of New England sided with Britain. In New England, they sensed that they could gain freedom by joining the rebels; many volunteered for service. Elsewhere, although some fought for the Revolution, they realized that their best chance of emancipation lay with the British army. During the war, perhaps 50,000 slaves (about 10 percent) fled their owners; of that total, between 8,000 and 10,000 were evacuated by the British. The decision to flee carried risks. In South Carolina during Clinton's 1776 invasion, hundreds reached the Sea Islands to join the British, only to face their owners' wrath when the British failed to rescue them. Some approached British units only to be treated as contraband (property). They faced possible resale. But most slaves who reached British lines won their freedom, even though the British army never became an instrument of systematic emancipation. When the British withdrew after the war, blacks went with them, many to Jamaica, some to Nova Scotia, others to London. In the 1780s, the British created a colony for former slaves at Sierra Leone in West Africa. A few even ended up in Australia.

The war, in short, created an enormous stream of refugees, black and white. In addition to 10,000 former slaves, some 60,000 to 70,000 colonists left for other parts of the British Empire. The American Revolution created 30 refugees for every 1,000 people, compared with 5 per 1,000 created by the French Revolution in the 1790s. About 35,000 settlers found their way to the Maritime Provinces. Another 6,000 to 10,000 fled to Quebec, settled upriver from the older French population, and in 1791 became the new province of Upper Canada (later Ontario). After 1783, low taxes and a generous land policy, which required an oath of allegiance to George III, attracted thousands of post-loyalist immigrants to Canada from the United States. By the War of 1812, four-fifths of Upper Canada's 100,000 people were American-born. Although only one-fifth of them could be traced to the loyalist emigration, these settlers supported Britain in that

war. In a real sense, the American Revolution laid the foundation for two new nations—the United States and Canada—and competition between them for settlers and their loyalties continued long after the fighting stopped.

The Indian Struggle for Unity and Survival

Indians of the eastern woodlands began to play a more active role in the war. Most of them saw that an American victory would threaten their survival as a people on their ancestral lands. They supported Britain in the hope that a British victory might stem the flood of western expansion, and they achieved a level of unity without precedent in their history.

At first, most Indians tried to remain neutral. The British were rebuffed when they asked the Iroquois to fight against the colonists. Delawares and Shawnees, defeated in Dunmore's War in 1774, also stood neutral. Only the Cherokees took up arms in 1776. Short on British supplies, they took heavy losses before making peace and accepting neutrality—although a splinter group, the Chickamaugas, continued to resist. In the Deep South, only the Catawbias—by now much reduced in number—fought on the American side.

Burgoyne's invasion brought the Iroquois into the war. Mohawks in the east and Senecas in the west sided with Britain under the leadership of Joseph Brant, a literate, educated Mohawk and a Freemason. His sister, Mary Brant, emerged as a skillful diplomat in the alliance between the Iroquois and the loyalists. A minority of Oneidas and Tuscaroras fought with the Americans. Most were becoming Christians under a patriot Presbyterian missionary, Samuel Kirkland. Despite severe strains during the Revolution, the Iroquois League did not dissolve until after the war, when those who fought for Britain migrated to Canada.

A minority of Shawnees, led by Cornplanter, and of Delawares, led by White Eyes and Killbuck, desired friendly relations with the Americans. They provided intelligence to American forces and served as wilderness guides, but they refused to fight other Indians and did their best to preserve peace along the frontier. Christian Moravian Indians in the Ohio country took a similar stance. The reluctance of Indians to kill other Indians, already becoming evident during the Seven Years' War, grew even more obvious during the Revolution. Loyalists and patriots were far more willing than Indians to kill one another.

Frontier racism, already conspicuous in Pontiac's War, intensified and made Indian neutrality all but impossible. Backcountry settlers from Carolina through New York refused to accept the neutrals on their own terms. Indian warriors, especially young men influenced by nativist prophets, increasingly believed that the Great Spirit had created whites, Indians, and blacks as separate peoples who ought to remain apart. Their militancy further enraged the settlers. White hunters, disdained by easterners as "near savages," secured their identity as "whites" (a fairly new term) by killing Indians.

Hatred of Indians grew so extreme that it threatened to undercut the American war effort. In 1777, a Continental officer had Cornplanter murdered. In 1778, American militia killed White Eyes. Four years later, Americans massacred 100 unarmed Moravian mission Indians at Gnadenhutten, Ohio. Nearly all of them were women and children who knelt in prayer as, one by one, their skulls were crushed

with mallets. This atrocity brutalized Indians as well as settlers. Until then, most Indians had refrained from the ritual torture of prisoners, but after Gnadenhutzen they resumed the custom—selectively. They burned alive any known leaders of the massacre whom they captured.

Faced with hatred, Indians united to protect their lands. They won the frontier war north of the Ohio River. The Iroquois ravaged the Wyoming valley of Pennsylvania in 1778. When an American army devastated Iroquoia in 1779 and committed many atrocities along the way, the Indians fell back on the British post at Niagara and continued the struggle. In 1779, nearly all Indians, from the Creeks on the Gulf Coast to the nations of the Great Lakes, exchanged emissaries and



MAP 6.2 War on the Frontier, 1777–1782

Indian unity during the Revolution exceeded even what had been achieved in Pontiac's War.

planned an all-out war along the frontier. George Rogers Clark of Virginia thwarted their offensive with a daring winter raid in which he captured Vincennes and cut off the western nations from British supplies, but the Indians regrouped, and by 1782 drove the Virginia “long knives” out of the Ohio country.

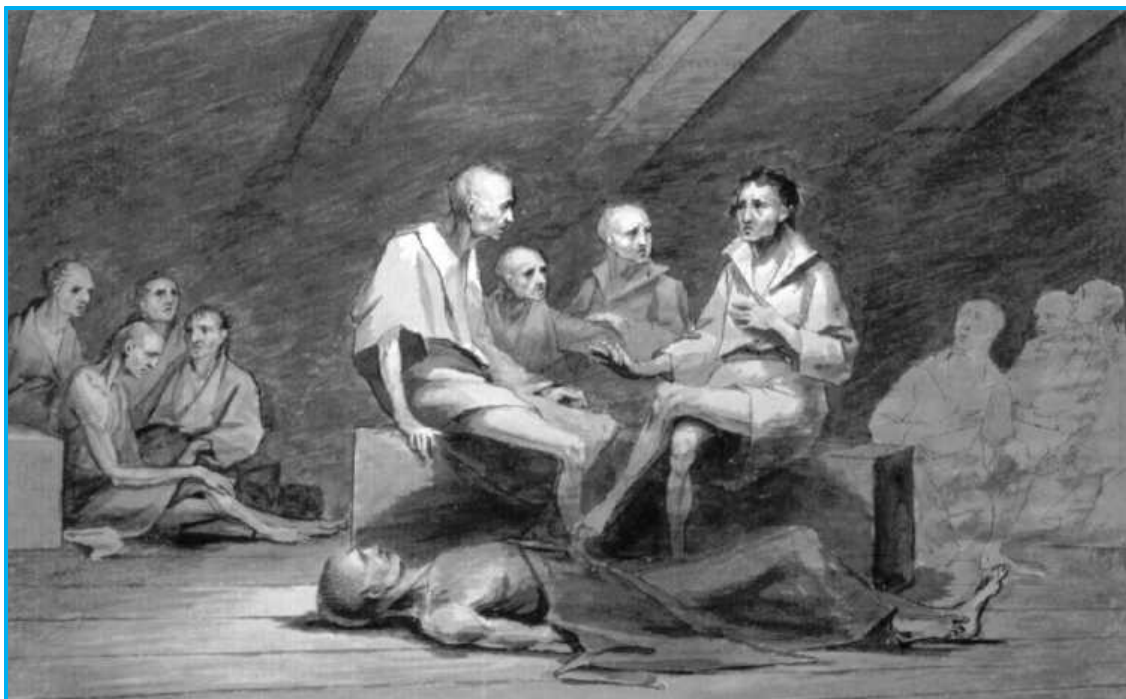
Attrition

After 1778, George III’s determination to continue the war bitterly divided his kingdom. Much of the British public doubted that the war could be won. Trade was disrupted, thousands of ships were lost to privateers, taxes and the national debt soared, military recruits became harder to find, and a French invasion became a serious threat. Political dissent rose and included widespread demand for the reduction of royal patronage and for electoral reforms. A proposal to abolish Germain’s office, a clear attack on the American war, failed in the Commons by only 208 votes to 201 in March 1780. In April, a resolve to denounce the influence of the Crown carried 233 votes to 215. The king barely persuaded North not to resign.

Desperate for men, the British army had been quietly recruiting Irish Catholics, and North supported a modest degree of toleration for English and Scottish Catholics. This leniency produced a surge of Protestant violence culminating in the Gordon riots, named for an eccentric agitator, Lord George Gordon. For a week in June 1780, crowds roared through London, smashing Catholic chapels attached to foreign embassies, liberating prisoners from city jails, and finally attacking the Bank of England. The army, supported by Lord Mayor John Wilkes, put down the rioters. This spectacular violence discredited the reformers and gave North one more chance to win the war.

Attrition also weakened the United States. Indian raids reduced harvests, and military levies kept thousands of men away from productive work. Loyalist raids into Connecticut and New Jersey wore down the defenders and destroyed a great deal of property. A 1779 raid on Virginia carried off or destroyed property worth £2 million. Merchants lost most of their European and West Indian markets, although a few of them made huge profits through blockade running or privateering. Average household income plunged by more than 40 percent. Even major American triumphs came at a high price. Burgoyne’s surrender left Americans with the burden of feeding his army for the rest of the war. Provisioning a French fleet in American waters, and later a French army, put huge strains on American resources.

These heavy demands led to the collapse of the Continental dollar in 1779–80. Congress had been printing money to pay its bills, using the Spanish dollar as its basic monetary unit. With French support bolstering American credit, this practice worked reasonably well into 1778. The money depreciated but without causing widespread dissatisfaction. As the war ground on, though, the value of Continental money fell to less than a penny on the dollar in 1779. Congress agreed to stop the printing presses and to rely instead on requisitions from the states and on foreign and domestic loans, but without paper money it could not even pay the army. Congress and the army had to requisition supplies directly from farmers in exchange for certificates geared to an inflation rate of 40 to 1, well below its true rate. Many farmers, rather than lose money on their crops, simply cut back production. William Beadle, a Connecticut shopkeeper, tried to fight inflation by



Charles Allen Munn Collection, Fordham University Library, Bronx, New York

John Trumbull, “American Prisoners.” *Conditions on British prison ships almost reached the horrors of the Middle Passage from Africa but lasted longer.*

accepting Continental money at face value until he saw the consequences. Rather than leave his wife and children impoverished, he slit their throats and shot himself.

Continental soldiers—unpaid, ill clothed, and often poorly fed—grew mutinous. As they became more professional through frequent drill, they also became more contemptuous of civilians. The winter of 1779–80, the worst of the century, marked a low point in morale among the main force of Continentals snowed in with Washington at Morristown, New Jersey. Many deserted. In May 1780, two Connecticut regiments of the Continental Line, without food for three days, threatened to go home, raising the danger that the whole army might dissolve. Their officers barely managed to restore control. On paper, Washington had 16,000 men. His real strength was 3,600 and not even enough horses to move his artillery.

THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE IN THE SOUTH

In 1780, the British attacked in the Deep South with great success. The Revolution entered its most critical phase and nearly collapsed. “I have almost ceased to hope,” Washington confessed. In December 1778, a small British amphibious force had taken Savannah and had held it through 1779. The British even restored royal government with an elective assembly in Georgia between 1780 and 1782. By early 1780, they were ready to launch a major offensive. General Clinton had finally devised a strategy for winning the war.

Much of his New York army would sail to Charleston, take it, and dispatch loyalists to pacify the countryside. Some of the regulars would remain in the

Carolinas to deal with any other army the Americans might field. Clinton would return with the rest to New York and land on the Jersey coast with a force three times larger than Washington's at Morristown. By dividing this army into two columns, Clinton could break through both passes of the Watchung Mountains leading to Morristown. Washington would have to hold fast and become overwhelmed or else abandon his artillery for lack of horses and then attack one of the invading columns on unfavorable terms. Either way, Clinton reasoned, the Continental Army would be destroyed. He was also negotiating secretly with a disgruntled Benedict Arnold (he had won little recognition for his heroics in the Saratoga campaign) for the surrender of West Point, thus opening the Hudson River to British ships as far north as Albany. Arnold had begun trading intelligence for cash in 1779. Finally, if the French landed in Newport, which the British had evacuated, Clinton would move against them with nearly his entire New York fleet and garrison. If he succeeded there too, he would have smashed every professional force in North America within a year's time. His remaining task would then be pacification, which he could pretty much leave to loyalists. But he told no one else about his New Jersey plan.

Clinton's invasion of South Carolina began with awesome successes. While the British navy sealed off Charleston from the sea, an army of 10,000 closed off the land approaches to the city and forced Benjamin Lincoln and 5,000 defenders to surrender on May 12. Loyalists under Banastre Tarleton caught the 350 remaining Continentals at the Waxhaws near the North Carolina border on May 29 and, in what became infamous as "Tarleton's quarter," killed them all. This calculated brutality was designed to terrorize civilians into submission. It worked for a time, but Thomas Sumter began to retaliate after loyalists burned his plantation. His mounted raiders attacked British outposts and terrorized loyalists. At Hanging Rock on August 6, Sumter's 800 men scattered 500 loyalists, killing or wounding nearly half of them. All participants on both sides were colonists. The struggle had become a civil war.

Leaving Cornwallis in command of 8,300 men in South Carolina, Clinton sailed north with one-third of his Carolina army, only to learn that loyalists, fearing that he would never take the initiative in the north, had persuaded Wilhelm, Baron von Knyphausen, New York's temporary commander, to land in New Jersey with 6,000 men on the night of June 6–7. Even a force that small would pose a grave threat to Washington unless the militia came to his aid. Loyalists hoped that the militia were so weary from the harsh winter and numerous raids that they would not turn out. Some companies were even mustering women. But to the dismay of the British, the militia appeared in force on June 7. Only after an inconclusive engagement did Knyphausen learn that Clinton was on his way with his own plan of attack. The British pulled back to the coast and waited, but they had lost the element of surprise. On June 23, Clinton attacked at Springfield while loyalists burned the village. Springfield became America's civil war in miniature. New Jersey loyalist regiments attacked the New Jersey regiments of the Continental Line, who were assisted by New Jersey militia. A stout defense persuaded Clinton to withdraw to New York.

With Washington's army intact, Clinton ignored the French when they took Newport. After June 1780, the British put all of their hopes on the southern campaign. Even Arnold's attempt to betray West Point was thwarted in September.

Clinton's agent, John André, was caught and hanged, but Arnold fled to British lines and became a general in the British army.

Despite Sumter's harassment, Cornwallis's conquest of the Carolinas proceeded rapidly. Congress scraped together 900 tough Maryland and Delaware Continentals, put Horatio Gates, the victor at Saratoga, in command, and sent them south against Cornwallis. Bolstered by 2,000 Virginia and North Carolina militia, Gates rashly offered battle at Camden on August 16, even though many of his men suffered from diarrhea after eating half-baked bread. The militia, who lacked bayonets, fled in panic at the first British charge. The exposed Continentals fought bravely but were crushed. Gates rode an astonishing 240 miles in three days to Hillsborough, North Carolina, before informing Congress that he had suffered "total Defeat." Two days after Camden, Tarleton surprised Sumter's camp at Fishing Creek, near the Waxhaws, killing 150 men and wounding 300. In four months, the British had destroyed all of the Continental forces in the Deep South, mauled Sumter's partisans, and opened North Carolina to invasion. These victories seemed to fulfill Cornwallis's boast that he would strip "three stripes ... from the detestable thirteen." He unleashed his loyalists to pacify South Carolina and marched confidently on to "liberate" North Carolina.

The Partisan War

But resistance continued. In the west, frontier riflemen, led by Daniel Morgan and enraged by Britain's support for Indians, crossed the Blue Ridge 1,800 strong to challenge Patrick Ferguson's loyalists at King's Mountain near the North Carolina border. On October 7, 1780, Morgan lost only 88 men as his marksmen picked off many defenders. He overwhelmed the loyalists, killing 160 men, including Ferguson, and capturing 860. They shot many prisoners and hanged a dozen, their answer to "Tarleton's quarter." This victory, the first major British setback in the Deep South, stung Cornwallis, who halted his drive into North Carolina.

In October 1780, Congress sent **Nathanael Greene** to the Carolinas with a small Continental force. After Sumter withdrew to nurse a wound, Francis Marion took his place. A much abler leader, Marion (who became known as the Swamp Fox) operated from remote bases in the marshy low country. Yet Greene's prospects seemed desperate. The ugliness of the partisan war—the mutilation of corpses, killing of prisoners, and wanton destruction of property—and the condition of his soldiers appalled him. Yet Greene and Marion devised a masterful strategy of partisan warfare that finally wore out the British.

In the face of a greatly superior enemy, Greene ignored a maxim of war and split up his force of 1,800 Continentals. He sent 300 men east to bolster Marion and ordered Daniel Morgan and 300 riflemen west to threaten the British outpost of Ninety-Six. Cornwallis, worried that after King's Mountain, Morgan might raise the entire backcountry against the British, divided his own army. He sent Tarleton with a mixed force of 1,100 British and loyalists after Morgan, who decided to stand with his back to a river at Cowpens, where a loyalist kept cattle. Including militia, Morgan had 1,040 men.

Tarleton attacked on January 17, 1781. In another unorthodox move, Morgan sent his militia out front as skirmishers. He ordered them to fire two rounds and then redeploy in his rear. Relieved of their fear of a bayonet charge, they obeyed.

As they pulled back, the British rushed forward into the Continentals, who also retreated at first, then wheeled and fired a lethal volley. After Morgan's cavalry charged into the British left flank, the militia returned to the fray. Although Tarleton escaped, Morgan annihilated his army.



MAP 6.3 War in the Lower South, 1780–1781

British victories in 1780 nearly restored Georgia and South Carolina to the Crown, but after Guilford Court House in March 1781, the Americans regained the advantage throughout the region.

As Morgan rejoined Greene, Cornwallis staked everything on his ability to find Greene and crush him, precisely what he had failed to do to Washington after Trenton and Princeton. But Greene had placed flatboats in his rear at major river crossings and then lured Cornwallis into a march of exhaustion. In a race to the Dan River, Cornwallis burned his baggage to travel lightly. Greene escaped on his flatboats across the Yadkin River, flooded with spring rains, just ahead of Cornwallis—who had to march to a ford 10 miles upstream, cross the river, and then march back while Greene rested. Greene repeated this stratagem all the way to the Dan until he judged that Cornwallis was so weak that the Americans could offer battle at Guilford Court House. With militia he outnumbered Cornwallis 4,400 to 1,900. On March 15, 1781, even though the British retained possession of the battlefield, they lost one-quarter of their force and the strategic initiative. Cornwallis retreated to Wilmington to refit. He then marched into Virginia—the seat of southern resistance, he told Clinton, the one place where Britain could achieve decisive results. Instead of following him, Greene returned to South Carolina, where he and Marion took the surviving British outposts one by one. After the British evacuated Ninety-Six on July 1, 1781, they held only Savannah and Charleston in the Deep South. Against heavy odds, Greene had reclaimed the region for the Revolution.

Mutiny and Reform

After the Camden disaster, army officers and state leaders demanded reforms to strengthen Congress and win the war.

State legislatures sent their ablest men to Congress. Maryland, the last state to hold out, finally completed the American union by ratifying the Articles of Confederation. But before any reforms could take effect, discontent again erupted in the army. Insisting that their three-year enlistments had expired, 1,500 men of the Pennsylvania Line got drunk on New Year's Day 1781, killed three officers, and marched out of their winter quarters at Morristown. General Clinton sent agents from New York to promise these men a pardon and their back pay if they defected to the British, but instead the mutineers marched south toward Princeton and turned Clinton's agents over to Pennsylvania authorities, who then executed the agents. Congress, reassured, negotiated with the soldiers. More than half of them accepted discharges, and those who reenlisted got furloughs and bonuses. Encouraged by this treatment, 200 New Jersey soldiers at Pompton also mutinied, but Washington used New England units to disarm them and executed two of the leaders.

Civilian violence, such as the "Fort Wilson" riot in Philadelphia, also prompted Congress to change policies. Radical artisans blamed rich merchants for the rampant inflation of 1779 and demanded price controls. Merchants blamed paper money. In October, several men were killed when the antagonists exchanged shots near the fortified home of James Wilson, a rich lawyer. Radical spokesmen deplored the violence and gave up the quest for price controls. For city dwellers, sound money was becoming the only solution to the devastating inflation.

Congress saw these outbursts as calls for national reforms. While armed partisans were making the war more radical, politics became more conservative, moving toward the creation of European state forms, such as executive departments and a bank. Patriot leaders gave up efforts at price control and allowed the market to set prices and the value of money. Congress stopped printing money, abandoned its cumbersome committee system, and created executive departments of foreign

affairs, finance, war, and marine. Robert Morris, a Philadelphia merchant, became secretary of finance, helped organize the Bank of North America (the first in America), and made certain that the Continental Army was clothed and well fed, although it still was not paid. Congress began to requisition revenue from the states, and they began to impose heavy taxes but not enough to meet both their own and national needs. Congress tried to amend the Articles of Confederation in 1781 and asked the states for a 5 percent duty on all imports. Most states quickly ratified the “impost” amendment, but Rhode Island rejected it in 1783. Because amendments needed unanimous approval by the states, this opposition killed the impost. A new impost proposal in 1783 was defeated by New York in 1786.

The reforms of 1781 barely kept a smaller army in the field for the rest of the war, but the executive departments had an unforeseen effect. Congress had been a plural executive, a substitute for the imperial Crown. But once Congress created its own departments, it looked more like a feeble legislature. It began to pass, not just “orders” and “resolves,” but also “ordinances,” which were meant to be permanent and binding. It still could not punish anyone for noncompliance, which may be why it never called any of its measures “laws.”

From the Ravaging of Virginia to Yorktown and Peace

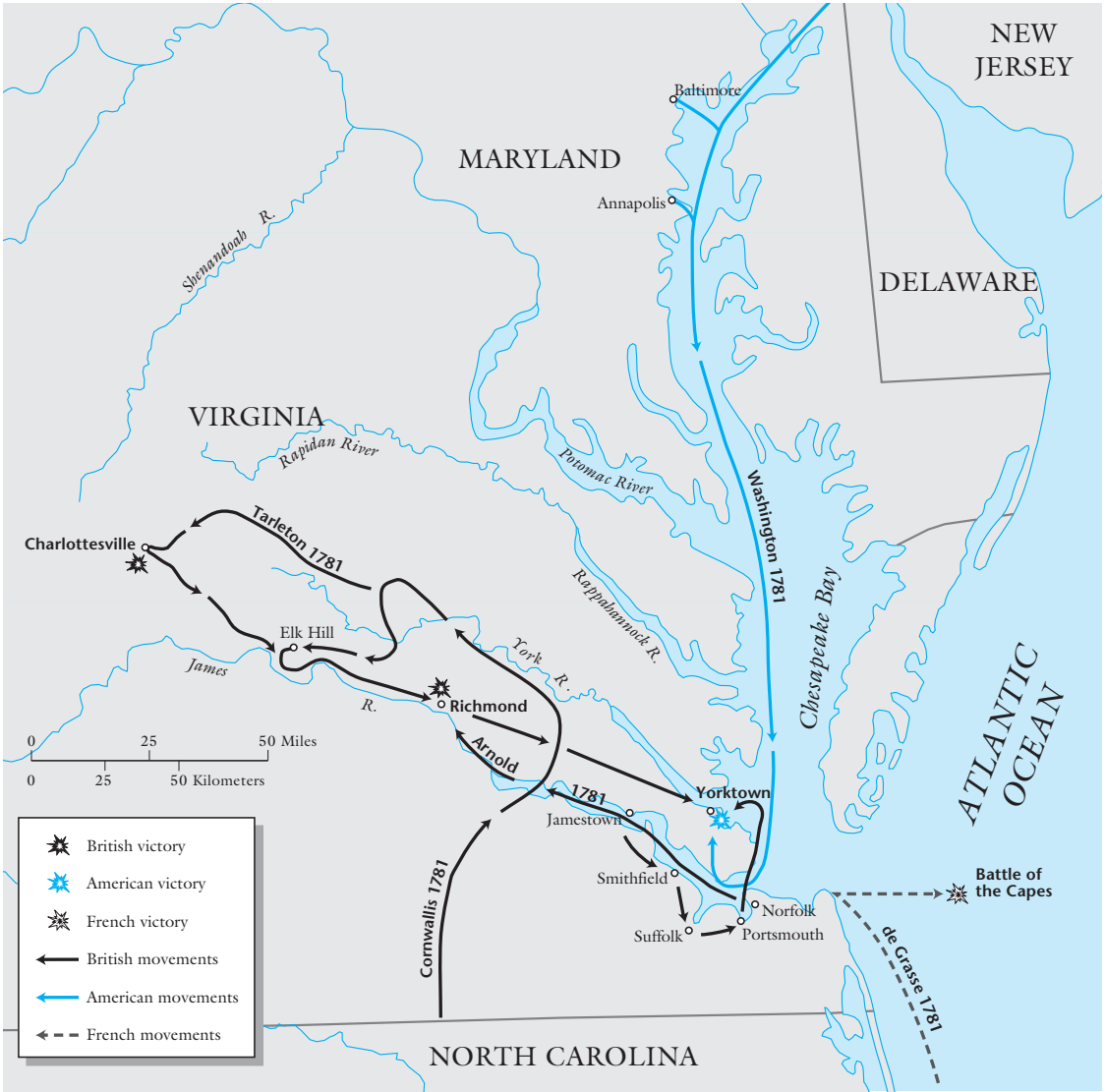
Both Cornwallis and Washington believed that events in Virginia would decide the war. When a large British force raided the state in late 1780, Governor Thomas Jefferson called up enough militia to keep the British bottled up in Portsmouth, while he continued to ship men and supplies to Greene in the Carolinas. Thereafter, the state's ability to raise men and supplies almost collapsed.

In January 1781, Clinton sent Arnold by sea from New York with 1,600 men, mostly loyalists. They sailed up the James and gutted the new capital of Richmond. When Jefferson called out the militia, few responded. Virginia had not experienced the partisan struggles that drew men to both sides in New Jersey and the Carolinas. The state provided a different kind of test for American values under stress. The voluntaristic ethic nearly failed to get the state through a long war. Most Virginia freemen had already done service, if only as short-term militia, thousands in response to the 1780 raid. In 1781, they thought it was now someone else's turn. For months, there was no one else. Cornwallis took command in April, and Arnold departed for New York. But the raids continued into summer, sweeping as far west as Charlottesville, where Tarleton, who had recruited a new legion since Cowpens, scattered the Virginia legislature and almost captured Jefferson. Many of Jefferson's slaves greeted the British as liberators. Washington sent Lafayette with 1,200 northern Continentals to contain the damage, while Cornwallis, on Clinton's orders, withdrew to Yorktown.

At last, Washington saw an opportunity to launch a major strike. He learned that a powerful French fleet under François, Comte de Grasse, with 3,000 soldiers would sail from Saint-Domingue for Chesapeake Bay on August 13. Cooperating closely with the French army commander, Jean Baptiste Donatien, Comte de Rochambeau, Washington sprang his trap. Rochambeau led his 5,000 soldiers from Newport to the outskirts of New York, where they joined Washington's 5,000 Continentals. After feinting an attack to freeze Clinton in place, Washington led the combined French and American armies 400 miles south to tidewater Virginia,

where they linked up with Lafayette’s Americans and the other French army brought by de Grasse. After de Grasse’s fleet beat off a British relief force at the Battle of the Capes on September 5, Washington cut off all retreat routes and besieged **Yorktown**. On October 19, 1781, Cornwallis surrendered his army of 8,000 men. Many escaped slaves died during the siege, most from smallpox, but planters hovered nearby to reclaim survivors.

Yorktown brought down the British government in March 1782. Lord North resigned, and George III even drafted an abdication message but never released it. The new ministry, committed to American independence as the price of peace, continued to fight the French in the Caribbean and the Spanish at Gibraltar, but the British evacuated Savannah and Charleston to concentrate their remaining forces in New York City.



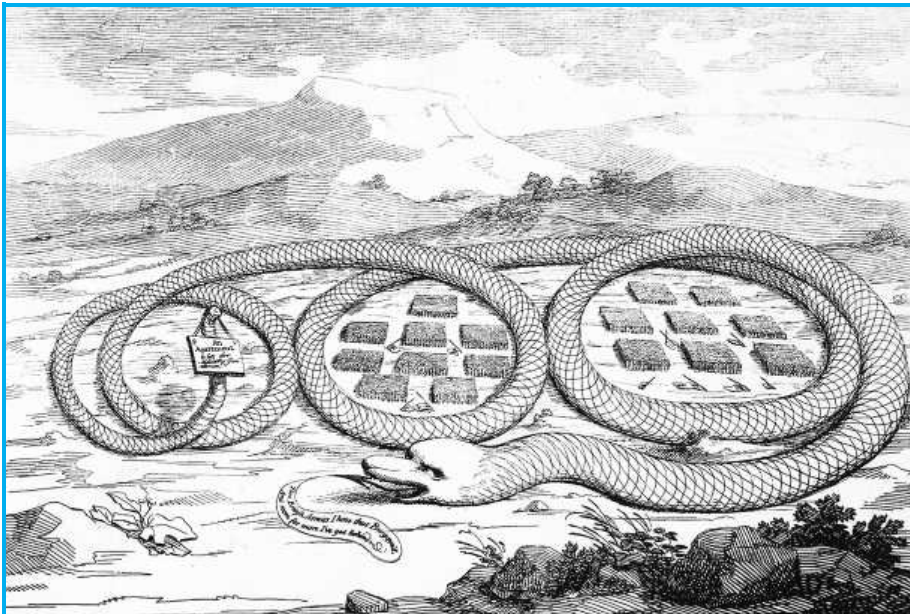
MAP 6.4 Virginia and the Yorktown Campaign

After the British ravaged much of Virginia, Washington and a French fleet and army were able to trap Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, force his surrender, and guarantee American independence.

Contrary to the French Treaty of 1778, John Jay and John Adams opened secret peace talks in Paris with the British. They won British recognition of the Mississippi, but without New Orleans, as the western boundary of the new republic. New Englanders retained the right to fish off Newfoundland. The treaty recognized the validity of prewar transatlantic debts, and Congress promised to urge the states to restore confiscated loyalist property. These terms gave American diplomats almost everything they could have desired. After the negotiations were far advanced, the Americans told Vergennes what they were doing. He feigned indignation, but the threat of a separate peace gave him the leverage he needed with Spain. Spain stopped demanding that France keep fighting until Gibraltar surrendered. The Treaty of Paris ended the war in 1783. Western Indians were appalled to learn that the treaty gave their lands to the United States. They had not been conquered, whatever European diplomats might say. Their war for survival continued with few breaks into 1795.

Congress still faced ominous problems. In March 1783, many Continental officers threatened a coup d'état unless Congress granted them generous pensions. Washington, confronting them at their encampment at Newburgh, New York, fumbled for his glasses and remarked, "I have grown gray in your service, and now find myself growing blind." Tears filled the eyes of his comrades in arms, and the threat of a coup vanished.

In Philadelphia two months later, unpaid Pennsylvania soldiers marched on the statehouse, where both Congress and the state's executive council sat. Ignoring Congress, they demanded that Pennsylvania redress their grievances. Congress felt insulted and left the city for Princeton, where it reconvened in Nassau Hall. Its archives and administrative departments remained in Philadelphia. "I confess I have great apprehensions for the union of the states," wrote Charles Thomson, secretary to



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

"The American Rattle Snake." This 1782 cartoon celebrated the victory of Yorktown, the second time in the war that an entire British army had surrendered to the United States.

Congress since 1774. The British threat, Thomson knew, had created the American Union. He feared that the Union would dissolve with the return of peace. Congress moved on from Princeton to Annapolis and eventually settled in New York, but the Union's survival remained uncertain.

A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY

Independence transformed America. The biggest winners were free householders, who gained enormous benefits from the democratization of politics and the chance to colonize the West. Besides loyalists, the biggest losers were Indians, determined to resist settler expansion. Many slaves won freedom, and women struggled for greater dignity. Both succeeded only when their goals proved compatible with the ambitions of white householders.

Religious Transformations

Independence left the Anglican Church vulnerable, if only because George III was its "supreme head." Although most Anglican clergymen supported the Revolution or remained neutral, an aggressive loyalist minority stirred the wrath of patriots. Religious dissenters disestablished the Anglican Church in every southern state. They deprived it of its tax support and other privileges, such as the sole right to perform marriages. In 1786, Virginia passed Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom, which declared that efforts to use coercion in matters of religion "tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness." In Virginia, church attendance and the support of ministers became voluntary activities.

Other states moved more slowly. In New England, Congregational churches supported the Revolution and were less vulnerable to attack. Ministers' salaries continued to be paid out of public taxes, although lawful dissenters, such as Baptists, could insist that their church taxes go to their own clergy. The Congregational Church exercised other public or quasi-public functions, especially on thanksgiving, fast, and election days. Disestablishment did not become complete until 1818 in Connecticut and 1833 in Massachusetts.

Although most states still restricted the holding of office to Christians or Protestants, many people were coming to regard the coercion of anyone's conscience as morally wrong. Jews and Catholics both gained from the new atmosphere of tolerance. When Britain recognized the Catholic Church in the Quebec Act of 1774, most Protestants had shuddered with dread, but in 1790, when John Carroll of Maryland became the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States, hardly anyone protested. Before independence, an Anglican bishop had become an explosive issue, but in the 1780s, the Church of England reorganized itself as the Protestant Episcopal Church and began to consecrate its own bishops. Both Episcopalians and Presbyterians paid homage to republican values by adopting written constitutions.

The First Emancipation

The Revolution freed tens of thousands of slaves, but it also gave new vitality to slavery in the region that people were beginning to call "the South." Within a generation, slavery was abolished in the emerging "North." Race became a defining factor in both

regions. In the South, most blacks remained slaves. In the North, they became free but not equal. The independent householder and his voluntaristic ethic remained almost a white monopoly.

Many slaves freed themselves. The British army enabled more than half the slaves of Georgia and a significant fraction in South Carolina to choose freedom. A similar process was under way in Virginia in 1781, only to be cut short at Yorktown. Hundreds of New England slaves won freedom through military service. Many revealed what they were fighting for in the surnames they chose. Jeffrey Liberty, Cuff Liberty, Dick Freeman, and Jube Freeman served in one Connecticut regiment. After the Massachusetts bill of rights proclaimed that all people were "born free and equal," Elizabeth (Bett) Freeman sued her master in 1781 and won her liberty. Thereafter, most of the slaves in Massachusetts and New Hampshire simply walked away from their masters.

Elsewhere, legislative action was necessary. Pennsylvania led the way in 1780 with the modern world's first gradual **emancipation** statute. It declared that children born to slaves after a given date would become free at age 28. The slaves, not masters or taxpayers, thus bore the costs of their own emancipation. This requirement left them unable to compete on equal terms with free white men, who usually entered adult life with inherited property. Some masters shipped their slaves south shortly before emancipation, and some whites kidnapped freedmen and carried them south. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society existed largely to fight these abuses. By 1800, Philadelphia had America's largest community of free blacks, with their own churches and other voluntary societies.

The Pennsylvania pattern took hold, with variations, in most other northern states until all of them had made provision for emancipation. Where slaves constituted more than 10 percent of the population, as in southern New York and northeastern New Jersey, slaveholders' resistance delayed legislation for years. New York yielded in 1799, New Jersey in 1804.

In the upper South, many Methodists and Baptists opposed slavery in the 1780s, only to retreat in later years. Maryland and Virginia authorized the **manumission** of individual slaves. By 1810, more than one-fifth of Maryland's slaves had been freed, as had 10,000 of Virginia's 300,000 slaves, including more than 123 freed under Washington's will after he died in 1799. But slaves were essential to the plantation economy and were usually their masters' most valuable asset. In the South, emancipation would have amounted to a social revolution and the impoverishment of the planter class. Planters supported such humane reforms as the Christianization of their slaves, but they resisted emancipation, especially with the rise of cotton as a new cash crop after the war. Cut off from British textiles during the war, South Carolina slaves insisted on growing cotton as a substitute. Their owners saw the huge potential of that crop which, in effect, condemned the children and grandchildren of those slaves to indefinite bondage.

Maryland and Virginia, where population growth among the slaves exceeded what the tobacco economy could absorb, banned the Atlantic slave trade, as had all other states outside the Deep South. Georgia and South Carolina, to make good their losses during the war and to meet the demand for cotton after 1790, reopened the Atlantic slave trade. South Carolina imported almost 60,000 more Africans before Congress prohibited that traffic in 1808.

The Challenge to Patriarchy

Nothing as dramatic as emancipation altered relations between the sexes. With the men away fighting, many women were left in charge of the household, sometimes with interesting consequences. “I hope you will not consider yourself as commander in chief of your own house,” Lucy Knox warned her soldier husband, Henry, in 1777, “but be convinced ... that there is such a thing as equal command.” Although some women acquired new authority, nearly all of them had to work harder to keep their households functioning. The war cut them off from most European consumer goods. Household manufactures, largely the task of women, filled the gap. Women accepted these duties without demanding broader legal or political rights, but soaring food prices made many of them assertive. In numerous food riots, women tried to force merchants to lower prices or stop hoarding grain.

Attitudes toward marriage were also changing. The common-law rule of coverture still denied wives any legal personality, but a few persuaded state governments not to impoverish them by confiscating the property of their loyalist husbands. Many writers insisted that good marriages rested on mutual affection, not on property settlements. In portraits of wealthy northeastern families, husbands and wives were beginning to appear as equals. Parents were urged to respect the personalities of their children and to avoid severe discipline. Traditional reverence for the elderly was yielding to an idealization of youth and energy.

In 1780, to relieve the sufferings of Continental soldiers, Esther de Berdt Reed organized the Philadelphia Ladies Association, the first women’s society in American history to take on a public role. Although few women yet demanded equal political rights, the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 let them vote if they headed a household (usually as a widow) and paid taxes. This right was revoked in 1807.

Especially in the Northeast, more women learned to read and write. Philosophers, clergymen, and even popular writers were beginning to treat women as morally superior to men, a sharp reversal of earlier teachings. The first female academies were founded in the 1790s. By 1830, nearly all native-born women in the Northeast had become literate. The ideal of the “republican wife” and the “republican mother” took hold, giving wives and mothers an expanding educational role within the family. They encouraged diligence in their husbands and patriotism in their sons. The novel became a major cultural form in the United States. Its main audience was female, as were many of the authors. Novels cast women as central characters and warned young women to beware of suitors motivated only by greed or lust.

Western Expansion, Discontent, and Conflict with Indians

Westward expansion continued during the Revolutionary War. With 30 axmen, Daniel Boone, a North Carolina hunter, hacked out the Wilderness Road from Cumberland Gap to the Kentucky bluegrass country in early 1775. The first settlers called Kentucky “the best poor man’s country” and claimed it should belong to those who tilled its soil, not to speculators in the Transylvania Company, which claimed ownership. Few Indians lived in Kentucky, but it was the favorite hunting ground of the Shawnees and other nations. Their raids often prevented settlers from planting crops. Instead they hunted and put up log cabins against the inside walls of large rectangular stockades, 10 feet high and built from oak logs. At each corner, a blockhouse with a protruding second

story permitted the defenders to fire along the outside walls. Three of these “Kentucky stations” were built—at Boonesborough, St. Asaph, and Harrodsburg. Because of the constant danger, settlement grew slowly at first. Kentucky lived up to its old Indian reputation as the “dark and bloody ground.” Only a few thousand settlers stuck it out until the war ended, when they were joined by swarms of newcomers. Speculators and absentees were already trying to claim the best blue-grass land. The Federal Census of 1790 listed 74,000 settlers and slaves in Kentucky and about half that many in Tennessee, where the Cherokees had ceded a large tract after their defeat in 1776. Those settlers thrived both because few Indians lived there and because British and Spanish raiders found it hard to reach them.

To the south and north of this bulge, settlement was much riskier. After the war, Spain supplied arms and trade goods to Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws who were willing to resist Georgia’s attempt to settle its western lands. North of the Ohio River, Britain refused to withdraw its garrisons and traders from Niagara, Detroit, and a few other posts, even though, according to the Treaty of Paris, those forts now lay within the boundaries of the United States. To justify their refusal, the British cited Congress’s failure to honor treaty obligations to loyalists and British creditors. When small groups of Indians sold large tracts of land to Georgia, Pennsylvania, and New York, as well as to Congress, the Indian nations repudiated those sales and, supported by either Spain or Britain, continued to resist.

During the Revolutionary War, Americans had recruited soldiers with promises of land after the war, and now they needed Indian lands to fulfill these pledges. The Indian nations that supported the United States suffered the most. In the 1780s, after Joseph Brant led most of the Iroquois north to Canada, New York confiscated much of the land of the friendly Iroquois who stayed. South Carolina dispossessed the Catawbans of most of their lands. The states had a harder time seizing the land of hostile Indians who had Spanish or British aid.

Secessionist movements arose in the 1780s when neither Congress nor eastern state governments seemed able to solve western problems. Some Tennessee settlers seceded from North Carolina to maintain, briefly, a separate state of Franklin. Separatist sentiment also ran strong in Kentucky. Settlers in western Pennsylvania thought of setting up on their own after Spain closed the Mississippi to American traffic in 1784. When Congress refused to accept Vermont’s independence from New York, even the radical Green Mountain Boys sounded out Canadian officials about readmission to the British Empire as a separate province.

The Northwest Ordinance

After Virginia ceded its land claims north of the Ohio River to Congress in 1781, other states followed suit. Jefferson offered a resolution in 1784 that would have created 10 or more new states in this Northwest Territory. In the Land Ordinance of 1785, Congress authorized the survey of the Northwest Territory and its division into townships six miles square, each composed of 36 “sections” of 640 acres. Surveyed land would be sold at auction starting at a dollar per acre. Alternate townships would be sold in sections or as a whole, to satisfy settlers and speculators, respectively.

In July 1787, while the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia, Congress (in New York) returned to the problems of the Northwest Territory. Massachusetts

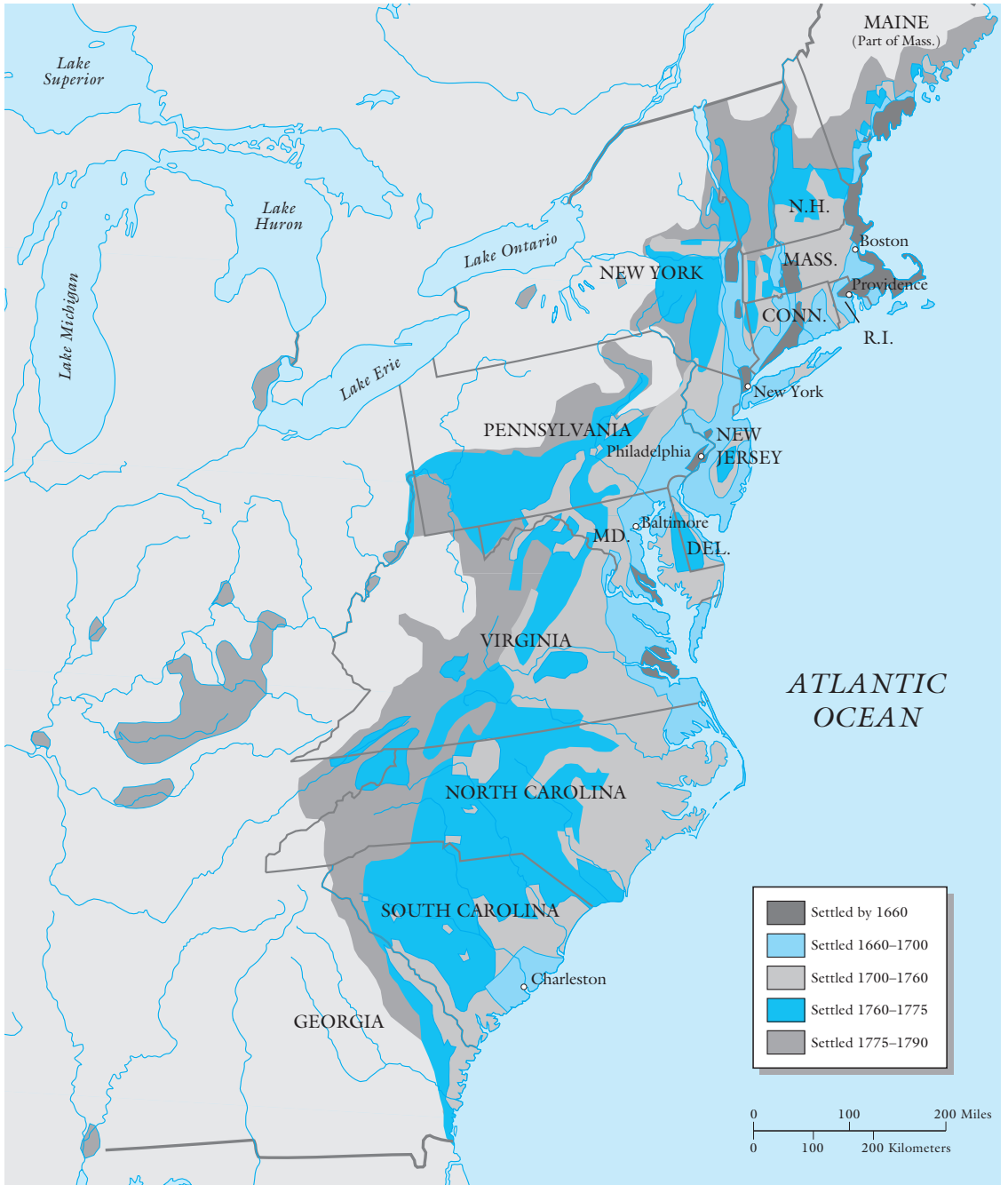


MAP 6.5 Western Land Claims during the Revolution

One of the most difficult questions that Congress faced was the competing western land claims of several states. After Virginia ceded its claims north of the Ohio to Congress, other states followed suit, creating the national domain and what soon became the Northwest Territory.

veterans were organizing the Ohio Company under Manassah Cutler to obtain a huge land grant from Congress. Cutler joined forces with William Duer, a New York speculator and an organizer of the Scioto Company. Together they pried from Congress 1.5 million acres for the Ohio Company veterans and an option on 5 million more acres, which the Ohio Company assigned to the Scioto Company. The Ohio Company agreed to pay Congress two installments of \$500,000 in depreciated securities. To meet the first payment, Duer’s backers lent Cutler’s \$200,000. Once again, speculators, rather than settlers, seemed to be winning the West.

In the same month, Congress passed the **Northwest Ordinance**. It authorized the creation of from 3 to 5 states, to be admitted to the Union as equals of the original 13. The ordinance thus rejected colonialism among white people except as a temporary phase through which a “territory” would pass on its way to statehood. Congress would appoint a governor and a council to rule until population reached



MAP 6.6 Advance of Settlement to 1790

Between 1760 and 1790, America’s population grew from nearly 1.6 million to almost 4 million. The area of settlement was spreading west of Pittsburgh and into much of Kentucky and parts of Tennessee.

5,000. At that point, the settlers could elect an assembly empowered to pass laws, although the governor (modeled on earlier royal governors) had an absolute veto. When population reached 60,000, the settlers could adopt their own constitution and petition Congress for statehood. The ordinance protected civil liberties, provided for public education, and prohibited slavery in the territory.

Southern delegates all voted for the Northwest Ordinance despite its antislavery clause. They probably hoped that Ohio would become what Georgia had been in the 1730s, a society of armed freemen able to protect vulnerable slave states, such as Kentucky, from hostile invaders. They also believed that most settlers would come from Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky. Even if they could not bring slaves with them, they would have southern loyalties. New Englanders, by contrast, were counting on the Ohio Company to lure their own veterans to the region.

The antislavery clause may have been part of a larger Compromise of 1787, involving both the ordinance and the clauses on slavery in the federal Constitution. The Philadelphia Convention permitted states to count three-fifths of their slaves for purposes of representation and direct taxation. The antislavery concession to northerners in the ordinance was made at the same time that southern states won this concession in Philadelphia. Several congressmen were also delegates to the Constitutional Convention and traveled back and forth between the two cities while these decisions were being made. They may have struck a deal.

Congress had developed a coherent western policy, but when the first townships were offered for sale in late 1787, there were few buyers. Yet by 1789, the Ohio Company had established the town of Marietta, Kentuckians had founded Cincinnati, and tiny outposts had been set up at Columbia and Gallipolis. But without massive help from the new federal government, the settlers had little chance of overcoming stout Indian resistance.

A MORE PERFECT UNION

The 1780s were difficult times. The economy failed to rebound, debtors fought creditors, and state politics became bitter and contentious. Out of this ferment arose the demand to amend or even replace the Articles of Confederation.

Commerce, Debt, and Shays's Rebellion

In 1784, British merchants flooded American markets with exports worth £3.7 million, the greatest volume since 1771, but Americans could not pay for them. Exports to Britain that year were £750,000—less than 40 percent of the £1.9 million of 1774, the last year of peace. When Britain

invoked the Navigation Acts to close the British West Indies to American ships (but not to American goods), indirect returns through this once-profitable channel also faltered. Trade with France closed some of the gap, but because the French could not offer the long-term credit that the British had provided, it remained disappointing. The American economy entered a deep depression. Exports rose to almost £900,000 by 1785, still far below prewar levels. Private debts became a huge social problem that the states, buried under their own war debts, could not easily mitigate. Merchants, dunned by British creditors, sued their customers, many of whom

could not even pay their taxes. Farmers, many faced with the loss of their crops and even their farms, resisted foreclosures and looked to their states for relief.

About half of the states issued paper money in the 1780s, and many passed **stay laws** to postpone the date on which a debt would come due. Massachusetts rejected both options and raised taxes to new heights. In 1786, many farmers in Hampshire County took matters into their own hands. Crowds gathered to prevent the courts from conducting business, much as patriots had done against the British in 1774. Governor James Bowdoin insisted that acts of resistance once appropriate against a tyrannical monarch were unacceptable in a government elected by the people. But in early 1787, the protestors, loosely organized under a Continental Army veteran, Captain Daniel Shays, threatened the federal arsenal at Springfield. An army of volunteers under Benjamin Lincoln marched west with artillery and scattered the protestors. Yet Shaysites won enough seats in the May assembly elections to pass a stay law. In Massachusetts, **Shays's Rebellion** converted into nationalists many gentlemen and artisans who until then had opposed strengthening the central government.

Cosmopolitans versus Localists

The tensions racking Massachusetts surfaced elsewhere as well. Angry debtors in other states closed law courts or even besieged the legislature. State politics reflected a persistent rift between “cosmopolitan” and “localist” coalitions. Merchants, professional men, urban artisans, commercial farmers, southern planters, and former Continental Army officers made up the cosmopolitan bloc. They favored aggressive trade policies, hard money, payment of public debts, good salaries for executive officials and judges, and leniency to returning loyalists. Localists were farmers, rural artisans, and militia veterans who distrusted those policies. They demanded paper money, debtor relief, and generous salaries for representatives so that ordinary men could afford to serve.

In most states, localists usually defeated their opponents. They destroyed the feudal revival by confiscating the gigantic land claims of the Granville District, the Fairfax estate, the Calvert and Penn proprietaries, and the manorial estates of New York loyalists. (Because their owners were patriots, Rensselaerswyck and Livingston Manor survived into the 1840s when agrarian violence forced the legislature to abolish them.) Except in Vermont, localists were much less adept at thwarting land speculators. Yet cosmopolitans lost so often that many despaired of state politics and looked to a strengthened central government for relief.

Congress also faced severe fiscal problems. Between October 1781 and February 1786, it requisitioned \$15.7 million from the states but received only \$2.4 million. Its annual income had fallen to \$400,000 at a time when interest on its debt neared \$2.5 million and the principal on the foreign debt was about to come due. Requisitions were beginning to seem as inefficient as George Grenville had predicted when he proposed the Stamp Act.

Foreign relations took an ominous turn. Without British protection, American ships that entered the Mediterranean risked capture by Barbary pirates and the enslavement of their crews. In 1786, Foreign Secretary John Jay negotiated a treaty with Don Diego de Gardoqui, Spanish minister to the United States. It offered northern merchants trading privileges with Spanish colonies in exchange for closure of the Mississippi River to American traffic for 25 years. Seven northern states voted for

the treaty, but all five southern states in Congress rejected these terms, thus defeating the treaty, which needed nine votes for ratification under the Articles of Confederation. Angry talk of disbanding the Union filled Congress. Delegates began haggling over which state would join what union after a breakup. The quarrel became public in early 1787 when a Boston newspaper called for dissolution of the Union.

By the mid-1780s, many cosmopolitans were becoming nationalists eager to strengthen the Union. Many of them had served long, frustrating years in the army or in Congress, unable to carry out measures that they considered vital to the Confederation. In 1785, some of them tried to see what could be done outside Congress. To resolve disputes about navigation rights on the Potomac River, Washington invited Virginia and Maryland delegates to a conference at Mount Vernon, where they drafted an agreement acceptable to both states and to Congress. Prompted by James Madison, the Virginia legislature urged all states to participate in a convention at Annapolis to explore ways to improve American trade.

Four states, including Maryland, ignored the call, and the New Englanders had not yet arrived when, in September 1786, the delegates from the four middle states and Virginia accepted a report drafted by Alexander Hamilton of New York. It asked all of the states to send delegates to a convention at Philadelphia the next May “to devise such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union.” Seven states responded positively before Congress endorsed the convention on February 21, 1787, and five accepted later. Rhode Island refused to participate. Madison used the winter months to study the defects of classical and European confederacies and to draft his own plan for a stronger union.

The Philadelphia Convention

The convention opened in May 1787 with a plan similar to the Virginia constitution of 1776. It proposed an almost sovereign Parliament for the United States. By September, the delegates had produced a document much closer to the Massachusetts constitution of 1780, with a clear separation of powers. The delegates, in four months of secret sessions, repeated the constitutional learning process that had taken four years at the state level after 1776.

Most Virginia and Pennsylvania delegates, who arrived early, formed a nationalist bloc. With Washington presiding, Governor Edmund Randolph proposed the Virginia, or “large state,” plan. Drafted by Madison, it proposed a bicameral legislature, with representation in both houses apportioned according to population. The legislature would choose the executive and the judiciary. It would possess all powers currently lodged in Congress and the power “to legislate in all cases to which the separate States are incompetent.” It could “negate all laws passed by the several States, contravening in [its] opinion ... the articles of Union.” Remarkably, the plan did not include specific powers to tax or regulate trade, although Madison intended to add them later on. His plan also required ratification by state conventions, not by state legislatures. Within two weeks, the delegates agreed on three-year terms for members of the lower house and seven-year terms for the upper house. The legislature would choose the executive for a single term of seven years.

In mid-June, delegates from the small states struck back. William Paterson proposed the New Jersey Plan, which gave the existing Congress power to levy import duties and a stamp tax (as in Grenville’s imperial reforms of 1764 and 1765), to

regulate trade, and to use force to collect delinquent requisitions from the states (as in North's Conciliatory Proposition of 1775). As under the Articles, each state would have one vote. In another alternative, perhaps designed to terrify the small states into accepting the Virginia Plan, Hamilton suggested a government in which both the senate and the executive would serve "on good behavior"—that is, for life! To him, the British constitution still seemed the best in the world, but he never formally proposed his plan. No other New York delegate would have supported it.

All of the options before the convention at that point seemed counterrevolutionary. Madison's Parliament for America (or at least what the delegates had seen of it so far), Paterson's emulation of Grenville and North, and Hamilton's enthusiasm for the British Empire all challenged in major ways the principles of 1776. But as the summer progressed, the delegates asked themselves what the voters would or would not accept and relearned the hard lessons of popular sovereignty that the state constitutions had taught. The result was a federal Constitution that was, in its own way, revolutionary.

Before the Constitution took its final shape, however, the debate grew as hot as the summer weather. The small states warned that their voters would never accept a constitution that let the large states swallow them. The large states insisted on proportional representation in both houses. "The Large States dare not dissolve the Confederation," retorted Delaware's Gunning Bedford in the most inflammatory outburst of the convention. "If they do, the small ones will find some foreign ally of more honor and good faith, who will take them by the hand and do them justice." Then the Connecticut delegates announced that they would be happy with proportional representation in one house and state equality in the other.

In July, the delegates accepted this Connecticut Compromise and then completed the document by September. They finally realized that they were creating a government of laws, to be enforced on individuals through federal courts, and were not propping up a system of congressional resolutions to be carried out (or ignored) by the states. Terms for representatives were reduced to two years, and terms for senators to six, with each state legislature choosing two senators. The president would serve four years, could be reelected, and would be chosen by an electoral college. Each state received as many electors as it had congressmen and senators combined, and the states were free to decide how to choose their electors. Each elector had to vote for two candidates, of whom one had to be from another state. This provision reflected a fear that localist impulses might block a majority for anyone. Washington would surely be the first president, but there was no obvious choice after him.

In other provisions, free and slave states agreed to count only three-fifths of the slaves in apportioning both representation and direct taxes. The enumeration of congressional powers became lengthy and explicit and included taxation, the regulation of foreign and interstate commerce, and the catchall "necessary and proper" clause. Madison's negative on state laws yielded to the gentler "supreme law of the land" clause. Over George Mason's last-minute objection, the delegates refused to include a bill of rights.

With little debate, the convention approved a revolutionary proposal for ratifying the Constitution. This clause called for special conventions in each state and declared that the Constitution would go into force as soon as any nine states had accepted it, even though the Articles of Confederation required unanimous approval



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“The Hero Who Defended the Mothers Will Protect the Daughters.”

Washington is hailed by young women near the bridge at Trenton on the way to his inauguration as first President of the United States, 1789.

for all amendments. The delegates understood that they were proposing an illegal but peaceful overthrow of the existing legal order—that is, a revolution. They hoped that once nine or more states accepted the Constitution, the others would follow their example after the new government got under way and would make ratification unanimous. At that point, their revolution would become both peaceful and legal. The Constitution would then rest on popular sovereignty in a way that the Articles never had. The **Federalists**, as supporters of the Constitution now called themselves, were willing to risk destroying the Union in order to save and strengthen it, but they knew that they would have to use persuasion, not force, to win approval.

Ratification

Back home, Federalist delegates made a powerful case for the Constitution in newspapers, most of which favored a stronger central government. Most Anti-Federalists, or opponents of the Constitution, were localists with few interstate contacts and limited access to the press. Federalists gave them little time to organize. The first ratifying conventions met in December. Delaware ratified unanimously on December 7, Pennsylvania by a 46-to-23 vote five days later, and New Jersey unanimously on December 18. Georgia ratified unanimously on January 2, and then Connecticut approved by a lopsided margin.

Except in Pennsylvania, these victories were in small states. Ironically, although the Constitution was mostly a “large state” document, small states embraced it while large states hesitated. Small states, once they had equality in the senate, saw advantages in a strong central government. Under the Articles, for example, New Jerseyans had to pay duties to neighboring states on foreign goods imported

through New York City or Philadelphia. Under the Constitution, import duties would go to the federal government, a clear gain for every small state but Rhode Island, which stood to lose revenue at both Providence and Newport.

Pennsylvania was the only large state with a solid majority for ratification. But Anti-Federalists there demanded a federal bill of rights and major changes in the structure of the new government. Large states could think of going it alone; small states could not—except Rhode Island, with its two cities and its long history of defying its neighbors.

The first hotly contested state was Massachusetts, which set a pattern for struggles in other divided states. Federalists there won by a slim margin (187 to 168) in February 1788. They blocked Anti-Federalist attempts to make ratification conditional on the adoption of specific amendments. Instead, they won their slim majority by promising to support a bill of rights by constitutional amendment *after* ratification. The Rhode Island legislature voted overwhelmingly against summoning a ratifying convention. Maryland and South Carolina ratified easily in April and May, bringing the total to eight of the nine states required. Then conventions met almost simultaneously in New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, and North Carolina. In each, a majority at first opposed ratification.

As resistance stiffened, the ratification controversy turned into the first great debate about the American Union, over what kind of national government the United States ought to have. Anti-Federalists argued that the new government would be too remote from the people to be trusted with the broad powers specified in the Constitution. They warned that in a House of Representatives divided into districts of 30,000 people (twice the size of Boston), only very prominent men would be elected. The absence of a bill of rights also troubled them.

During the struggle over ratification, Hamilton, Madison, and Jay wrote a series of 85 essays, published first in New York newspapers, and then widely reprinted elsewhere. They defended the Constitution almost clause by clause. Signing themselves “Publius,” they later published the collected essays as *The Federalist Papers*, the most comprehensive body of political thought produced by the Revolutionary generation. In *Federalist*, no. 10, Madison challenged 2,000 years of received wisdom when he argued that a large republic would be more stable than a small one. Small republics were unstable, he insisted, because majority factions could easily gain power within them, crush the rights of minorities, and ignore the common good. But in a huge republic as diverse as the United States, factions would seldom be able to forge a majority. “Publius” hoped that the new government would draw on the talents of the wisest and best-educated citizens. To those who accused him of trying to erect an American aristocracy, he noted that the Constitution forbade titles and hereditary rule.

Federalists won a narrow majority (57 to 46) in New Hampshire on June 21, and Madison guided Virginia to ratification (89 to 79) five days later. New York approved, by 30 votes to 27, one month later, bringing 11 states into the Union, enough to launch the new government. North Carolina rejected the Constitution in July 1788 but finally ratified in November 1789 after the first Congress had drafted the Bill of Rights and sent it to the states. Rhode Island, after refusing seven times to call a ratifying convention, finally summoned one that ratified by a vote of only 34 to 32 in May 1790. The Bill of Rights was ratified a year later.

CONCLUSION

Americans survived the most devastating war they had yet fought and won independence, but only with massive aid from France. Most Indians and blacks, free to do so, sided with Britain. During the struggle, white Americans affirmed liberty and equality for themselves in their new state constitutions and bills of rights, but they rarely applied these values to blacks or Indians, even though every northern state adopted either immediate or gradual emancipation. The discontent of the post-war years created the Federalist coalition, which drafted and ratified a new national Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. Federalists endowed the new central government with more power than Parliament had ever successfully exercised over the colonies but insisted that the Constitution was fully compatible with the liberty and equality proclaimed during the Revolution. Nothing resembling American federalism had ever been tried before. Under this new system, sovereignty was removed from government and bestowed on the people, who then empowered separate levels of government through their state and federal constitutions. As the Great Seal of the United States proclaimed, it was a *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order for the ages.

7

COMPLETING THE REVOLUTION, 1789–1815

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Establishing the National Government, 1793–1797
- The Republic in a World at War, 1793–1797
- The Jeffersonians in Power
- The Republic and the Napoleonic Wars, 1804–1815

ALMOST BY ACCLAMATION, George Washington became the first president under the Constitution. Washington and his closest advisers (they would soon call themselves Federalists) believed that the balance between power and liberty had tipped toward anarchy after the Revolution. “Local mischiefs,” they said, had nearly destroyed the union of the states that had made independence possible. Federalists wanted the Constitution to counter democratic excesses. They were determined to make the national government powerful enough to command respect abroad and to impose order at home. For the most part, they succeeded, but in the process they aroused a determined opposition that feared the Federalists’ consolidation of central power at the expense of the states and the citizenry. These self-styled Democratic Republicans (led almost from the beginning by Thomas Jefferson) were as firmly tied to revolutionary ideals of limited government and a citizenry of independent farmers as the Federalists were tied to visions of an orderly commercial republic with a powerful national state. The fight between Federalists and Democratic Republicans echoed the revolutionary contest between liberty and power—conducted this time against an ominous backdrop of international intrigue and war between France (which entered a republican revolution of its own in 1789) and Britain. Only when this Age of Democratic Revolution ended in 1815 could Americans survey the kind of society and government that their own Revolution had made.

ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

George Washington left Mount Vernon for the temporary capital in New York City in April 1789. The way was lined with the grateful citizens of the new republic.

CHRONOLOGY

1789	George Washington inaugurated as first president of the United States ♦ Judiciary Act establishes the Supreme Court and federal circuit courts
1790	Hamilton delivers his Report on Public Credit to Congress ♦ Congress drafts the Bill of Rights
1794	Federalists' excise tax triggers Whiskey Rebellion
1796	Jay's Treaty and Pinckney's Treaty ratified
1798	XYZ affair results in undeclared war with France ♦ Alien and Sedition Acts passed by Congress
1801	Thomas Jefferson inaugurated as third president of the United States
1803	United States purchases Louisiana Territory from France ♦ <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> establishes the doctrine of judicial review
1804–1806	Lewis and Clark explore the Louisiana Purchase and the Columbia River Basin
1807	<i>Chesapeake-Leopard</i> affair ignites anti-British sentiment ♦ Congress passes Embargo Act
1810	Henry Clay elected Speaker of the House
1812	War with England begins
1814	Federalists convene the Hartford Convention. Treaty of Ghent ends the War of 1812
1815	American victory at the Battle of New Orleans

Militia companies and local dignitaries escorted him from town to town, crowds cheered, church bells marked his progress, and lines of girls in white dresses waved demurely as he passed. At Newark Bay, he boarded a flower-bedecked barge and, surrounded by scores of boats, crossed to New York City. He arrived on April 23 and was inaugurated seven days later.

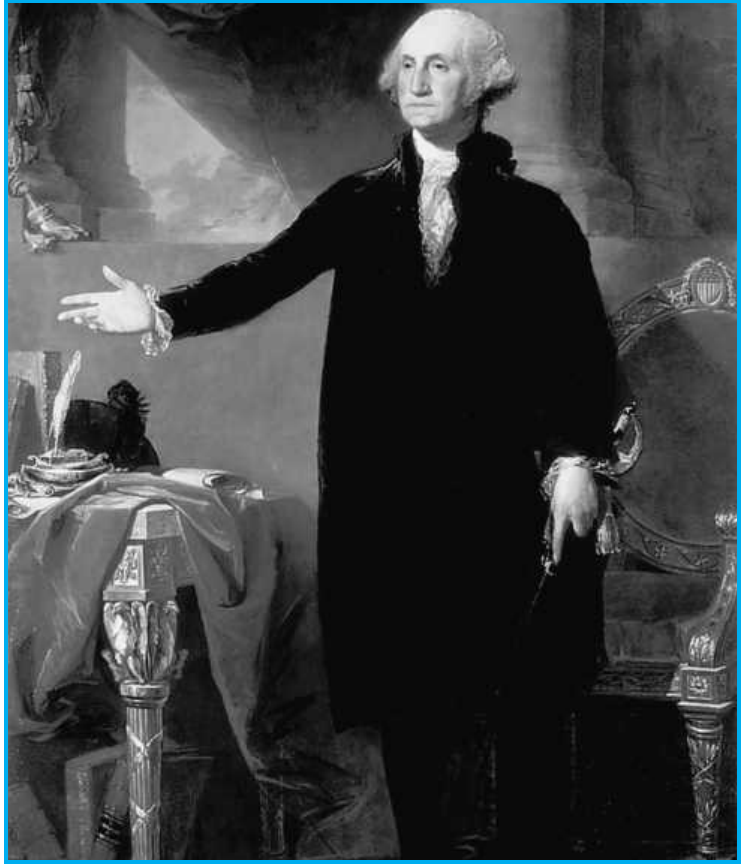
The “Republican Court”

Reporting for work, President Washington found the new government embroiled in its first controversy—an argument over the dignity that would attach to his own office. Vice

President John Adams had asked the Senate to create a title of honor for the president. Adams and others wanted a title that would reflect the power of the new executive. They rejected “His Excellency” because that was the term used for ambassadors, colonial governors, and other minor officials. Among the other titles they considered were “His Highness,” “His Mightiness,” “His Elective Highness,” “His Most Benign Highness,” “His Majesty,” and “His Highness, the President of the United States, and Protector of Their Liberties.” The Senate debated the question for a full month, and then gave up when it became clear that the more democratic House of Representatives disliked titles. They settled on the

George Washington in 1796, Near the End of His Presidency.

The artist captured the formal dignity of the first president and surrounded him with gold, red velvet, a presidential throne, and other emblems of kingly power. Only Washington's deeds and reputation suggested an attachment to liberty and equality.



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austere dignity of “Mr. President.” A senator from Pennsylvania expressed relief that the “silly business” was over. Thomas Jefferson pronounced the whole affair “the most superlatively ridiculous thing I ever heard of.”

Jefferson would learn, however, that much was at stake in the argument over titles. The Constitution provided a blueprint for the republic. George Washington’s administration would translate the blueprint into a working state. It mattered very much how citizens addressed their president, for that was part of the huge constellation of laws, customs, and forms of etiquette that would give the new government either a republican or a courtly tone. Many Federalists wanted to bolster presidential power against the localism and democracy that, they believed, had nearly killed the republic in the 1780s. Washington’s stately inaugural tour, the high salaries paid to executive appointees, the endless round of formal balls and presidential dinners, the public celebration of the president’s birthday (an English royal custom), the appearance of Washington’s profile on some of the nation’s coins—all dramatized the power and grandeur of the new government, particularly of its executive. When Jefferson became secretary of state and attended official social functions, he often found that aristocratic sentiments prevailed, “unless there chanced to be some [democrat] from the legislative Houses.” Thus the battle over presidential titles was not “silly business.” It was a revealing episode in the argument over how questions of power and liberty that Americans had debated since the 1760s would finally be answered.

The First Congress

Leadership of the First Congress fell to James Madison, the Virginia congressman who had helped write the Constitution. Under his guidance, Congress strengthened the new national government at every turn. First it passed a **tariff** on imports, which would be the government's chief source of income. Next, it turned to amendments to the Constitution demanded by the state ratifying conventions.

Madison proposed 19 constitutional amendments to the House. The 10 that survived congressional scrutiny and ratification by the states became the **Bill of Rights**. They reflected fears that were raised by a generation of struggle with centralized power. The First Amendment guaranteed the freedoms of speech, press, and religion against federal interference. The Second and Third Amendments, prompted by old fears of a standing army, guaranteed the continuation of a militia of armed citizens and stated the specific conditions under which soldiers could be quartered in citizens' households. The Fourth through Eighth Amendments defined a citizen's rights in court and when under arrest—rights that had been central to the Revolution's list of grievances. The Ninth Amendment stated that the enumeration of specific rights in the first eight amendments did not imply a denial of other rights. Finally, the 10th Amendment stated that powers not assigned to the national government by the Constitution remained with the states and the citizenry, though the intentional omission of the word “expressly” left room for argument.

Madison, a committed nationalist, had performed skillfully. Many doubters at the ratifying conventions had called for amendments that would weaken the national government. By channeling their fears into the area of civil liberties, Madison soothed popular fears while preserving governmental power. The Bill of Rights was an important guarantee of individual liberties. In the context in which it was written and ratified, however, it was an even more important guarantee of the power of the national government.

To fill out the framework of government outlined in the Constitution, Congress created the executive departments of war, state, and treasury and guaranteed that the president would appoint the heads of those departments (and their assistants), thus removing them from congressional control. Congress next created the federal courts, which were demanded by but not specified in the Constitution. The Judiciary Act of 1789 established a Supreme Court with six members, along with 13 district courts and three **circuit courts** of appeal. The act allowed certain cases to be appealed from state courts to federal circuit courts presided over by traveling Supreme Court justices, thus dramatizing federal power. As James Madison and other members of the intensely nationalist First Congress surveyed their handiwork, they could congratulate themselves on having strengthened national authority at every opportunity.

Hamiltonian Economics: The National Debt

Washington filled posts in his cabinet with familiar faces. As secretary of war, he chose Henry Knox, an old comrade from the Revolution. The State Department went to his fellow Virginian, Thomas Jefferson. He chose **Alexander Hamilton** of New York, his trusted aide-de-camp during the Revolution, to head the Department of the Treasury.

Hamilton was the most single-minded nationalist in the new government. He was a brilliant economic thinker, an admirer of the British system of centralized government and finance, and a supremely arrogant and ambitious man. More than any other cabinet member, and perhaps even more than Washington (he later referred to Washington's presidency as "my administration"), Hamilton directed the making of a national government.

In 1789, Congress asked Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton to report on the public debt. The debt fell into three categories, Hamilton reported. The first was the \$11 million owed to foreigners—primarily debts to France incurred during the Revolution. The second and third—roughly \$24 million each—were debts owed by the national and state governments to American citizens who had supplied food, arms, and other resources to the revolutionary cause. Congress agreed that both justice and the credibility of the new government dictated that the foreign debts be paid in full, but the domestic debts raised troublesome questions. Those debts consisted of notes issued during the Revolution to soldiers, and to merchants, farmers, and others who had helped the war effort. Over the years, speculators had purchased many of these notes at a fraction of their face value; when word spread that the Constitution would create a government likely to pay its debts, speculators and their agents fanned out across the countryside, buying all the notes they could find. By 1790, the government debt was concentrated in the hands of businessmen and speculators—most of them northeasterners—who had bought notes at prices only 10 percent to 30 percent of their original value. Full payment would bring them enormous windfall profits.

The Revolutionary War debt of the individual states was another source of contention. Nationalists, with Hamilton at their head, wanted to assume the states' debts as part of a national debt. The states' debts also had been bought up by speculators, and they posed another problem as well: Many states, including all of the southern states with the exception of South Carolina, had paid off most of their notes in the 1780s; the other states still had significant outstanding debts. If the federal government assumed the states' debts, money would flow out of the southern, middle, and western states into the Northeast, whose citizens would hold fully four-fifths of the combined national debt.

That is precisely what Hamilton proposed in his Report on Public Credit, issued in January 1790. He urged Congress to assume the states' debts and combine them with the federal government's foreign and domestic debts into a consolidated national debt. He agreed that the foreign debt should be paid promptly, a move that would announce to the international community that the government of the United States would pay its bills. But he insisted that debts owed to Americans be a permanent, tax-supported fixture of government. Under his plan, the government would issue securities to its creditors and would pay an annual rate of interest of 4 percent. A permanent debt would encourage wealthy financiers to invest in government securities, thus allying them with the national state. Servicing the debt would also require a significant enlargement of the federal civil service, national financial institutions, and federal taxes. The national debt, in short, was at the center of Alexander Hamilton's plan for a powerful national state.

Hamiltonian Economics: The Bank and the Excise

As part of that plan, Hamilton asked Congress to charter a Bank of the United States. The government would store its funds in the bank and would supervise its operations, but directors representing private stockholders would control the bank. The Bank of the United States would print and back the national currency and would regulate other banks. Hamilton's proposal also made stock in the bank payable in government securities, thus (1) adding to the value of the securities, (2) giving the bank a powerful interest in the fiscal stability of the government, and (3) binding the holders of the securities even closer to the national government. Those who looked closely saw that Hamilton's Bank of the United States was a carbon copy of the Bank of England.

To fund the national debt, Hamilton called for a federal **excise tax** on wines, coffee, tea, and spirits. The tax on spirits would fall most heavily on the whiskey produced in abundance on the frontier. Its purpose, stated openly by Hamilton, was not only to produce revenue but also to establish the government's power to create an internal tax and to collect it in the most remote regions in the republic. The result, as we shall see later in this chapter, was a **Whiskey Rebellion** in the west and an overwhelming display of federal force.

Passed in April 1791, the national bank and the federal excise measures completed Hamilton's organization of government finances. Taken separately, the consolidated government debt, the national bank, and the federal excise tax ably solved discrete problems of government finance. Taken together, however, they constituted a full-scale replica of the treasury-driven government of Great Britain.

The Rise of Opposition

In 1789, nearly every federal office holder wanted to make the new government work. In particular, Alexander Hamilton at Treasury and James Madison in the House of Representatives expected to continue the political partnership that had helped them write the Constitution and get it ratified. Yet in the debate over the national debt, Madison led congressional opposition to Hamilton. In 1792, Thomas Jefferson joined the opposition, insisting that Hamilton's schemes would dismantle the Revolution. Within a few short years, the consensus of 1789 had degenerated into an angry argument over what sort of government would finally result from the American Revolution. More than 25 years later, Jefferson still insisted that the battles of the 1790s had been "contests of principle between the advocates of republican and those of kingly government."

Hamilton presented his national debt proposal to Congress as a solution to specific problems of government finance, not as part of a blueprint for an English-style state. Madison and other southerners opposed it because they did not want northern speculators to reap fortunes from notes bought at rock-bottom prices from soldiers, widows, and orphans. He branded Hamilton's plan "public plunder."

At the urging of Jefferson and others, Madison and the congressional opposition compromised with Hamilton. In exchange for accepting his proposals on the debt, they won his promise to locate the permanent capital of the United States at a site on the Potomac River. The compromise went to the heart of

American revolutionary republicanism. Hamilton intended to tie northeastern commercial interests to the federal government. If New York or Philadelphia became the permanent capital, political and economic power might be concentrated there as it was in Paris and London—court cities in which power, wealth, and every kind of excellence were in league against the countryside. Madison and the opposition supported Hamilton's debt only on condition that the capital be moved south. The compromise would distance the commercial power of the cities from the federal government and would put an end to the "republican court" that had formed around Washington. This radical republican move ensured that the capital of the United States would be, except for purposes of government, an unimportant place.

Jefferson versus Hamilton

When Hamilton proposed the Bank of the United States, republicans in Congress immediately noted its similarity to the Bank of England and voiced deep suspicion. Thomas Jefferson joined the opposition, arguing that Congress had no constitutional right to charter a bank, and that allowing Congress to do so would revive the popular fears of centralized despotism that had nearly defeated ratification of the Constitution. Hamilton responded with the first argument for expanded federal power under the clause in the Constitution empowering Congress "to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper" to the performance of its duties. President Washington and a majority in Congress sided with Hamilton.

Jefferson's strict constructionism (his insistence that the government had no powers beyond those specified in the Constitution) revealed his fears of the de facto constitution that Hamilton was making. Jefferson argued that the federal bank was unconstitutional, that a federal excise tax was certain to arouse public opposition, and that funding the debt would reward speculators and penalize ordinary citizens. More important, Jefferson argued, Hamilton used government securities and stock in the Bank of the United States to buy the loyalty not only of merchants and speculators but also of members of Congress. Thirty congressmen owned stock in the Bank of the United States. Many others held government securities or had close ties to men who did. Jefferson charged that this "corrupt squadron" of "paper men" in Congress enabled Hamilton to control Congress from his seat in the executive branch. "The ultimate object of all this," insisted Jefferson, "is to prepare the way for a change, from the present republican form of government, to that of a monarchy, of which the English constitution is to be the model."

For their part, Hamilton and his supporters (who by now were calling themselves Federalists) insisted that centralization of power and a strong executive were necessary to the survival of the republic. The alternative was a return to the localism and public disorder of the 1780s and ultimately to the failure of the Revolution. The argument drew its urgency from the understanding of both Hamilton and his detractors that the United States was a weak republic in a world governed by kings and aristocrats, and that republics had a long history of failure. They all knew that Americans might yet lose their Revolution. Until late 1792, however, the argument over Hamilton's centralizing schemes was limited to government officials. Then, as both sides began to mobilize popular support, events in Europe came to dominate the politics of the American republican experiment, to place

that experiment in even greater jeopardy, and to increase the violence of American politics to the point at which the republic almost failed.

THE REPUBLIC IN A WORLD AT WAR, 1793–1797

Late in 1792, French revolutionaries rejected monarchy and proclaimed the French Republic. They beheaded Louis XVI in January 1793. Eleven days later, the French, who were already at war with Austria and Prussia, declared war on conservative Britain, thus launching a war between French republicanism and British-led reaction that, with periodic outbreaks of peace, would embroil the Atlantic world until the defeat of France in 1815.

Americans and the French Revolution

Americans could not have escaped involvement even if they had wanted to. Treaties signed in 1778 allied the United States with France, although Federalists and Jeffersonians would argue whether those treaties applied to the French

Republic that had killed the king who made them. Americans had overwhelmingly supported the French Revolution of 1789 and had applauded the progress of French republicanism during its first three years. Their gratitude for French help during the American Revolution and hopes for international republicanism faced severe tests in 1793, when the French Republic began to execute thousands of aristocrats, priests, and other “counterrevolutionaries,” and when the French threatened the sovereignty of nations by declaring a war of all peoples against all monarchies. The argument between Jeffersonian republicanism and Hamiltonian centralization was no longer a squabble within the U.S. government. National politics was now caught up and subsumed within the struggle over international republicanism.

As Britain and France went to war in 1793, President Washington declared American neutrality, thereby **abrogating** the 1778 treaties with the French. Washington and most of his advisers realized that the United States was in no condition to fight a war. They also wanted to stay on good terms with Great Britain. Ninety percent of American imports came from Britain, and 90 percent of the federal revenue came from customs duties on those imports. Thus both the nation’s commerce and the financial health of the government depended on good relations with Great Britain. Moreover, Federalists genuinely sympathized with the British in the war with France. They regarded the United States as a “perfected” England and viewed Britain as the defender of hierarchical society and ordered liberty against the homicidal anarchy of the French.

Jefferson and his friends saw things differently. They applauded the French for carrying on the republican revolution Americans had begun in 1776, and they had no affection for the monarchical politics of the Federalists or for Americans’ continued neocolonial dependence on British trade. The faction led by Jefferson and Madison wanted to abandon the English mercantile system and trade freely with all nations. They did not care if that course of action hurt commercial interests (most of which supported the Federalists) or impaired the government’s ability to centralize power in itself. Although they agreed that the United States should stay

out of the war, the Jeffersonians sympathized as openly with the French as the Federalists did with the British.

Citizen Genêt

Throughout the war years from 1793 to 1815, both Great Britain and France, by intervening freely in the internal affairs of the United States, made American isolationism impossible.

In April 1793, the French sent Citizen Edmond Genêt as minister to the United States. Genêt's ruling Girondists were the revolutionary faction that had declared the war on all monarchies; they ordered Genêt to enlist American aid with or without the Washington administration's consent. After the president's proclamation of neutrality, Genêt openly commissioned American privateers to harass British shipping and enlisted Americans in intrigues against the Spanish outpost of New Orleans. Genêt then opened France's Caribbean colonies to American shipping, providing American shippers a choice between French free trade and British mercantilism. Genêt's mission ended abruptly in summer 1793, when Robespierre and the infamous Terror drove the Girondists from power. Learning that he would be guillotined if he returned to France, Genêt accepted the hospitality of Americans, married a daughter of George Clinton, the old Anti-Federalist governor of New York, and lived out the rest of his life as an American country gentleman.

The British answered Genêt's free-trade declaration with a promise to seize any ship trading with French colonies in the Caribbean. Under these Orders in Council the British seized 250 American ships. The Royal Navy also searched American ships for English sailors who had deserted or who had switched to safer, better paying work in the American merchant marine. Inevitably, some American sailors were kidnapped into the British navy in a contemptuous and infuriating assault on American sovereignty. Meanwhile, the British, operating from Canada and from their still-garrisoned forts in the Northwest, began promising military aid to the Indians north of the Ohio River. Thus, while the French ignored the neutrality of the United States, the English engaged in both overt and covert acts of war.

Western Troubles: The Whiskey Rebellion

The problems with France and on the high seas were accompanied by an intensified threat from British and Indian forces in the west, as well as from settlers in that region. The situation came to a head in summer and fall 1794. The Shawnee and allied tribes plotted with the British and talked of driving all settlers out of their territory. At the same time, frontier whites, sometimes with the encouragement of English and Spanish officials, grew increasingly contemptuous of a national government that could neither pacify the Indians nor guarantee their free use of the Mississippi River. President Washington heard that 2,000 Kentuckians were armed and ready to attack New Orleans—a move that would have started a war between the United States and Spain. Settlers in Georgia were making unauthorized forays against the Creeks, and settlers up and down the frontier refused to pay the Federalists' excise tax on whiskey—a direct challenge to federal authority. In western Pennsylvania, mobs tarred and feathered excise officers and burned the property of distillers who paid the tax. In July 1794, near Pittsburgh, 500 militiamen

marched on the house of the unpopular federal excise collector General John Neville. Neville, his family, and a few federal soldiers fought the militiamen, killing two and wounding six before they abandoned the house to be looted and burned. Two weeks later, 6,000 “Whiskey Rebels” met at Braddock’s Field near Pittsburgh, threatening to attack the town.

Faced with serious international and domestic threats to his new government, Washington determined to defeat the Indians and the Whiskey Rebels by force, thus securing American control of the Northwest. He sent General “Mad Anthony” Wayne against the northwestern tribes. Wayne’s decisive victory at Fallen Timbers in August 1794—fought almost in the shadow of a British fort—ended the Indian-British challenge in the Northwest for many years. In September, Washington ordered 12,000 federalized militiamen from eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. The president promised amnesty to rebels who pledged to support the government and prison terms to those who did not. As the army marched west from Carlisle, they found defiant liberty poles but no armed resistance. Arriving at Pittsburgh, the army arrested 20 suspected rebels—none of them leaders—and marched them back to Philadelphia for trial. In the end, only two “rebels,” both of them feeble-minded, were convicted. President Washington pardoned them, and the Whiskey Rebellion was over.

Western Troubles: Although many of the woodland tribes were still intact and still living on their ancestral lands in 1790, they were in serious trouble. The Iroquois had been restricted to reservations in New York and Pennsylvania, and many had fled to Canada. In the Old Northwest, the Shawnee, Miami, and other tribes—with the help of the British, who still occupied seven forts within what was formally the United States—continued to trade furs and to impede white settlement. Skirmishes with settlers, however, brought reprisals, and the Indians now faced not only hostile pioneers but the U.S. Army as well. In the Ohio country, punitive expeditions led by General Josiah Harmar and General Arthur St. Clair failed in 1790 and 1791—the second ending in an Indian victory in which 630 soldiers died.

In 1794, President Washington sent a third army, under General “Mad Anthony” Wayne, which defeated the Indians at Fallen Timbers, near present-day Toledo. The Treaty of Greenville forced the Native Americans to cede two-thirds of what are now Ohio and southeastern Indiana. Following their victory at Fallen Timbers, whites filtered into what remained of Indian lands. In 1796, President Washington threw up his hands and announced that “I believe scarcely any thing, short of a Chinese Wall, or a line of troops, will restrain Land Jobbers and the encroachment of settlers upon the Indian Territory.” Five years later, Governor William Henry Harrison of Indiana Territory admitted that frontier whites “consider the murdering of the Indians in the highest degree meritorious.”

The Jay Treaty While he sent armies against Indians and frontiersmen, President Washington capitulated to the British on the high seas. In 1794, he sent John Jay, chief justice of the Supreme Court, to negotiate the

conflicts between the United States and Britain. Armed with news of Wayne's victory, Jay extracted a promise from the British to remove their troops from American territory in the Northwest. On every other point of dispute, however, he agreed to British terms. The Jay Treaty made no mention of **impressment** or other violations of American maritime rights, nor did it refer to the old issue of British payment for slaves carried off during the Revolution. The treaty did allow small American ships back into the West Indies, but only on terms that the Senate would reject. In short, Jay's Treaty granted British trade a most-favored-nation status in exchange for the agreement of the British to abandon their northwestern forts. Given the power of Great Britain, it was the best that Americans could expect. Washington, obliged to choose between an unpopular treaty and an unwinnable war, passed Jay's Treaty on to the Senate, which, in June 1795, ratified it by a bare two-thirds majority.

During the fight over Jay's Treaty, dissension within the government was first aired in public. The seaport cities and much of the Northeast reacted favorably to the treaty. It ruled out war with England and cemented an Anglo-American trade relationship that strengthened both Hamilton's national state and the established commercial interests that supported it. The South, on the other hand, saw Jay's Treaty as a blatant sign of the designs of Britain and the Federalists to subvert republicanism in both France and the United States. The Virginia legislature branded the treaty as unconstitutional, and Republican congressmen demanded to see all documents relating to Jay's negotiations. Washington responded by telling them that their request could be legitimate only if the House was planning to initiate **impeachment** proceedings, thus tying approval of the treaty to his enormous personal prestige.

Meanwhile, on March 3, 1796, Washington released the details of a treaty that Thomas Pinckney had negotiated with Spain. In this treaty, Spain recognized American neutrality and set the border between the United States and Spanish Florida on American terms. Most important, the Pinckney Treaty ended Spanish claims to territory in the Southwest and gave Americans the unrestricted right to navigate the Mississippi River and to trans-ship produce at the Spanish port of New Orleans. Coupled with the victory at Fallen Timbers, the British promise to abandon their posts in the Northwest, and Washington's personal popularity, Pinckney's Treaty helped turn the tide in favor of the unpopular Jay's Treaty. With a diminishing number of hotheads willing to oppose Washington, western representatives joined the Northeast and increasing numbers of southerners to ratify Jay's Treaty.

Washington's Farewell

George Washington refused to run for reelection in 1796, thus setting a two-term limit observed by every president until Franklin Roosevelt (see Chapter 25). Washington could be proud of his accomplishment. He had presided over the creation of a national government. He had secured American control over the western settlements by ending British, Spanish, and Indian military threats and by securing free use of the Mississippi River for western produce. Those policies, together with the federal invasion of western Pennsylvania, had made it evident that the government could control its most distant regions. Washington had also avoided war with Great Britain, although not without overlooking assaults on American sovereignty. As he was about to leave



MAP 7.1 The West, 1790–1796

In 1790, the United States “owned” nearly all of its present territory east of the Mississippi River, but white Americans remained concentrated east of the Appalachians, and independent Indian peoples controlled most of the map of the United States. The Battle of Fallen Timbers and the resultant Treaty of Greenville pushed white settlement across Ohio and into Indiana, but the Indians of the Northwest remained intact, determined, and in touch with the British in Canada. Native Americans also controlled nearly the entire Southwest, and Florida and the Gulf Coast—including all outlets from the interior to the Caribbean—remained in Spanish hands. The American west was very far from secure in the 1790s.

government, he wrote, with substantial help from Hamilton, his Farewell Address. In it he warned against long-term “entangling alliances” with other countries. America, he said, should act independently in international affairs—an ideal that many felt

had been betrayed in Jay's Treaty. Washington also warned against internal political divisions. Of course, he did not regard his own Federalists as a party. They were simply friends of the government. But he saw Jefferson's Democratic Republicans as a self-interested faction, thus branding them, in the language of classical republicanism, as public enemies. Washington's call for national unity and an end to partisanship was in fact a parting shot at the Democratic Republican opposition.

The Election of 1796

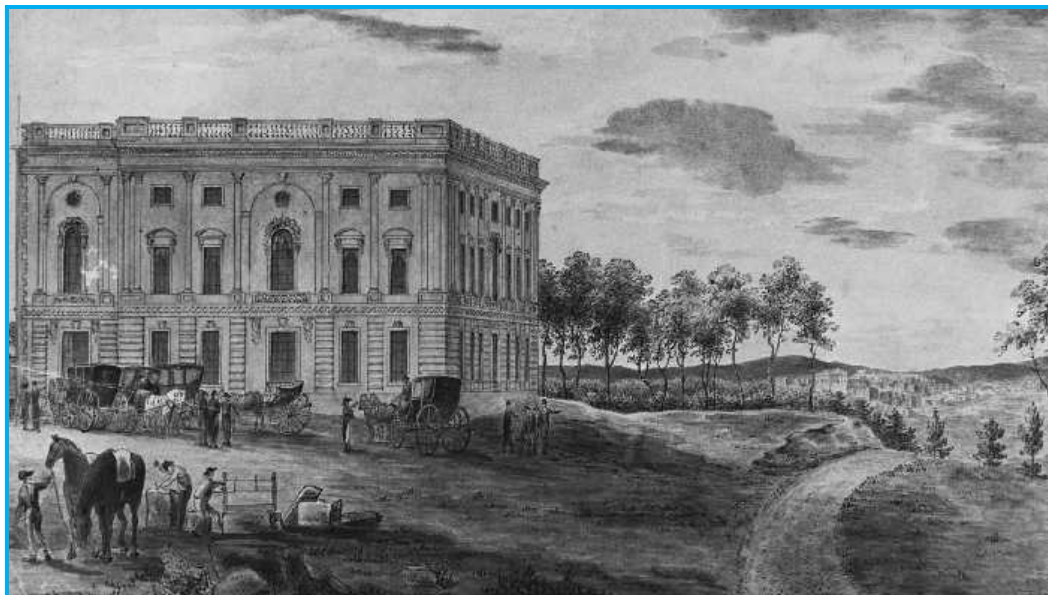
Washington's retirement opened the way to the competition for public office that he had feared: in 1796, Americans experienced their first contested presidential election. The Federalists chose as their candidate John Adams of Massachusetts, who had served as vice president. The Democratic Republicans nominated Thomas Jefferson. According to the gentlemanly custom of the day, the candidates did not campaign in person, but friends of the candidates, the newspaper editors who enjoyed their patronage, and even European governments, ensured that the election would be hotly contested.

Adams would certainly carry New England and Jefferson would carry the South. The election would be decided in Pennsylvania and New York. Some states, most of them in the South, chose presidential electors by direct vote, but in the crucial mid-Atlantic states, state legislatures selected the presidential electors. The election of 1796 would be decided in elections to the legislatures of those states. John Beckley, clerk of the House of Representatives, devised the Republican strategy in Pennsylvania. He secretly circulated a list of well-known and respected Jeffersonian candidates for the state legislature. Discovering the Republican slate only when it was too late to construct a similar list, the Federalists lost Pennsylvania. There was, however, no John Beckley in New York. Adams took the state's electoral votes and won the national election. The distribution of electoral votes revealed the sectional bases of Federalist and Republican support: Adams received only two electoral votes south of the Potomac, and Jefferson received only 18 (all but five of them in Pennsylvania) north of the Potomac.

The voting was over, but the intriguing was not. Alexander Hamilton, who had retired from the Treasury in 1795, knew that he could not manipulate the independent and almost perversely upright John Adams. So he secretly instructed South Carolina's Federalist electors to withhold their votes from Adams. That would have given the presidency to Adams's running mate, Charles Pinckney. (Before the ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804, the candidate with a majority of the electoral votes became president, and the second-place candidate became vice president.) Like some of Hamilton's other schemes, this one backfired. New England electors heard of the plan and angrily withheld their votes from Pinckney. As a result, Adams was elected president and his opponent Thomas Jefferson became vice president. Adams took office with a justifiable mistrust of many members of his own party and with the head of the opposition party as his second in command. It was not an auspicious beginning.

Troubles with France, 1796–1800

As Adams entered office, an international crisis was already in full swing. France, regarding Jay's Treaty as an Anglo-American alliance, broke off relations with the United States. The French hinted that they intended to overthrow the reactionary government of the United States but would postpone taking action in the



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Washington, D.C. *The Americans built a capital city that had no function other than republican government. It had no mercantile or financial establishments, no theaters, and no military fortress. Broad, straight streets stretched beyond the built-up areas of the town; visually as well as politically, Washington, D.C., was dependent upon and vulnerable to the countryside—the opposite of European court cities. It was the kind of capital that American republicans wanted.*

hope that a friendlier Thomas Jefferson would replace “old man Washington” in 1797. Then, during the crucial elections in Pennsylvania, they stepped up their seizures of American ships trading with Britain, giving the Americans a taste of what would happen if they did not elect a government that was friendlier to France. When the election went to John Adams, the French gave up on the United States and set about denying Britain its new *de facto* ally. In 1797, the French ordered that American ships carrying “so much as a handkerchief” made in England be confiscated without compensation, and announced that American seamen serving in the British navy would be summarily hanged if captured.

President Adams wanted to protect American commerce from French depredations, but he knew that the United States might not survive a war with France. He also knew that French grievances (including Jay’s Treaty and the abrogation of the French-American treaties of 1778) were legitimate. He decided to send a mission to France, made up of three respected statesmen: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, John Marshall of Virginia, and Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. When the delegates reached Paris, however, they were left cooling their heels in the outer offices of the Directory—the revolutionary committee of five that had replaced France’s beheaded king. At last, three French officials (the correspondence identified them only as “X, Y, and Z,” and the incident later became known as the **XYZ affair**) discreetly hinted that France would receive them if they paid a bribe of \$250,000, arranged for the United States to loan \$12 million to the French government, and apologized for unpleasant remarks that John Adams had made about France. The delegates refused, saying “No, not a sixpence,” and returned home. There a journalist transformed their remark into “Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute.”

President Adams asked Congress to prepare for war, and the French responded by seizing more American ships. Thus began, in April 1798, an undeclared war between France and the United States in the Caribbean. While the French navy dealt with the British in the North Atlantic, French privateers inflicted costly blows on American shipping. But after nearly a year of fighting, with the British providing powder and shot for American guns, the U.S. Navy chased the French privateers out of the Caribbean.

The Crisis at Home, 1798–1800

The troubles with France precipitated a crisis at home. Disclosure of the XYZ correspondence, together with the quasi-war in the Caribbean, produced a surge of public hostility toward the French and their Republican friends in

the United States. Many Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, wanted to use the crisis to destroy their political opponents.

The Alien and Sedition Acts

Without consulting President Adams, the Federalist-dominated Congress passed several wartime measures. The first was a federal property tax—graduated, spread equally between sections of the country, and justified by military necessity, but a direct federal tax nonetheless. Congress then passed four laws known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. The first three were directed at immigrants: They extended the **naturalization** period from 5 to 14 years and empowered the president to detain enemy **aliens** during wartime and to deport those he deemed dangerous to the United States. The fourth law—the Sedition Act—set jail terms and fines for persons who advocated disobedience to federal law or who wrote, printed, or spoke “false, scandalous, and malicious” statements against “the government of the United States, or the President of the United States [note that Vice President Jefferson was not included], with intent to defame ... or to bring them or either of them, into contempt or disrepute.”

President Adams never used the powers granted under the Alien Acts, but the Sedition Act resulted in the prosecution of 14 Republicans, most of them journalists. William Duane, editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora*, was indicted when he and two Irish friends circulated a petition against the Alien Act on the grounds of a Catholic church. Another prominent Republican went to jail for statements made in a private letter. Matthew Lyon, a scurrilous Republican congressman from Vermont, had brawled with a Federalist representative in the House chamber; he went to jail for his criticisms of President Adams, Federalist militarism, and what he called the “ridiculous pomp” of the national administration.

Republicans charged that the Alien and Sedition Acts violated the First Amendment, and they turned to the states for help. Southern states, which had provided only 4 of the 44 congressional votes for the Sedition Act, took the lead. Jefferson provided the Kentucky legislature with draft resolutions, and Madison did the same for the Virginia legislature. These so-called Virginia and Kentucky Resolves restated the constitutional fundamentalism that had guided Republican opposition from the beginning. Jefferson’s Kentucky Resolves reminded Congress that the Alien and Sedition Acts gave the national government powers not mentioned in the Constitution and that the 10th Amendment reserved such powers to the states.

He also argued that the Constitution was a “compact” between sovereign states and that state legislatures could “nullify” federal laws they deemed unconstitutional, thus anticipating constitutional theories that states’-rights southerners would use after 1830.

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolves demonstrated the extremes to which Jefferson and Madison might go. Beyond that, however, they had few effects. Opposition to the Sedition Act ranged from popular attempts to obstruct the law to fistfights in Congress, and Virginia began calling up its militia. No other states followed the lead of Virginia and Kentucky, however, and talk of armed opposition to Federalist policies was limited to a few areas in the South.

The Politicians and the Army

Federalists took another ominous step when President Adams asked Congress to create a military prepared for war. Adams wanted a stronger navy, both because the undeclared war with France was being fought on the ocean and because he agreed with other Federalists that America’s future as a commercial nation required a respectable navy. Hamilton and others (who were becoming known as **“High Federalists”**) preferred a standing army. At the urging of Washington and against his own judgment, Adams appointed Hamilton inspector general. As such, Hamilton would be the *de facto* commander of the U.S. Army. Congress authorized a 20,000-man army, and Hamilton proceeded to raise it. Congress also provided for a much larger army to be called up in the event of a declaration of war. When Hamilton expanded the officer corps in anticipation of such an army, he excluded Republicans and commissioned only his political friends. High Federalists wanted a standing army to enforce the Alien and Sedition Acts and to put down an impending rebellion in the South. Beyond that, there was little need for such a force. The war was being fought at sea, and most Americans believed that the citizen militia could hold off any land invasion until an army was raised. The Republicans, President Adams, and many other Federalists now became convinced that Hamilton and his High Federalists were determined to destroy their political opponents, enter into an alliance with Great Britain, and impose Hamilton’s statist designs by force.

Adams was angry. First the Hamiltonians had tried to rob him of the presidency. Then they had passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, the direct tax, and plans for a standing army without consulting him. None of this would have been possible if not for the crisis with France.

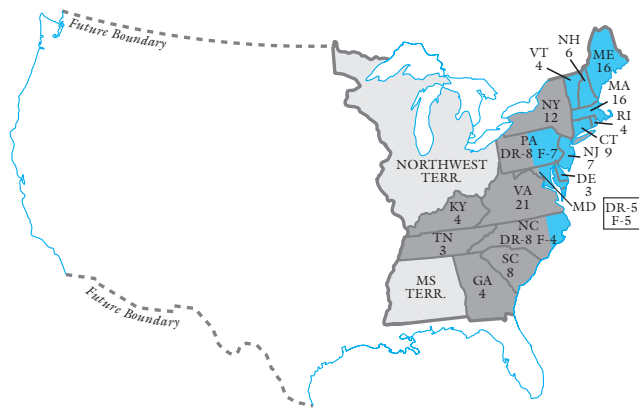
Adams, who had resisted calls for a declaration of war, began looking for ways to declare peace. He opened negotiations with France and stalled the creation of Hamilton’s army while the talks took place. At first, Federalists in the Senate refused to send an envoy to France. They relented when Adams threatened to resign and leave the presidency to Vice President Jefferson. In the agreement that followed, the French canceled the obligations that the United States had assumed under the treaties of 1778. But they refused to pay reparations for attacks on American shipping since 1793—the very point over which many Federalists had wanted war. Peace with France cut the ground from under the more militaristic and repressive Federalists and intensified discord among the Federalists in general. (Hamilton would campaign against Adams in 1800.) It also damaged Adams’s chances for reelection.

The Election of 1800

Thomas Jefferson and his Democratic-Republicans approached the election of 1800 better organized and more determined than they had been four years earlier. Moreover, events in the months preceding the election worked in their favor. The Alien and Sedition Acts, the direct tax of 1798, and the Federalist military buildup were never popular. Even when peace with France was certain, the Federalists continued. The army suppressed a minor tax rebellion led by Jacob Fries in Pennsylvania, prosecutions under the Sedition Act revealed its partisan origins, and the Federalists showed no sign of repealing the tax or abandoning the Alien and Sedition Acts and the new military. Taken together, these events gave credence to the Republicans' allegation that the Federalists were using the crisis with France to consolidate their power, destroy liberty and the opposition, and overthrow the American republic. The Federalists countered by warning that the election of Jefferson and his radical allies would release the worst horrors of the French Revolution onto the streets of American towns. A Connecticut Federalist moaned: "There is scarcely a possibility that we shall escape *Civil War*" following a Republican victory, and predicted other bad results: "murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest will all be openly taught and practiced, the air will be rent with the cries of distress, the soil will be soaked with blood, and the nation black with crimes." Alexander Hamilton put it succinctly: the election of Jefferson would lead to the "overthrow ... [of] the Government" by a "Revolution after the manner of Bonaparte." Each side believed that its defeat in 1800 would mean the end of the republic.

The Democratic-Republicans were strong in the South and weak in the Northeast. Jefferson knew that he had to win New York, the state that had cost him the 1796 election. Jefferson's running mate, the New Yorker **Aaron Burr**, arranged a truce between New York's Republican factions and chose candidates for the state legislature who were both locally respected and committed to Jefferson. In New York City, Burr played skillfully on the interests and resentments of craftsmen and granted favors to merchants who worked outside the British trade that was dominated by Federalist insiders. The strategy succeeded. The Republicans carried New York City and won a slight majority in the legislature. New York's electoral votes belonged to Jefferson. (When it became clear that Jefferson had won, Hamilton suggested changing the law so that New York's electors would be chosen by popular vote; John Jay, the Federalist governor of New York, rejected the suggestion.) The election was decided in South Carolina, which, after a brisk campaign, cast its votes for Jefferson.

Jefferson and Burr had won with 73 votes each. Adams had 65 votes, and his running mate Charles Cotesworth Pinckney had 64. (In order to distinguish between their presidential and vice-presidential candidates—and thus thwart yet another of Hamilton's attempts to rig the election—the Federalists of Rhode Island had withheld one vote from Pinckney.) Jefferson and Burr had tied, though everyone knew that Jefferson was the presidential candidate. But under the Constitution, a **lame-duck** Federalist Congress decided the outcome. Federalists talked of choosing Burr. Jefferson wrote that Democratic Republicans had decided "to declare openly and firmly, one and all, that the day such an act passed, the Middle States would arm, and that no such usurpation, even for a single day, should be submitted to." One of his supporters put it more bluntly: anyone other than Jefferson "who



	Electoral Vote	
	Number	%
Jefferson Burr (Democratic Republicans)	73	53
	73	53
Adams Pinckney Jay (Federalists)	65	47
	64	46
	1	----

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MAP 7.2 Presidential Election, 1800

The electoral votes in 1800 split along starkly sectional lines. The South voted for Jefferson, New England voted for Adams, and the election was decided by close contests in Pennsylvania and New York.

should thus be appointed President by law and accept the office would instantaneously be put to death.”

The Republican governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia made plans to call up the militia to prevent the expected usurpation. After six quarrelsome days and 35 ballots on which most Federalist congressmen voted for Burr (whose part in these proceedings has never been fully uncovered), a compromise was reached: Many Federalists abandoned Burr but turned in blank ballots and thus avoided voting for the hated (but victorious) Jefferson. With that, the “Revolution of 1800” had won its first round.

THE JEFFERSONIANS IN POWER

On the first Tuesday of March 1801, Thomas Jefferson left his rooms at Conrad and McMunn’s boardinghouse in Washington and walked up Pennsylvania Avenue. Jefferson received military salutes along the way, but he forbade the pomp and ceremony that had ushered Washington into office. Accompanied by a few friends and a company of artillery from the Maryland militia (and not by Hamilton’s regulars), Jefferson walked (no carriages) up the street and into the unfinished capitol building. The central tower and the wing that would house Congress were only half completed. Jefferson joined Vice President Burr, other members of the government, and a few foreign diplomats in the newly finished Senate chamber.

The Republican Program

Jefferson took the oath of office from Chief Justice John Marshall, a distant relative and political opponent from Virginia. Then, in a small voice that was almost inaudible to those at a distance, he delivered his inaugural address. Referring to the political discord that had brought him into office, he began with a plea for unity, insisting that “every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.” Jefferson did not mean that he and his opponents should forget their ideological differences. He meant only to invite moderate Federalists into a broad Republican coalition in which there was no room for the statist designs of Alexander Hamilton and his High Federalist friends.

Jefferson went on to outline the kind of government a republic should have. Grateful that the Atlantic Ocean separated the United States from “the exterminating havoc” of Europe and that America possessed “a chosen country, with room for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation,” he declared that Americans were a free people with no need for a European-style national state. A people blessed with isolation, bountiful resources, and liberty needed only “a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and thus is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.”

Jefferson’s “wise and frugal” government would respect the powers of the states and preserve the liberties ensured by the Bill of Rights. It would be small, and it would pay its debts without incurring new ones, thus ending the need for taxation and cutting the ground from beneath the burgeoning Federalist state. It would rely for defense on “a disciplined militia” that would fight invaders while regulars were being trained, thus eliminating Hamilton’s standing army. It would protect republican liberties from enemies at home and from the nations of Europe. And, Jefferson promised, it would ensure “the encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaiden.” Beyond the fostering of an agrarian republic and the maintenance of limited government, Jefferson promised little. Blessed with peace abroad and the defeat of the High Federalists at home, he believed that the United States could at last enter into its experiment with truly republican government.

The simplicity of Jefferson’s inauguration set the social tone of his administration. The new president reduced the number and grandeur of formal balls, levees, and dinners. He sent his annual messages to Congress to be read by a clerk, rather than delivering them in person in the manner of English kings and Federalist presidents. He refused to ride about Washington in a carriage, preferring to carry out his errands on horseback. Abandoning grand banquets, Jefferson entertained senators and congressmen at small dinners, which were served at a round table without formal seating, thus ending the fine-tuned hierarchy of the Federalists’ old arrangements. Jefferson presided over the meals without wearing a wig and dressed in old homespun clothes and a pair of worn bedroom slippers. The casualness (slovenliness, said some of his critics) did not extend to what was served at dinner, however. The food was prepared by expert chefs and accompanied by fine wines, and it was followed by

brilliant conversation perfected by Jefferson while he was a diplomat and a visitor to the salons of Paris. The president's dinners set examples of the unpretentious excellence through which this cultivated country squire hoped to govern.

Cleansing the Government

Jefferson's first order of business was to reduce the size and expense of government. The Federalists, despite their big-government dispositions, had left a surprisingly small federal establishment. Jefferson found only 316 employees who were subject to presidential appointment and removal. Those employees, together with 700 clerks and assistants and 3,000 post office workers, made up the entire federal civil service. Jefferson reduced the diplomatic corps and replaced officeholders who were incompetent, corrupt, or avowedly anti-republican. Even so, the rate of turnover was only about 50 percent during his first term. The replacements were not the violent revolutionaries that Federalists had warned against but Republican gentlemen who matched the social status of the departing Federalists. Jefferson altered the politics of the civil service, but he left its size and shape intact.

Jefferson made more substantial cuts in the military. The Federalists had built a sizable army and navy to prepare for war and, if necessary, to put down opposition at home. Legislation passed in March 1802 reduced the army to two regiments of infantry and one of artillery—a total of 3,350 officers and men, most of whom were assigned to western posts far from the centers of white population. Similar cutbacks reduced the navy. The goal, Jefferson explained, was to rely mainly on the militia for national defense but to maintain a small, well-trained professional army as well. (The same legislation that reduced the army created the military academy at West Point.) At Jefferson's urging, Congress also abolished the direct tax of 1798 and repealed the parts of the Alien and Sedition Acts that had not already expired. Jefferson personally pardoned the 10 victims of those acts who were still in jail and repaid their fines with interest.

Thus with a few strokes, Jefferson dismantled the repressive apparatus of the Federalist state. By reducing government expenditures, he reduced the government's debt and the army of civil servants and papermen gathered around it. During Jefferson's administration, the national debt fell from \$80 million to \$57 million, and the government built up a treasury surplus, even after paying \$15 million in cash for the **Louisiana Purchase** (discussed later in this chapter). Although some doubted the wisdom of such stringent economy, no one questioned Jefferson's frugality.

The Jeffersonians and the Courts

Jefferson next turned his attention to the federal courts. The Constitution had created the Supreme Court but had left the creation of lesser federal courts to Congress. The First Congress had created circuit courts presided over by the justices of the Supreme Court. Only Federalists served on the Supreme Court under Washington and Adams, and Federalists on the circuit courts had extended federal authority into the hinterland—a fact that prosecutions under the Alien and Sedition Acts had made abundantly clear. Jeffersonian mistrust of the federal courts intensified when the lame-duck Federalist Congress passed a Judiciary Act early in 1801. The act reduced the number of associate justices of the Supreme

Court from six to five when the next vacancy occurred, thus reducing Jefferson's chances of appointing a new member to the Court. The Judiciary Act also took Supreme Court justices off circuit and created a new system of circuit courts. This allowed Adams to appoint 16 new judges, along with marshals, federal attorneys, clerks, and justices of the peace. Adams worked until nine o'clock on his last night in office signing commissions for these "midnight judges." All of them were staunch Federalists. Coupled with President Adams's appointment of Federalist John Marshall as chief justice in January, the Judiciary Act ensured long-term Federalist domination of the federal courts.

Republicans disagreed on what to do about the Federalists' packing of the courts. Some distrusted the whole idea of an independent judiciary and wanted judges elected by popular vote. Jefferson and most in his party wanted the courts shielded from democratic control, but they deeply resented the Federalist **"midnight judges"** created by the Judiciary Act of 1801. Jefferson replaced the new federal marshals and attorneys with Republicans and dismissed some of the federal justices of the peace, but judges were appointed for life and could be removed only through impeachment. The Jeffersonians hit on a simple solution: They got rid of the new judges by abolishing their jobs. Early in 1802, with some of Jefferson's supporters questioning the constitutionality of what they were doing, Congress repealed the Judiciary Act of 1801 and thus did away with the midnight appointees.

The Impeachments of Pickering and Chase

With the federal courts scaled back to their original size, Republicans in Congress went after High Federalists who were still acting as judges. As a first test of impeachment, they chose John Pickering, a federal attorney with the circuit court of New Hampshire. Pickering was a highly partisan Federalist. He was also a notorious alcoholic and clearly insane. The Federalists who had appointed him had long considered him an embarrassment. The House drew up articles of impeachment, and the senate removed Pickering by a strict party vote.

On the same day, Congress went after bigger game: They voted to impeach Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase. Chase was a much more prominent public figure than Pickering, and his "crimes" were not alcoholism or insanity but mere partisanship. He hated the Jeffersonians, and he had prosecuted sedition cases with real enthusiasm. He had also delivered anti-Jeffersonian diatribes from the bench, and he had used his position and his formidable legal skills to bully young lawyers with whom he disagreed. In short, Chase was an unpleasant, overbearing, and unashamedly partisan member of the Supreme Court. Even so, his faults did not add up to the "high crimes and misdemeanors" that are the constitutional grounds for impeachment.

Moderate Republicans doubted the wisdom of impeaching Chase. Their uneasiness grew when Congressman John Randolph took over the prosecution. Randolph led a radical states'-rights faction that violently disapproved of, among other things, the way Jefferson had settled a southern land controversy. A corrupt Georgia legislature had sold huge parcels in Mississippi and Alabama to the Yazoo Land Company, which in turn had sold them to private investors, many of them New England speculators. When a new Georgia legislature rescinded the

sale and turned the land over to the federal government in 1802, Jefferson agreed to pay off the investors' claims with federal money.

As Randolph led the prosecution of Samuel Chase, he lectured in his high-pitched voice that Jefferson was double-crossing southern Republicans in an effort to win support in the Northeast. (There was some truth to the accusation: Jefferson envisioned a national Republican coalition, sometimes at the expense of radical states-rights southerners.) Most Republican senators sided with Jefferson. With Jefferson's approval, many Republicans in the Senate joined the Federalists in voting to acquit Samuel Chase, thus isolating and humiliating Randolph and his states-rights friends.

Justice Marshall's Court

Chief Justice John Marshall probably cheered the acquittal of Justice Chase, because it was clear that Marshall was next on the list. Secretary of state under John Adams, Marshall was committed to Federalist ideas of national power, as he demonstrated with his decision in the case of **Marbury v. Madison**. William Marbury was one of the justices of the peace whom Jefferson had eliminated in his first few days in office. He sued Jefferson's secretary of state, James Madison, for his commission. Although Marbury never got his job, Marshall used the case to hand down important rulings that laid the basis for the practice of **judicial review**—the Supreme Court's power to rule on the constitutionality of acts of Congress. In arguing that Congress could not alter the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, Marshall stated that the Constitution is “fundamental and paramount law” and that it is “emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what law is.”

Some Republicans saw Marshall's ruling as an attempt to arrogate power to the Court, but John Marshall was not a sinister man. As secretary of state under John Adams, he had helped end the undeclared war with France, and he had expressed doubts about the wisdom and necessity, if not the constitutionality, of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Although he disliked Congress's repeal of the 1801 legislation, he believed in Congress's right to make and unmake laws, and he accepted the situation. Jefferson and the moderate Republicans noted that Marshall was less interested in the power of the judiciary than in its independence. Ultimately, they decided they trusted Marshall more than they trusted the radicals in their own party. With the acquittal of Justice Chase, Jeffersonian attacks on the federal courts ceased.

Justice Marshall demonstrated his strict constructionism (as well as his partisanship) in the treason trial of former Vice President Aaron Burr in 1807. Following his failed attempt at the presidency in 1801, Burr's further intrigues with northern Federalists broke down—a breakdown that helped lead to a duel in which Burr killed Alexander Hamilton. The disgraced Aaron Burr headed west and organized a cloudy conspiracy that may have involved (according to varying testimonies) an invasion of Mexico or Florida or the secession of Louisiana. President Jefferson ordered his arrest. He was tried for treason at Richmond, with the Chief Justice, who was riding circuit, on the bench. Kings had frequently used the charge of treason to silence dissent. Marshall stopped what he and other Federalists considered Jefferson's attempt to do

the same thing by limiting the definition of treason to overt acts of war against the United States or to adhering to the republic's foreign enemies—and by requiring two witnesses to an overt act of treason. Under these guidelines, Burr went free. At the same time, the United States had formally separated internal dissent from treason.

Louisiana

It was Jefferson's good fortune that Europe remained at peace and stayed out of American affairs during his first term. The one development that posed an international threat to the United States turned into a grand triumph: the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France.

By 1801, half a million Americans lived west of the Appalachians, and Republicans saw westward expansion as the best hope for the survival of the republic. Social inequality and the erosion of yeoman independence would almost inevitably take root in the East, but in the vast lands west of the mountains, the republic could renew itself for many generations to come. To serve that purpose, however, the West needed ready access to markets through the river system that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans. "There is on the globe," wrote President Jefferson, "one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans."

In 1801, Spain owned New Orleans and under Pinckney's Treaty allowed Americans to trans-ship produce from the interior. The year before, however, Spain had secretly ceded the Louisiana Territory (roughly, all the land west of



A View of New Orleans Taken from the Plantation of Marigny, November, 1803 by Boquet de Woiserie, Chicago History Museum

The Louisiana Purchase. *This panorama of New Orleans celebrates the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The patriotic caption promises prosperity for the city and (by inference) for the American settlements upriver. Here the power of the central government (in the form of money and the purchase of land) is shown to serve the spread of liberty.*

the Mississippi drained by the Missouri and Arkansas rivers) to France. Napoleon Bonaparte had plans for a new French empire in America with the sugar island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) at its center, and with mainland colonies feeding the islands and thus making the empire self-sufficient. Late in 1802, the Spanish, who had retained control of New Orleans, closed the port to American commerce, creating rumors that they would soon transfer the city to France. That would threaten the existence of American settlements west of the Appalachians. President Jefferson sent a delegation to Paris early in 1803 with authorization to buy New Orleans for the United States.

By the time the delegates reached Paris, events had dissolved French plans for a new American empire. The slaves of Saint-Domingue (the French colony on Hispaniola) had revolted and had defeated French attempts to regain control of the island. At the same time, another war between Britain and France seemed imminent. Napoleon—reputedly chanting, “Damn sugar, damn coffee, damn colonies”—decided to bail out of America and concentrate his resources in Europe. He astonished Jefferson’s delegation by offering to sell not only New Orleans but the whole Louisiana Territory—which would double the size of the United States—for the bargain price of \$15 million.

Jefferson, who had criticized Federalists when they violated the letter of the Constitution, faced a dilemma: The president lacked the constitutional power to buy territory, but the chance to buy Louisiana was too good to refuse. It would ensure Americans access to the rivers of the interior; it would eliminate a serious foreign threat on America’s western border; and it would give American farmers enough land to sustain the agrarian republic for a long time to come. Swallowing his constitutional scruples (and at the same time half-heartedly asking for a constitutional amendment to legalize the purchase), Jefferson told the American delegates to buy Louisiana. Republican senators quickly ratified the Louisiana treaty over Federalist objections that the purchase would encourage rapid settlement and add to backcountry barbarism and Republican strength. Most Americans agreed that the accidents of French and Haitian history had given the United States a grand opportunity, and Congress’s ratification of the Louisiana Purchase met with overwhelming public approval. For his part, Jefferson was certain that the republic had gained the means of renewing itself through time. As he claimed in his second inaugural address, he had bought a great “empire of liberty.”

Lewis and Clark The Americans knew almost nothing about the land they had bought. Only a few French trappers and traders had traveled the plains between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, and no white person had seen the territory drained by the Columbia River. In 1804, Jefferson sent an expedition under Meriwether Lewis, his private secretary, and William Clark, brother of the Indian fighter George Rogers Clark, to explore the new land. To prepare for the expedition, Lewis studied astronomy, zoology, and botany; Clark was already an accomplished mapmaker. The two explorers kept meticulous journals about one of the epic adventures in American history.

In May 1804, Lewis and Clark and 41 companions boarded a keelboat and two large canoes at the village of St. Louis. They poled and paddled 1,600 miles

up the Missouri River, passing through rolling plains dotted by the farm villages of the Pawnee, Oto, Missouri, Crow, Omaha, Hidatsa, and Mandan peoples. The villages of the lower Missouri had been cut off from the western buffalo herds and reduced to dependence by mounted Sioux warriors, who had begun to establish their hegemony over the northern plains.

Lewis and Clark traveled through Sioux territory and stopped for the winter at the heavily fortified Mandan villages at the big bend of the Missouri River in Dakota country. In the spring they hired Toussaint Charbonneau, a French fur trader, to guide them to the Pacific. Charbonneau was useless, but his wife, a teenaged Shoshone girl named Sacajawea, was an indispensable guide, interpreter, and diplomat. With her help, Lewis and Clark navigated the upper Missouri, crossed the Rockies to the Snake River, and followed that stream to the Columbia River. They reached the Pacific in November 1805 and spent the winter at what is now Astoria, Oregon. Retracing their steps the following spring and summer, they returned to St. Louis in September 1806. They brought with them many volumes of drawings and notes, along with assurances that the Louisiana Purchase had been worth many, many times its price.

As Jefferson stood for reelection in 1804, he could look back on an astonishingly successful first term. He had dismantled the government's power to coerce its citizens, and he had begun to wipe out the national debt. The Louisiana



MAP 7.3 Louisiana Purchase

Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled the geographic size of the United States. It ended European competition for control of the North American interior and granted the United States the mouth of the Mississippi River, thus strengthening white settlements between the Appalachians and the Mississippi and increasing American control over those settlements.

Purchase had doubled the size of the republic at remarkably little cost. Moreover, by eliminating France from North America, it had strengthened the argument for reducing the military and the debts and taxes that went with it. Jefferson was more certain than ever that the republic could preserve itself through peaceful expansion. The “wise and frugal” government he had promised in 1801 was becoming a reality.

The combination of international peace, territorial expansion, and inexpensive, unobtrusive government left the Federalists without an issue in the 1804 election. They nominated Charles Pinckney of South Carolina as their presidential candidate and then watched Jefferson capture the electoral votes of every state but Delaware and Connecticut. As he began his second term in 1805, Jefferson could assume that he had ended the Federalist threat to the republic.

THE REPUBLIC AND THE NAPOLEONIC WARS, 1804–1815

In spring 1803, a few weeks after closing the deal for Louisiana, Napoleon declared war on Great Britain. This 11-year war, like the wars of the 1790s, dominated the national politics of the United States. Most Americans wanted to remain neutral. Few Republicans supported Bonaparte as they had supported the French revolutionaries of 1789, and none but the most rabid Federalists wanted to intervene on the side of Great Britain. Neither France nor Britain, however, would permit American neutrality.

The Dilemmas of Neutrality

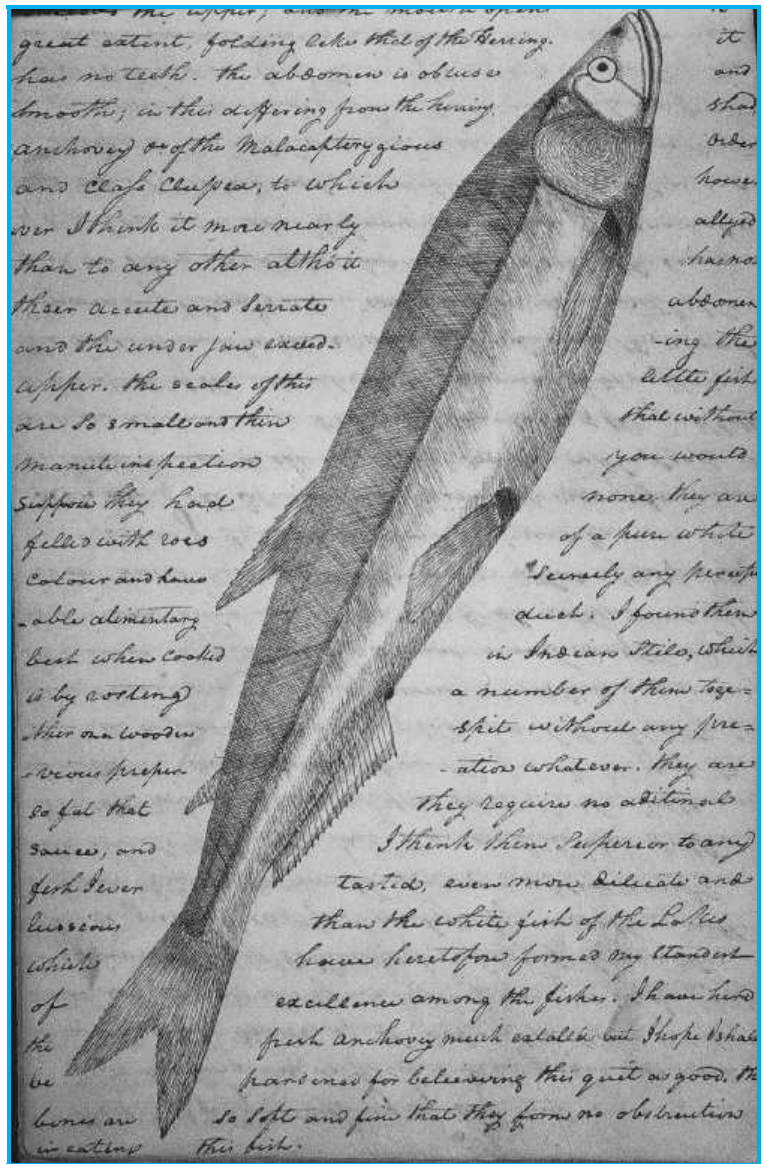
At the beginning, both Britain and France, whose rural economies were disrupted by war, encouraged the Americans to resume their role as neutral carriers and suppliers of food. For a time, Americans made huge profits. Between 1803 and 1807, U.S. exports—mostly foodstuffs and plantation staples—rose from \$66.5 million to \$102.2 million. Re-exports—goods produced in the British, Spanish, and French islands of the Caribbean, picked up by American vessels, and then reloaded in American ports onto American ships bound for Europe—rose even faster, from \$13.5 million to \$58.4 million.

In 1805, the Royal Navy under Lord Nelson destroyed the French and Spanish fleets at the Battle of Trafalgar. Later that year, Napoleon’s armies won a decisive victory over Austria and Russia at the Battle of Austerlitz and won effective control of Europe. The war reached a stalemate: Napoleon’s army occupied Europe, and the British navy controlled the seas.

Britain decided to use its naval supremacy to blockade Europe and starve the French into submission. The Essex Decision of 1805 empowered the Royal Navy to seize American ships engaged in the re-export trade with France. Then Britain blockaded long stretches of the European coast. Napoleon responded with the Berlin Decree, outlawing all trade with the British Isles. The British answered with an Order in Council, which demanded that neutral ships trading with Europe stop first for inspection and licensing in a British port. Napoleon responded with the Milan Decree, which stated that any vessel that obeyed the British decrees or allowed itself to be searched by the Royal Navy was subject to seizure by France. Beginning in 1805 and ending with the Milan Decree in December 1807, the barrage of

A Page from the Journals of Lewis and Clark.

Lewis and Clark traveled among peoples, flora, and wildlife that no American white person had ever seen. Their journals reveal meticulous observation coupled with a sense of wonder.



European decrees and counter-decrees meant that one or the other of the warring powers would outlaw virtually all American commerce with Europe.

Trouble on the High Seas

Given British naval supremacy, France had few opportunities to harass American shipping. The Royal Navy, on the other hand, maintained a loose blockade of the North American coast and stopped and searched American ships as they left the major seaports. Hundreds of ships were seized, along with their cargoes and crews. Under British law, the Royal Navy could impress any British subject into service during wartime. Many British subjects, including legions of deserters from the Royal Navy, were hiding in the American merchant marine, where they avoided the danger, low pay, bad food, and draconian discipline of the British navy. British ships commandeered those men. They also took Englishmen who had taken out U.S. citizenship (an act the British did not recognize) and, inevitably,

native-born Americans. An estimated 6,000 American citizens were impressed into the Royal Navy between 1803 and 1812.

The kidnapping of American sailors enraged Americans and brought the country close to war in summer 1807. In June, the American naval frigate *Chesapeake* signed on four English deserters from the British navy, along with some Americans who had joined the British navy and then deserted. Some of the deserters spotted their old officers from *H.M.S. Leopard* in Norfolk, Virginia, and taunted them on the streets. The *Leopard* left port and resumed its patrol of the American coast. On June 21, the *Leopard* caught the *Chesapeake* off Hampton Roads and demanded the return of the British deserters. When the American captain refused, the British fired on the *Chesapeake*, killing three Americans and wounding 18. The British then boarded the *Chesapeake*, seized the four deserters, and later hanged one of them.

The *Chesapeake* affair set off huge anti-British demonstrations in the seaport towns and angry cries for war throughout the country. President Jefferson responded by barring British ships from American ports and American territorial waters and by ordering state governors to prepare to call up as many as 100,000 militiamen. The United States in 1807 stood at the brink of full-scale war with the most powerful nation in the world.

Embargo

Jefferson wanted to avoid war, which would inevitably bring high taxes, government debt, a bloated military and civil service, and the repression of dissent—precisely the evils that Jefferson had vowed to eliminate. Worse, war carried the danger of defeat and thus the possible failure of the United States.

Jefferson had one more card to play: He could suspend trade with Europe altogether and thus keep American ships out of harm's way. Jefferson assumed that U.S. farm products and the U.S. market for imported goods were crucial to the European economies. He could use trade as a means of “peaceable coercion” to enforce respect for American neutral rights and keep the country out of war. “Our commerce,” he wrote just before taking office, “is so valuable to them, that they will be glad to purchase it, when the only price we ask is to do us justice.” Convinced that America’s yeoman republic could survive without European luxuries more easily than Europe could survive without American food, Jefferson decided to give “peaceable coercion” a serious test. Late in 1807, he asked Congress to suspend all U.S. trade with foreign countries.

Congress passed the Embargo Act on December 22. Within a few months, it was clear that it would not work. The British found other markets and other sources of food. American farmers in the Northeast, who hated the **embargo**, helped the British by smuggling goods into Canada. Northeastern merchantmen, having been at sea when the embargo went into effect, stayed away from their home ports and functioned as part of the British merchant marine. A loophole in the Embargo Act allowed U.S. ships to leave port in order to pick up American property stranded in other countries. An estimated 6,000 ships set sail under that provision and then stayed at sea. Hundreds of others, plying the coastal trade, were “blown off course” and into international commerce. For his part, Napoleon

seized American ships in European ports, explaining that, because the embargo kept all American ships in port, those trading under American flags must be British ships in disguise.

The embargo hurt American commerce badly. Its 1807 exports of \$108 million dropped to \$22 million in 1808. The economy slowed in every section of the country, but it ground to a halt in the cities of the Northeast. While much of the ocean-going merchant fleet rotted at anchor, unemployed sailors, dockworkers, and other maritime workers and their families sank to levels of economic despair seldom seen in British North America. Northeastern Federalists branded Jefferson's embargo a "Chinese" (i.e., isolationist) solution to the problems of commerce and diplomacy. Commerce, they argued, was the great civilizer: "Her victories are over ferocious passions, savage manners, deep rooted prejudices, blind superstition and delusive theory." Federalists accused Jefferson of plotting an end to commerce and a reversion to rural barbarism, and they often took the lead in trying to subvert the embargo through smuggling and other means. In Connecticut, the Federalist governor flatly refused Jefferson's request to mobilize the militia to enforce the embargo.

The Federalists gained ground in the elections of 1808. James Madison, Jefferson's old ally and chosen successor, was elected president with 122 electoral votes to 47 for his Federalist opponent, C. C. Pinckney. Although Republicans retained control of both houses of Congress, Federalists made significant gains in Congress and won control of several state legislatures. Federalist opposition to the embargo, and to the supposed southern, agrarian stranglehold on national power, was gaining ground.

The Road to War

When President Madison took office in spring 1809, it was clear that the embargo had failed. On the contrary, the embargo had created misery in the seaport cities, choked off the imports that provided 90 percent of federal revenue, and revived Federalist opposition to Republican dominance. Early in 1809, Congress passed the Non-Intercourse Act, which retained the ban on trade with Britain and France but reopened trade with other nations. It also gave President Madison the power to reopen trade with either Britain or France once they had agreed to respect American rights. Neither complied, and the Non-Intercourse Act proved nearly as ineffective as the embargo.

In 1810, Congress passed Macon's Bill No. 2, a strange piece of legislation that rescinded the ban on trade with France and Britain but also authorized the president to reimpose the Non-Intercourse Act on either belligerent if the other agreed to end its restrictions on U.S. trade. Napoleon decided to test the Americans. In September 1810, the French promised, with vague conditions, that France would repeal the Berlin and Milan Decrees. Although the proposal was a clear attempt to lead the United States into conflict with Great Britain, Madison saw no choice but to go along with it. He accepted the French promise and proclaimed in November 1810 that the British had three months to follow suit. "It promises us," he said of his proclamation, "at least an extrication from the dilemma, of a mortifying peace, or a war with both the great belligerents."

In the end, Madison's proclamation led to war. The French repealed only those sections of the Berlin and Milan Decrees that applied to the neutral rights of the

United States. The British refused to revoke their Orders in Council and told the Americans to withdraw their restrictions on British trade until the French had repealed theirs. The United States would either have to obey British orders (thus making American exports and the American merchant marine a part of the British war effort—a neo-colonial situation that was utterly repugnant to most Americans) or go to war. When Congress reconvened in November 1811, it voted military measures in preparation for war with Great Britain.

The War Hawk Congress, 1811–1812

Republicans controlled both houses of Congress in 1811–12 by 75 percent of the House and 82 percent of the Senate, but they were a divided majority. The Federalist minority was united in opposition to Madison. They were often joined by

northeastern Republicans who followed the pro-British, Federalist line on international trade, and by Republicans who wanted a more powerful military than other Republicans would allow. Also opposed to Madison were the self-styled Old Republicans of the South, led by John Randolph. It was a deeply divided Congress that met the war crisis.

In this confused situation, a group of talented young congressmen took control. Nearly all of them were Republicans from the South or the West: Richard M. Johnson and Henry Clay of Kentucky, John C. Calhoun and William Lowndes of South Carolina, George M. Troup of Georgia, Peter B. Porter from the Niagara district of New York, and others. Called the **War Hawks**, these ardent nationalists wanted to declare war on England to protect U.S. rights. Through their organizational, oratorical, and intellectual power, they won control of Congress. Henry Clay, only 34 years old and serving his first term in Congress, was elected Speaker of the House. More vigorous than his predecessors, Clay controlled debate, packed key committees, worked tirelessly behind the scenes, and imposed order on his fellow congressmen. John Randolph, one of the most feared members of the House, routinely brought his dog into the House chamber. Speaker Clay pointedly ordered the dog removed. Earlier speakers had not dared give such an order.

In the winter and spring of 1811–12, the War Hawks led Congress into a declaration of war. In November they voted military preparations, and in April they enacted a 90-day embargo—not to coerce the British but to return American ships safely to port before war began. On June 1, Madison sent a war message to Congress. This was to be the first war declared under the Constitution, and the president stayed out of congressional territory by not asking explicitly for a declaration of war. He did, however, present a list of British crimes that could be interpreted in no other way: (1) the enforcement of the Orders in Council, even within the territorial waters of the United States; (2) the impressment of American seamen; (3) the use of spies and provocateurs within the United States; and (4) the wielding of “a malicious influence over the Indians of the Northwest Territory.” Madison concluded that war had in fact begun: “We behold ... on the side of Great Britain a state of war against the United States; and on the side of the United States, a state of peace toward Great Britain.”

Congress declared war on June 18. The vote was far from unanimous: 79 to 49 in the House of Representatives, 19 to 13 in the Senate. All 30 Federalists

voted against the declaration, as did one in five Republicans, nearly all of them from the Northeast. Thus the war was declared by the Democratic Republican Party, more particularly by the Republicans of the South and the West. The Northeast, whose commercial rights were supposedly the issue at stake, opposed the declaration.

American Strategy in 1812

The War Hawks declared a war to defend the sovereignty, the western territory, and the maritime rights of the United States. The war they planned and fought, however, bore the stamp of southern and western Republicanism. Federalists and many northeastern Republicans expected a naval war. After all, the British had committed their atrocities on the ocean, and some, remembering U.S. naval successes against France in the quasi-war of 1798–1800, predicted similar successes against Great Britain. Yet when Madison asked Congress to prepare for war, the War Hawks led a majority that strengthened the U.S. Army and left the navy weak. Reasoning that no U.S. naval force could challenge British control of the seas, they prepared instead for a land invasion of British Canada.

The decision to invade Canada led the Federalists, along with many of Randolph's Old Republicans, to accuse Madison and the congressional majority of planning a war of territorial aggression. Some members of Congress did want to annex Canada to the United States, but most saw the decision to invade Canada as a matter of strategy. Lightly garrisoned and with a population of only half a million (many of them French, and most of the others American émigrés of doubtful loyalties), Canada seemed the easiest and most logical place in which to damage the British. It was also from bases in Canada that the British armed the Indians of the Northwest, and western Republicans were determined to end that threat decisively. Finally, Canada was a valuable colony of Great Britain. The American embargoes, coupled with Napoleon's control of Europe, had impaired Britain's ability to supply its plantation colonies in the West Indies, and Canadian farmers had begun to fill the gap. Thus Canada was both valuable and vulnerable, and American policy makers reasoned that they could take it and hold it hostage while demanding that the British back down on other issues. Although U.S. military strategy focused on Canada, maritime rights and national honor, along with the British-fed Indian threat west of the Appalachians, were the central issues in 1812. As John C. Calhoun, who was instrumental in taking the nation to war, concluded: "The mad ambition, the lust of power, and commercial avarice of Great Britain have left to neutral nations an alternative only between the base surrender of their rights, and a manly vindication of them."

The Rise of Tecumseh

Native peoples east of the Mississippi River recognized alliances with Britain as a final chance to hold back American settlers. Northwestern Indians had lost much of their land at the Battle of Fallen Timbers and the Treaty of Greenville. Relegated to smaller territory but still dependent on the European fur trade, they fell into competition with settlers and other Indians for the diminishing supply of game.

The Creeks, Choctaws, and other tribes of the Old Southwest faced the same problem: Even when they chased settlers out of their territory, the settlers managed to kill or scare off the deer and other wildlife, thus ruining the old hunting grounds. When the Shawnee sent hunting parties farther west, they met irate western Indians. The Choctaws also sent hunters across the Mississippi, where they found both new sources of furs and angry warriors of the Osage and other peoples of Louisiana and Arkansas. The Indians of the interior now realized that the days of the fur trade, on which they depended for survival, were numbered.

Faced with shrinking territories, the disappearance of wildlife, and diminished opportunities to be traditional hunters and warriors, many Indian societies sank into despair. Epidemics of European diseases (smallpox, influenza, measles) attacked peoples who were increasingly sedentary and vulnerable. Old internal frictions grew nastier. In the Old Southwest, full-blooded Indians came into conflict with mixed-blood Indians, who often no longer spoke the native language and who wanted their people to adopt white ways. Murder and clan revenge plagued the tribes, and depression and suicide became more common. The use of alcohol, which had been a scourge on Indian societies for two centuries, increased. Indian males spent more time in their villages and less on the hunt, and by most accounts they drank more and grew more violent when they drank.

Out of this cultural wreckage emerged visionary leaders who spoke of a regenerated native society and the expulsion of all whites from the old tribal lands. The prophet who came closest to military success was Tenskwatawa, a fat, one-eyed, alcoholic Shawnee who had failed as a warrior and medicine man. He went into a deep trance in 1805, and the people thought he was dead. During preparations for his funeral, he awoke and told them he had visited heaven and hell and had received a prophetic vision. First, all Indians must stop drinking and fighting among themselves. They must also return to their traditional food, clothing, tools, and hairstyles, and must extinguish all of their fires and start new ones without using European tools. All who opposed the new order (including local chiefs, medicine men, shamans, and witches) must be put down by force. When all of that had been done, God (a monotheistic, punishing God borrowed from the Christians) would restore the world that Indians had known before the whites came over the mountains.

Tenskwatawa's message soon found its way to the Delawares (who attacked the Christians among their people as witches) and other native peoples of the Northwest. When converts flooded into the prophet's home village, he moved to Prophetstown (Tippecanoe) in what is now Indiana. There, with the help of his brother Tecumseh, he created an army estimated by the whites at anywhere between 650 and 3,000. Tecumseh, who took control of the movement, announced to the whites that he was the sole chief of all the Indians north of the Ohio River. Land cessions by anyone else would be invalid. Tenskwatawa's prophecy and Tecumseh's leadership had united the Indians of the Old Northwest in an unprecedented stand against white encroachment.

Tecumseh's confederacy posed a threat to the United States. A second war with England was looming, and Tecumseh was receiving supplies and encouragement from the British in Canada. He was also planning to visit the southern tribes in an

attempt to bring them into his confederacy. The prospect of unified resistance by the western tribes in league with the British jeopardized every settler west of the Appalachians. In 1811, William Henry Harrison led an army toward Prophetstown. With Tecumseh away, Tenskwatawa ordered an unwise attack on Harrison's army and was beaten at the Battle of Tippecanoe. But Tecumseh's confederacy remained a formidable opponent of the United States.

The War with Canada, 1812–1813

The United States attacked Canada in 1812, with disastrous results. The plan was to invade Upper Canada (Ontario) from the Northwest, thus cutting off the Shawnee, Potawatomi, and other pro-British Indian tribes from their British support.

When General William Hull, governor of Michigan Territory, took a poorly supplied, badly led army of militiamen and volunteers into Canada from a base in Detroit, he found that the British had outguessed him. The area was crawling with British troops and their Indian allies. With detachments of his army overrun and his supply lines cut, he retreated to the garrison at Detroit. Under siege, he heard that an Indian force had captured the garrison at Fort Dearborn. British General Isaac Brock, who knew that Hull was afraid of Indians, sent a note into the fort telling him, "the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops, will be beyond my controul the moment the contest commences." Without consulting his officers, Hull surrendered his army of 2,000 to the smaller British force. Hull was later court-martialed for cowardice, but the damage was done: The British and Indians occupied many of the remaining American garrisons in the Northwest and transformed the U.S. invasion of Upper Canada into a British occupation of much of the Northwest.

The invasion of Canada from the east went no better. In October a U.S. force of 6,000 faced 2,000 British and Indians across the Niagara River separating Ontario from western New York. The U.S. regular army crossed the river, surprised the British, and established a toehold at Queenston Heights. While the British prepared a counterattack, New York militiamen refused to cross the river to reinforce the regulars. Ohio militiamen had behaved the same way when Hull invaded Canada, and similar problems had arisen with the New York militia near Lake Champlain. Throughout the war, citizen-soldiers proved that Jefferson's confidence in the militia could not be extended to the invasion of other countries. The British regrouped and slaughtered the outnumbered, exhausted U.S. regulars at Queenston Heights.

As winter set in, it was clear that Canada would not fall as easily as the Americans had assumed. The invasion, which U.S. commanders had thought would knife through an apathetic Canadian population, had the opposite effect: The attacks by the United States turned the ragtag assortment of American loyalist émigrés, discharged British soldiers, and American-born settlers into a self-consciously British Canadian people. Years later, an Englishwoman touring Niagara Falls asked a Canadian ferryman if it was true that Canadians had thrown Americans off Queenston Heights to their death on the rocky banks of the Niagara River. "Why yes," he replied, "there was a good many of them; but it was right to show them that there was water between us, and you know it might help to keep the rest of them from coming to trouble us on our own ground."



MAP 7.4 War of 1812

Early in the war, Americans chose to fight the British in Canada, with costly and inconclusive results. Later, the British determined to blockade the whole coast of the United States and, late in the war, to raid important coastal towns. The results were equally inconclusive: Both sides could inflict serious damage, but neither could conquer the other. The one clear military outcome—one that the Americans were determined to accomplish—was the destruction of Indian resistance east of the Mississippi.

Tecumseh's Last Stand

Tecumseh's confederacy, bruised but not broken in the Battle of Tippecanoe, allied itself with the British in 1812. On a trip to the southern tribes, Tecumseh found the traditionalist wing of the Creeks—led by prophets who called themselves Red Sticks—willing to join him. The augmented confederacy provided stiff resistance to the United States throughout the war. The Red Sticks chased settlers from much of Tennessee. They

then attacked a group of settlers who had taken refuge in a stockade surrounding the house of an Alabama trader named George Mims. In what whites called the Massacre at Fort Mims, the Red Sticks (reputedly in collusion with the black slaves within the fort) killed at least 247 men, women, and children. In the Northwest, Tecumseh's warriors, fighting alongside the British, spread terror throughout the white settlements.

A wiser U.S. army returned to Canada in 1813. They raided and burned the Canadian capital at York (Toronto) in April, and then fought inconclusively throughout the summer. An autumn offensive toward Montreal failed, but the Americans had better luck on Lake Erie. The barrier of Niagara Falls kept Britain's saltwater navy out of the upper Great Lakes, and on Lake Erie, the British and Americans engaged in a frenzied shipbuilding contest throughout the first year of the war. The Americans won. In September 1813, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry cornered and destroyed the British fleet at Put-in-Bay. Control of Lake Erie enabled the United States to cut off supplies to the British in the Northwest, and a U.S. army under William Henry Harrison retook the area and continued on into Canada. On October 5, Harrison caught up with a force of British and Indians at the Thames River and beat them badly. In the course of that battle, Richard M. Johnson, a War Hawk congressman acting as commander of the Kentucky militia, killed Tecumseh. Proud militiamen returned to Kentucky with pieces of hair and clothing and even swatches of skin torn from Tecumseh's corpse. Their officers reaped huge political rewards: The Battle of the Thames would produce a president of the United States (Harrison), a vice president (Johnson), three governors of Kentucky, three lieutenant governors, four U.S. senators, and about 20 congressmen—telling evidence of how seriously the settlers of the interior had taken Tecumseh.

The following spring, General Andrew Jackson's Tennessee militia, aided by Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee allies, attacked and slaughtered the Red Sticks, who had fortified themselves at Horseshoe Bend in Alabama. With the Battle of the Thames and the Battle of Horse Shoe Bend, the military power of the Indian peoples east of the Mississippi River was broken.

The British Offensive, 1814

The British defeated Napoleon in April 1814, thus ending the war in Europe. They then turned their attention to the American war and went on the offensive. They had already blockaded much of the American coast from Georgia to Maine. During summer 1814, they raided Chesapeake Bay and marched on Washington, D.C. They chased the army and politicians out of town and burned down the capitol building and the president's mansion. In September, the British attacked Baltimore, but could not blast their way past the determined garrison that commanded the harbor from Fort McHenry. This was the battle that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the lyrics of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which was set to the tune of an old English drinking song ("To Anacreon in Heaven," music by John Stafford Smith). It became the national anthem in the 1930s. When a British offensive on Lake Champlain stalled during the autumn, the war reached a stalemate: Britain had turned back the invasion of Canada and had blockaded the American coast, but neither side could take and hold the other's territory.



The Burning of Washington. *The United States suffered one of its greatest military embarrassments in 1814, when the British raided Washington, D.C., brushed off the opposition, and burned the president's house and the capitol building.*

The British now shifted their attention to the Gulf Coast, particularly to New Orleans, a city of vital importance to U.S. trans-Appalachian trade and communications. Peace negotiations had begun in August, and the British wanted to capture and hold New Orleans as a bargaining chip. A large British force landed eight miles south of New Orleans. There they met an American army made up of U.S. regulars, Kentucky and Tennessee militiamen, clerks, working men, free blacks from the city, and about a thousand French pirates—all under the command of Andrew Jackson of Tennessee. Throughout late December and early January, unaware that a peace treaty had been signed on December 24, the armies exchanged artillery barrages and the British probed and attacked American lines. On January 8, they launched a frontal assault. A formation of 6,000 British soldiers marched across open ground toward 4,000 Americans concealed behind breastworks. With the first American volley, it was clear that the British had made a mistake. Veterans of the bloodiest battles of the Napoleonic wars swore that they had never seen such withering fire; soldiers in the front ranks who were not cut down threw themselves to the ground and surrendered when the shooting stopped. The charge lasted half an hour. At the end, 2,000 British soldiers lay dead or wounded. American casualties numbered only 70. Fought nearly two weeks after the peace treaty, the Battle of New Orleans had no effect on the outcome of the war or on the peace terms, but it salved the injured pride of Americans and made a national hero and a political power of Andrew Jackson.

The Hartford Convention

While most of the nation celebrated Jackson's victory, events in Federalist New England went differently. New Englanders had disliked Republican trade policies, and their congressmen had voted overwhelmingly against going to war. The New England states seldom met their quotas of militiamen for the war effort, and some Federalist leaders had openly urged resistance to the war. The British had encouraged that resistance by not extending their naval blockade to the New England coast, and throughout the first two years of the war, New England merchants and farmers had traded freely with the enemy. In 1814, after the Royal Navy had extended its blockade northward and had begun to raid the towns of coastal Maine, some Federalists talked openly about seceding and making a separate peace with Britain.

In an attempt to undercut the secessionists, moderate Federalists called a convention at Hartford to air the region's grievances. The Hartford Convention, which met in late December 1814, proposed amendments to the Constitution that indicated New England's position as a self-conscious minority within the Union. First, the convention delegates wanted the "three-fifths" clause, which led to overrepresentation of the South in Congress, and the Electoral College (see Chapter 6) stricken from the Constitution. They also wanted to deny naturalized citizens—who were strongly Republican—the right to hold office. They wanted to make it more difficult for new states, all of which sided with the Republicans and their southern leadership, to enter the Union. Finally, they wanted to require a two-thirds majority of both houses for a declaration of war—a requirement that would have prevented the War of 1812.

Leaders of the Hartford Convention, satisfied that they had headed off the secessionists, took their proposals to Washington in mid-January. They arrived to find the capital celebrating news of the peace treaty and Jackson's victory at New Orleans. When they aired their sectional complaints, they were branded as traitors. Although Federalists continued for a few years to wield power in southern New England, the Hartford debacle ruined any chance of a nationwide Federalist resurgence after the war. Andrew Jackson had stolen control of American history from New England. He would do so again in the years ahead.

The Treaty of Ghent

Britain's defeat of Napoleon had spurred British and American efforts to end a war that neither wanted. In August 1814, they opened peace talks in the Belgian city of Ghent. Perhaps waiting for the results of their 1814 offensive, the British opened with proposals that the Americans were certain to reject. They demanded the right to navigate the Mississippi. Moreover, they wanted territorial concessions and the creation of the permanent, independent Indian buffer state in the Northwest that they had promised their Indian allies. The Americans ignored these proposals and talked instead about impressment and maritime rights. As the autumn wore on and the war reached stalemate, both sides began to compromise. The British knew that the Americans would grant concessions in the interior only if they were thoroughly defeated, an outcome that British commanders thought impossible. For their part, the Americans realized that British maritime depredations were by-products of the struggle with Napoleonic France. Faced with peace in Europe and a senseless military stalemate in

North America, negotiators on both sides began to withdraw their demands. The Treaty of Ghent, signed on Christmas Eve 1814, simply ended the war. The border between Canada and the United States remained where it had been in 1812; Indians south of that border—defeated and without allies—were left to the mercy of the United States; and British maritime violations were not mentioned. The makers of the treaty stopped a war that neither side could win, trusting that a period of peace would resolve the problems created by two decades of world war.

CONCLUSION

In 1816, Thomas Jefferson was in retirement at Monticello, satisfied that he had defended liberty against the Federalists' love of power. The High Federalist attempt to consolidate power, militarize government, and jail their opposition had failed. Their direct taxes were repealed. Their debt and their national bank remained in place, but only under the watchful eyes of true republicans. And their attempt to ally the United States with the antirepublican designs of Great Britain had ended in what many called the Second War of American Independence. American independence was truly won, and Jefferson's vision of a union of independent republican states seemed to have been realized.

Yet for all his successes, Jefferson saw that he must sacrifice some of his longest-held dreams. Jefferson's republican ideal was grounded in farmer-citizens whose vision was local and who wanted nothing more from government than protection of their property and rights. Jefferson's imagined yeomen traded farm surpluses for European manufactured goods—a system that encouraged rural prosperity, prevented the growth of cities and factories (the much-feared nurseries of corruption and dependence), and thus sustained the landed independence on which republican citizenship rested. Westward expansion, Jefferson had believed, would ensure the yeoman republic for generations to come. By 1816, that dream was ended. The British and French had “cover [ed] the earth and sea with robberies and piracies,” disrupting America's vital export economy whenever it suited their whims. Arguing as Hamilton had argued in 1790, Jefferson insisted, “we must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturalist.”

8



NORTHERN TRANSFORMATIONS, 1790–1850

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Postcolonial Society, 1790–1815
- From Backcountry to Frontier: The Northwest
- Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860
- Northeastern Farms, 1815–1860
- The Northwest
- Farm Families
- The Beginnings of the Industrial Revolution

IN 1790, AMERICAN SOCIETY approximated Jefferson's ideal: the United States was a nation of farmers who provided for themselves and sent surpluses overseas to be traded for manufactured goods. To put it in a less bucolic way, Americans remained on the colonial periphery of North Atlantic capitalism. They sent timber, cured fish, wheat, tobacco, rice, and money to Europe (primarily Great Britain), and Europe (again, Britain was the big player) sent manufactured goods—along with bills for shipping, insurance, banking, and tariff duties—back to America. In the 25 years following adoption of the Constitution, this old relationship fed significant economic growth in the United States, as European wars increased the demand for American produce and American shipping. Americans sent growing mountains of food and raw materials overseas, and they decorated their homes with comforts and small luxuries produced in British factories.

Beginning in the 1790s and accelerating dramatically with the peace of 1815, northern farmers changed that relationship: by 1830, the primary engine of northern economic development was no longer the North Atlantic trade; it was the self-sustained internal development of the northern United States. Northeastern businessmen noted that rural markets were expanding, that imports were unreliable, and that a crowded countryside produced people eager to work for wages. They began to invest in factories. New factory towns, together with the old seaports and new inland towns that served a commercializing agriculture, provided the country's first significant domestic market for food. Governments of the northern states built roads and canals that linked farmers to distant markets, and farmers turned to cash-crop agriculture and bought necessary goods (and paid mortgages

CHRONOLOGY

1789	National government under the Constitution begins
1790	Samuel Slater builds his first Arkwright spinning mill at Pawtucket, Rhode Island
1791	Vermont enters the union as the 14th state
1793	Beginning of Anglo-French War ♦ Ohio enters the union as the 17th state
1807	Robert Fulton launches first steamboat
1812	Second war with Britain begins
1813	Boston Associates erect their first textile mill at Waltham, Massachusetts
1815	War of 1812 ends
1818	National Road completed to Ohio River at Wheeling, Virginia
1822	President Monroe vetoes National Road reparations bill
1825	New York completes the Erie Canal between Buffalo and Albany
1828	Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (America's first) completed
1835	Main Line Canal connects Philadelphia and Pittsburgh

and crop loans) with the money they made. By 1830, a large and growing portion of New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the Northwest had transcended colonial economics to become an interdependent, self-sustaining market society.

The pioneering sociologist Max Weber made a distinction between capitalism and the *spirit* of capitalism. Economic exchange and the desire for profit, Weber noted, have existed in all societies. Only a few, however, have organized capitalism into an everyday culture. Historians have coined the term “market revolution” to describe the transformation of the North from a society with markets to a market society—a society in which the market was implicated in the ways in which northerners saw the world and dealt with it. This chapter describes that revolution in the North up to 1830. The succeeding chapter describes the very different patterns of change in the South in the same years.

POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETY, 1790–1815

In 1782, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a French soldier who had settled in rural New York, explained America's agrarian republic through the words of a fictionalized farmer. First of all, he said, the American farmer owns his own land and bases his claim to dignity and citizenship on that fact. He spoke of “the bright idea of property,” and went on: “This formerly rude soil has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return, it has established all our rights; on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of [a rural neighborhood]....” Second, he said, farm ownership endows the American farmer with the powers and responsibilities of fatherhood. “Often when I plant my

low ground,” he said, “I place my little boy on a chair which screws to the beam of the plough—its motion and that of the horses please him; he is perfectly happy and begins to chat. As I lean over the handle, various are the thoughts which crowd into my mind. I am now doing for him, I say, what my father did for me; may God enable him to live that he may perform the same operations for the same purposes when I am worn out and old!”

Farms

Crèvecoeur’s farmer, musing on liberty and property, working the ancestral fields with his male heir strapped to the plough, was concerned with proprietorship and fatherhood, not with making money. He shared those concerns with most northern farmers. Their first concern was to provide food and common comforts for their households. Their second was to achieve long-term security and the ability to pass their farms on to their sons. The goal was to create what rural folks called a **“competence”**: the ability to live up to neighborhood standards of material decency while protecting the long-term independence of the household. Farmers thought of themselves first as fathers, neighbors, and stewards of family resources, and they avoided financial risk. Weather, bad crop years, pests, and unexpected injuries or deaths provided enough of that without adding the uncertainties of cash-crop agriculture and international commodity prices. In this situation, most farmers played it safe. They raised a variety of animals and plants, and did not concentrate on a single cash crop. Most farms in New England and the middle states were divided into corn and grain fields, pasturage for animals, woodlands for fuel, a vegetable garden, and perhaps a dairy cow. The multifarious configuration of these farms provided a hedge against the uncertainties of rural life. Farm families ate most of what they grew, bartered much of the rest within their neighborhoods, and gambled surpluses on long-distance trade.

West Indian and European markets for American meat, grain, and corn had been growing since the mid-18th century. They expanded dramatically between 1793 and 1815, when war disrupted farming in Europe. Many northern farmers, particularly in the mid-Atlantic states, expanded production to take advantage of these overseas markets. The prosperity and aspirations of hundreds of thousands of farmers rose, and their houses were sprinkled with tokens of comfort and gentility. The same markets, however, sustained traditions of household independence and neighborly cooperation. Farmers continued to provide for their families from their own farms and neighborhoods, and they risked little by increasing their surpluses and sending them overseas. They profited from world markets without becoming dependent on them.

Production for overseas markets after 1790 did, however, alter relationships within farm families—usually in ways that reinforced the independence of the household and the power of its male head. Farm labor in post-revolutionary America was carefully divided by sex. Men worked in the fields, and production for markets both intensified that labor and made it more exclusively male. In the grain fields of the middle states, for instance, the long-handled scythe was replacing the sickle as the principal harvest tool. Women could use the sickle efficiently, but because of its length and weight, men were better able to wield the scythe. At the same time, farmers completed the substitution of ploughs for hoes as the principal cultivating tools—not only because ploughs worked better, but also because rural

Americans had developed a prejudice against women working in the fields, and ploughs were male tools. By the early 19th century, visitors to the long-settled farming areas (with the exception of some mid-Atlantic German communities) seldom saw women in the fields. In his travels throughout France, Thomas Jefferson spoke harshly of peasant communities where he saw women doing field labor.

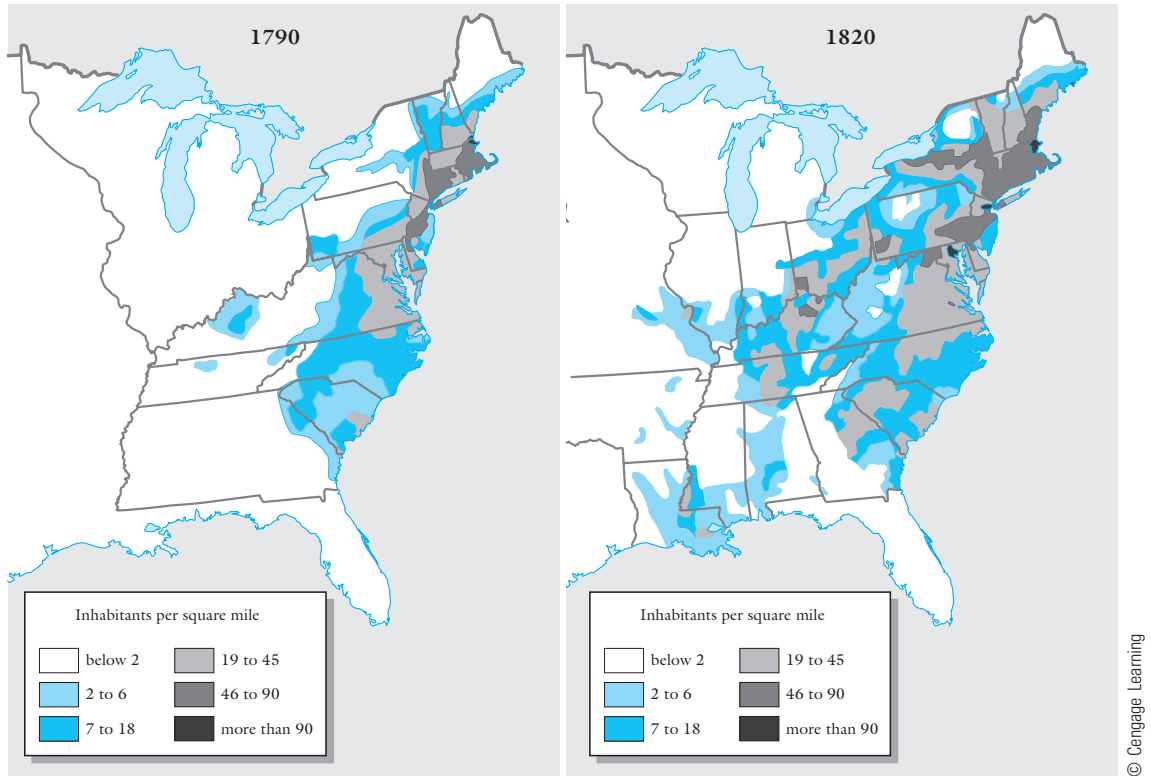
At the same time, household responsibilities multiplied and fell more exclusively to women. Farm women's labor and ingenuity helped create a more varied and nutritious rural diet in these years. Bread and salted meat were still the staples. The bread was the old mix of Indian corn and coarse wheat ("rye and Injun," the farmers called it), with crust so thick that it was used as a scoop for soups and stews. Though improved brines and pickling techniques augmented the supply of salt meat that could be laid by, farmers' palates doubtless told them that it was the same old salt meat. A variety of other foods were now available, however.

By the 1790s, improved winter feeding for cattle and better techniques for making and storing butter and cheese kept dairy products on the tables of the more prosperous farm families throughout the year. Chickens became more common, and farm women began to fence and manure their kitchen gardens, planting them with potatoes, turnips, cabbages, squashes, beans, and other vegetables that could be stored in the root cellars that were becoming standard features of farmhouses. By the 1830s, a resident of Weymouth, Massachusetts, claimed, "a man who did not have a large garden of potatoes, crooked-necked squashes, and other vegetables ... was regarded [as] improvident." He might have added poultry and dairy cattle to the list, and he might have noted—as he did not—that all were more likely to result from the labor of women than from the labor of men.

Neighbors

Rural communities were far more than accumulations of independent farm-owning households. The struggle to maintain household independence involved most farm families in elaborate networks of neighborly cooperation, and long-term, give-and-take relationships with neighbors were essential economic and social assets. Few farmers possessed the tools, the labor, and the food they would have needed to be truly self-sufficient. They regularly worked for one another, borrowed oxen and plows, and swapped one kind of food crop for another. Women traded ashes, herbs, butter and eggs, vegetables, seedlings, baby chicks, goose feathers, and the products of their spinning wheels and looms. The regular exchange of such goods and services was crucial to the workings of rural neighborhoods. Some undertakings—house and barn raisings and husking bees, for example—brought the whole neighborhood together, transforming a necessary chore into a pleasant social event. The gossip, drinking, and dancing that took place on such occasions were fun. They were also—like the exchanges of goods and labor—social rituals that strengthened the neighborly relations within which farmers created a livelihood and passed it on to their sons.

Few of these neighborhood transactions involved money. In 1790, no paper money had yet been issued by the states or the federal government, and the widespread use of Spanish, English, and French coins testified to the shortage of specie. In New England, farmers kept careful accounts of neighborhood debts. In the South and West, farmers used a **"changing system"** in which they simply remembered what they owed; they regarded the New England practice as a sign of Yankee greed



MAP 8.1 Population Density, 1790–1820

The population of the United States nearly doubled between 1790 and 1820, growing from 5.2 million to 9.6 million persons. In the South, an overwhelmingly rural population spread rapidly across space. The population of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic also occupied new territory over these years, but the rise of seaport towns and intensely commercialized (and often overcrowded) farming areas were turning the North into a much more densely settled region.

and lack of character. Yet farmers everywhere relied more on barter than on cash. “Instead of money going incessantly backwards and forwards into the same hands,” observed a French traveler in Massachusetts in 1790, Americans “supply their needs in the countryside by direct reciprocal exchanges. The tailor and the bootmaker go and do their work at the home of the farmer ... who most frequently provides the raw material for it and pays for the work in goods. They write down what they give and receive on both sides, and at the end of the year they settle a large variety of exchanges with a very small quantity of coin.”

George Holcomb, a farmer in New York’s Hudson Valley, left a record of his neighborly transactions over a few days in 1812: “Today Wm. Dixon paid me eight dollars and I lent the same to Samuel Holcomb and today I wanted about two thirds of it for Wm. Dixon and he paid me in three trees of timber that I went and chopped and got home at night ... this evening I went to Mr. Zach Chapman to a party, Mr. Foley came and dressed flax for half a cord of wood I drew him last winter to the school house.” In a short time, George Holcomb dealt with neighbors and relatives, with cash and bartering, and with a local economy that mixed cut wood, schoolhouse provisions, dressed flax, and a party. He conducted his

economic life within an elaborate network of neighborly and family obligations, and not by buying, selling, and calculating.

Country storekeepers and village merchants handled relationships between farmers and long-distance markets, and they were as much a part of their neighborhoods as of the wider world. In most areas, farmers brought produce—often a mixed batch of grain, vegetables, ashes, goose down, and so on—to the storekeeper, who arranged its shipment to a seaport town. Some paid cash for produce, but most simply credited the farmer's account. Farmers also bought store goods on credit, and when bad crop years or bad luck made them unable to pay, storekeepers tended to wait for payment without charging interest. In many instances, the store was incorporated into the relations of local exchange. Hudson River merchants paid the same prices for local goods that were to be sold locally over long periods of time—a price that reflected their relative value within the local barter economy. When sent to New York City, the prices of the same goods floated up and down with their value on international markets. Storekeepers also played a role in local networks of debt, for it was common for farmers to bring their grain, ashes, butter, and eggs to the store, and to have them credited to the accounts of neighbors to whom they were in debt, thus turning the storekeeper into a broker within the complicated web of neighborhood obligations.

Standards of Living

In 1790, most farmhouses in the older rural areas were small, one-story structures, and few farmers bothered to keep their surroundings clean or attractive. They repaired their fences only when they became too dilapidated to function. They rarely planted trees or shrubs, and housewives threw out garbage for chickens and pigs that foraged near the house.

Inside, there were few rooms and many people. Beds stood in every room, and few family members slept alone. Growing up in Bethel, Connecticut, the future show-business entrepreneur P. T. Barnum shared a bed with his brother and an Irish servant. Guests shared beds in New England taverns until the 1820s. The hearth remained the source of heat and light in most farmhouses. Between 1790 and 1810, over half the households in central Massachusetts, an old and relatively prosperous area, owned only one or two candlesticks, suggesting that one of the great disparities between wealthy families and their less affluent neighbors was that the wealthy could light their houses at night. Another disparity was in the outward appearance of houses. The better-off families painted their houses white as a token of pristine republicanism, but their bright houses stood apart from the weathered grey-brown clapboard siding of their neighbors in stark and unrepublican contrast.

Increased income from foreign markets did result in improvement. Farmers bought traditional necessities such as salt and pepper, gunpowder, tools, and coffee and tea, but these were now supplemented with an increasingly alluring array of little luxuries such as crockery, flatware, finished cloth, mirrors, clocks and watches, wallpaper, and the occasional book. At mealtimes, only the poorest families continued to eat with their fingers or with spoons from a common bowl. By 1800, individual place settings with knives and forks and china plates, along with individual chairs instead of benches, had become common in rural America.

Inheritance

Northern farmers between 1790 and 1815 were remarkably like Jefferson's yeoman-citizen ideal: prosperous, independent, living in rough equality with neighbors who shared the same status. Yet even as rural Americans acted out that vision, its social base was disintegrating. Overcrowding and the growth of markets caused the price of good farmland to rise sharply throughout the older settlements. Most young men could expect to inherit only a few acres of exhausted land, or to move to wilderness land in the **backcountry**. Failing that, they could expect to quit farming altogether. Crèvecoeur's baby boy—who in fact ended up living in Boston—was in a more precarious position than his seat on his father's plough might have indicated.

In Revolutionary America, fathers had been judged by their ability to support and govern their households, to serve as good neighbors, and to pass land on to their sons. After the war, fewer farm fathers were able to do that. Those in the old settlements had small farms and large families, which made it impossible for them to provide a competence for all of their offspring. Fathers felt that they had failed as fathers, and their sons, with no prospect of an adequate inheritance, were obliged to leave home. Most fathers tried to provide for all of their heirs (generally by leaving land to their sons and personal property to their daughters). Few left all of their land to one son, and many stated in their wills that the sons to whom they left the land must share barns and cider mills—even houses—on farms that could be subdivided no further. Such provisions fitted a social system that guaranteed the independence of the household head through complex relations with kin and neighbors, but they were also an indication that that system had reached the end of the line.

Outside New England, farm **tenancy** was on the increase. In parts of Pennsylvania and in other areas as well, farmers often bought farms when they became available in the neighborhood, rented them to tenants to augment the household income, and gave them to their sons when they reached adulthood. The sons of poorer farmers often rented a farm in the hope of saving enough money to buy it. Some fathers bought tracts of unimproved land in the backcountry—sometimes on speculation, more often to provide their sons with land they could make into a farm. Others paid to have their sons educated, or arranged an apprenticeship to provide them with an avenue of escape from a crowded countryside. As a result, more and more young men left home. The populations of the old farming communities grew older and more female, while the populations of the rising frontier settlements and seaport cities became younger and more male. The young men who stayed home often had nothing to look forward to but a lifetime as tenants or hired hands.

The Seaport Cities

When the first federal census takers made their rounds in 1790, they found 94 percent of Americans living on farms and in rural villages. The remaining 6 percent lived in 24 towns with a population of more than 2,500 (a census definition of “urban” that included many communities that were, by modern standards, very small). Only five places had populations over 10,000: Boston (18,038), New York (33,131), Philadelphia (42,444), Baltimore (13,503), and Charleston (16,359). All five were seaports, which is testimony to the key role of international commerce in the economy of the early republic.

The little streams of produce that left farm neighborhoods joined with others on the rivers and the coastal shipping lanes, and they piled up as a significant national surplus on the docks of the seaport towns. When war broke out between Britain and France in 1793, the overseas demand for American foodstuffs, and thus the production of American farms, increased. The warring European powers also needed shipping to carry products from the Caribbean islands to Europe. America's saltwater merchants, free from the old colonial restrictions, responded by building one of the great merchant fleets in the world, and American overseas trade entered a period of unprecedented growth. Ocean trade during these years was risky and uneven, subject to the tides of war and the strategies of the belligerents. French seizures of American shipping and the resulting undeclared war of 1798–1800, the British ban on America's re-export trade in 1805, Jefferson's nonimportation of 1806 and his embargo of 1807, and America's entry into the war in 1812 all disrupted the maritime economy and threw the seaports into periods of economic collapse. But by 1815, wartime commerce had transformed the seaports and the institutions of American business. New York City had become the nation's largest city, with a population that grew from 33,131 in 1790 to 96,373 in 1810. Philadelphia's population had risen to 53,722 by 1810; Boston's to 34,322; and Baltimore's to 46,555. Economic growth in the years 1790 to 1815 was most palpably concentrated in these cities.

Seaport merchants in these years amassed the private fortunes and built the financial infrastructure that would soon take up the task of commercializing and industrializing the northern United States. Old merchants like the Brown brothers of Providence and Elias Hasket Darby of Salem grew richer, and newcomers like the immigrant John Jacob Astor of New York City built huge personal fortunes. To manage those fortunes, new institutions emerged. Docking and warehousing facilities improved dramatically. Bookkeepers were replaced by accountants, who were familiar with the new double-entry system of accounting, and insurance and banking companies were formed to handle the risks and rewards of wartime commerce.

The cities prospered in these years. The main thoroughfares and a few of the side streets were paved with cobblestones and lined with fine shops and townhouses. But in other parts of the cities, visitors learned that the boom was creating poverty as well as wealth. There had been poor people and depressed neighborhoods in the 18th-century seaports, but not on the scale that prevailed between 1790 and 1820. A few steps off the handsome avenues were narrow streets crowded with ragged children, browsing dogs and pigs, with garbage and waste filling the open sewers. Epidemics became more frequent and deadly. New York City, for example, experienced six severe bouts of yellow fever between 1791 and 1822. Each time, the disease entered through the seaport and settled in the slums. Life expectancy in Boston, reputedly the healthiest city in America, was three to five years lower than in the surrounding countryside.

The slums were evidence that money created by commerce was being distributed in undemocratic ways. Per capita wealth in New York rose 60 percent between 1790 and 1825, but the wealthiest 4 percent of the population owned over half of that wealth. The wages of skilled and unskilled labor rose in these years, but the increase in seasonal and temporary employment, together with the recurring interruptions of foreign commerce, cut deeply into the security and prosperity of

ordinary women and men. Added to the old insecurities of sickness, fire, accident, aging, and any number of personal misfortunes, these ate up the gains made by laborers, sailors, and most artisans and their families.

Meanwhile, the status of artisans in the big cities was undergoing change. In 1790, artisans were the self-proclaimed “middling classes” of the towns. They demanded and usually received the respect of their fellow citizens. When a clerk in Boston refused to attend dancing classes that one of the town’s master saddlers had joined, a newspaper scolded him (a mere “stockjobber’s lackey”) for considering himself the social superior of the saddler and other “reputable mechanics.” Skilled manual workers constituted about half the male workforce of the seaport cities, and their respectability and usefulness, together with the role they had played in the Revolution, had earned them an honorable status.

That status rested in large part on their independence. In 1790, most artisan workshops were household operations with at most one or two apprentices and hired **journeymen**—wage earners who looked forward to owning their own shops one day. Timothy Dwight, the conservative president of Yale College, observed that there were few of those “amphibious beings” in America who remained journeymen (wage earners) for life. Most master craftsmen lived modestly (on the borderline of poverty in many cases) and aspired only to support their household in security and decency, and to do so by performing useful work. They identified their way of life with republican virtue. Jefferson proclaimed them “the yeomen of the cities.”



The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Procession of the Victuallers*, by John Lewis Kimmel (Bc85 K89)

Procession of Victuallers, 1815. *The frequent and festive parades in the seaport cities included militia companies, political officials, clergymen, and artisans organized by trade. In this Philadelphia parade celebrating the end of the War of 1812, the victuallers, preceded by militia cavalymen, carry a penned steer and a craft flag high atop a wagon, while butchers in top hats and clean aprons ride below. Behind them, shipbuilders drag a ship through the streets. Such parades were vivid displays of the system of interlocking labors that made up the city and of the value of artisans within that system.*

The patriarchal base of that republicanism, however, was eroding. With the growth of the maritime economy, the nature of construction work, shipbuilding, the clothing trades, and other specialized crafts changed. Artisans were being replaced by cheaper labor and undercut by subcontracted “slop work” performed by semiskilled rural outworkers. Perhaps one in five master craftsmen entered the newly emerging business class. The others took work as laborers or wage-earning craftsmen. By 1815, most young craftsmen in the seaports could not hope to own their own shops. About half of New York City’s journeymen that year were over 30 years old; nearly a quarter of them were over 40. Most were married, and half headed a household that included four or more dependents. In short, they had become wage earners for life. In the seaports between 1790 and 1815, the world of artisans like Paul Revere, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine was passing out of existence. Wage labor was taking its place.

The loss of independence undermined artisan husbands and fathers. Few wage earners could support a family without the earnings of a wife and children. Working-class women took in boarders and did laundry and found work as domestic servants or as peddlers of fruit, candy, vegetables, cakes, or hot corn. They sent their children out to scavenge in the streets. The descent into wage labor and the reliance on the earnings of women and children were at variance with the republican, patriarchal assumptions of fathers.

FROM BACKCOUNTRY TO FRONTIER: THE NORTHWEST

The United States was a huge country in 1790, at least on paper. In the treaty that ended the War of Independence in 1783, the British ignored Indian claims and ceded all of the land from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River to the new republic, with the exceptions of Spanish Florida and New Orleans. The states then surrendered their individual claims to the federal government, and in 1790 George Washington became president of a nation that stretched nearly 1,500 miles inland. Still, most white Americans lived on thin strips of settlement on the Atlantic coast and along the few navigable rivers that emptied into the Atlantic. Some were pushing their way into the wilds of Maine and northern Vermont, and in New York others set up communities as far west as the Mohawk Valley. Pittsburgh was a struggling new settlement, and two outposts had been established on the Ohio River: at Marietta and at what would become Cincinnati.

The Backcountry, 1790–1815

To easterners, the backcountry whites, who were displacing the Indians, seemed no different from the defeated aborigines. In fact, in accommodating themselves to a borderless forest used by both Indians and whites, many settlers—like many Indians—had melded Indian and white ways. To clear the land, backcountry farmers simply girdled the trees and left them to die and fall down by themselves. They plowed the land by navigating between the stumps. To easterners’ minds, the worst offense was that women often worked the fields, particularly while their men, as did Indians, spent long periods away on hunting trips for food game and animal skins for trade. The arch-pioneer Daniel Boone, for instance, braided his hair, dressed

himself in Indian leggings, and, with only his dogs for company, disappeared for months at a time on “long hunts.” When easterners began to “civilize” his neighborhood, Boone moved farther west.

Eastern visitors were appalled not only by the poverty, lice, and filth of frontier life but also by the drunkenness and violence of the frontiersmen. Americans everywhere drank heavily in the early years of the 19th century, but everyone agreed that westerners drank more and were more violent when drunk than men anywhere else. Travelers told of no-holds-barred fights in which men gouged the eyes and bit off the noses and ears of their opponents. No account was complete without a reckoning of the number of one-eyed, one-eared men the traveler had met on the frontier. Stories arose of half-legendary heroes such as Davy Crockett of Tennessee, who wrestled bears and alligators and had a recipe for Indian stew, and Mike Fink, a Pennsylvania boatman who brawled and drank his way along the rivers of the interior until he was shot and killed in a drunken episode that none of the participants could clearly remember. Samuel Holden Parsons, a New Englander serving as a judge in the Northwest Territory, called the frontiersmen “our white savages.” Massachusetts conservative Timothy Pickering branded them “the least worthy subjects of the United States. They are little less savage than the Indians.”

Settlement

After 1789, settlers of the backcountry made two demands of the new national government: protection from the Indians and a guarantee of the right to navigate the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The Indians were pushed back in the 1790s and finished off in the War of 1812; in 1803, Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase ended the European presence on the rivers and at the crucial chokepoint at New Orleans. Over these years, the pace of settlement quickened. In 1790, only 10,000 settlers lived west of the Appalachians—about one American in 40. By 1800, the number of settlers had risen to nearly one million. By 1820, two million Americans were westerners—one in five.

The new settlers bought land from speculators who had acquired tracts under the Northwest Ordinance in the Northwest; from English, Dutch, and American land companies in western New York; and from land dealers in the Southwest and in northern New England. They built frame houses surrounded by cleared fields, planted marketable crops, and settled into the struggle to make farms out of the wilderness and to meet mortgage payments along the way. Ohio entered the union in 1803, followed by Indiana (1816) and Illinois (1818). As time passed, the term *backcountry*, which easterners had used to refer to the wilderness and the dangerous misfits who lived in it, fell into disuse. By 1820, the term *frontier* had replaced it. The new settlements no longer represented the backwash of American civilization. They were its cutting edge.

TRANSPORTATION REVOLUTION, 1815–1860

After 1815, dramatic improvements in transportation—more and better roads, steamboats, canals, and railroads—tied old communities together and penetrated previously isolated neighborhoods and transformed them. Most of these improvements were the work of state governments. They made the transition to a market society physically possible.

Transportation in 1815

In 1815, the United States was a rural nation stretching from the old settlements on the Atlantic coast to the trans-Appalachian west, with transportation facilities that ranged from primitive to nonexistent. Americans despaired of communicating, to say nothing of doing business on a national scale. In 1816, a Senate committee reported that \$9 would move a ton of goods across the 3,000-mile expanse of the North Atlantic. The same \$9 would move the same ton of goods only 30 miles inland. A year later, the cost of transporting wheat from the new settlement of Buffalo to New York City was three times higher than the selling price of wheat in New York. Farming for profit made sense only for farmers near urban markets or with easy river access to the coast.

West of the Appalachians, transportation was almost entirely undeveloped. Until the 1820s, most northwesterners were southern yeomen who settled near tributaries of the Ohio–Mississippi River Valley, which reached the sea at New Orleans. Farmers floated their produce downriver on jerrybuilt flatboats. Boatmen making the trip from Louisville to New Orleans spent a full month navigating dangerous rivers through unsettled territory. At New Orleans, northwestern produce was trans-shipped to New York and other eastern ports. Most boatmen knocked down their flatboats, sold the lumber, and then walked home to Kentucky or Ohio over the difficult and dangerous Natchez Trace.

Transporting goods *into* the western settlements was even more difficult. Keel boatmen like the legendary Mike Fink could navigate upstream—using eddies and back currents, sailing when the wind was right, but usually poling their boats against the current. Skilled crews averaged only 15 miles a day, and the trip from New Orleans to Louisville took three to four months. Looking for better routes, some merchants dragged finished goods across Pennsylvania and into the West at Pittsburgh, but transport costs made these goods prohibitively expensive. Consequently, the trans-Appalachian settlements—home to one in five Americans by 1820—remained marginal to the market economy. By 1815, New Orleans was shipping about \$5 million of western produce annually—an average of only \$15 per farm family in the interior.

Improvements

In 1816, Congress resumed construction of the **National Road** (first authorized in 1802) that linked the Potomac River with the Ohio River at Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia)—an attempt to link west and east through the Chesapeake. The smooth, crushed-rock thoroughfare reached Wheeling in 1818. At about the same time, Pennsylvania extended the Lancaster Turnpike to make it run from Philadelphia to the Ohio River at Pittsburgh. These ambitious roads into the West, however, had limited effects. The National Road made it easier for settlers and a few merchants' wagons to reach the West, but the cost of moving bulky farm produce over the road remained high. Eastbound traffic on the National Road consisted largely of cattle and pigs, which carried themselves to market. Farmers continued to float their corn, **cotton**, wheat, salt pork, and whiskey south by riverboat and from there to eastern markets.

It was the steamboat that first made commercial agriculture feasible in the Northwest. Tinkerers and mechanics had been experimenting with steam-powered boats for a generation or more when an entrepreneur named **Robert Fulton** launched



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Travel by Stage Coach near Trenton, New Jersey, 1815. *The coach is small and open to the weather, the passengers are crowded and uncomfortable (one of them has lost his hat), and the road is a dirt path with a steep incline—difficult when going uphill, dangerous when going down. The driver, like many of the people who worked with horses, is black. This was travel in one of the most developed parts of the country in 1815.*

the *Clermont* on an upriver trip from New York City to Albany in 1807. Over the next few years, Americans developed flat-bottomed steamboats that could navigate rivers even at low water. The first steamboat reached Louisville from New Orleans in 1815. Two years later, with 17 steamboats already working western rivers, the *Washington* made the New Orleans–Louisville run in 25 days, a feat that convinced westerners that two-way river trade was possible. By 1820, 69 steamboats were operating on western rivers. The 60,000 tons of produce that farmers and planters had shipped out of the interior in 1810 grew to 500,000 tons in 1840. The steamboat had transformed the interior from an isolated frontier into a busy commercial region that traded farm and plantation products for manufactured goods.

In the East, state governments created rivers where nature had made none. In 1817, Governor DeWitt Clinton, after failing to get federal support, talked the New York legislature into building a canal linking the Hudson River to Lake Erie, thus opening a continuous water route between the Northwest and New York City. The **Erie Canal** was a near-visionary feat of engineering. Designed by self-taught engineers and built by gangs of Irish immigrants, local farm boys, and convict laborers, it stretched 364 miles from Albany to Buffalo. Although “Clinton’s Ditch” passed through carefully chosen level ground, it required a complex system of 83 locks, and it passed over 18 rivers on stone aqueducts. Construction began in

1819, and the canal reached Buffalo in 1825. It was clear even before then that the canal would repay New York State's investment of \$7.5 million many times over, and that it would transform the territory that it served.

The Erie Canal would direct the trade of the whole Great Lakes watershed into New York City, but its first and most powerful effects were on western New York, which had been a raw frontier accessible to the East only over a notoriously bad state road. By 1830, the New York corridor of the Erie Canal, settled largely from hill-country New England, was one of the world's great grain-growing regions, dotted with market towns and new cities like Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo.

The Erie Canal was an immense success, and legislators and entrepreneurs in other states joined a canal boom that lasted for 20 years. When construction began on the Erie Canal, there were fewer than 100 miles of canal in the United States. By 1840, there were 3,300 miles, nearly all of it in the Northeast and Northwest. Northwestern states, Ohio in particular, built ambitious canal systems that linked isolated areas to the Great Lakes and thus to the Erie Canal. Northeastern states followed suit. A canal between Worcester and Providence linked the farms of central Massachusetts with Narragansett Bay. Another canal linked the coal mines of northeastern Pennsylvania with the Hudson River at Kingston, New York. In 1835, Pennsylvania completed a canal from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh.

The canal boom was followed quickly by a boom in railroads. The first of them connected burgeoning cities to rivers and canals. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, for example, linked Baltimore to the rivers of the West. Although the approximately 3,000 miles of railroads built between the late 1820s and 1840 helped the market positions of some cities, they did not constitute a national or even a regional rail network. A national system developed with the 5,000 miles of track laid in the 1840s and with the flurry of railroad building that by 1860 gave the United States a rail network of 30,000 miles—a continuous, integrated system that created numerous links between the East and the Northwest and that threatened to put canals out of business. In fact, the New York Central, which paralleled the Erie Canal, rendered that canal obsolete. Other railroads, particularly in the northwestern states, replaced canal and river transport almost completely, even though water transport remained cheaper. By 1860, few farmers in the North and West lived more than 20 road miles from railroads, canals, or rivers that could deliver their produce to regional, national, and international markets.

Time and Money The transportation revolution brought a dramatic reduction in the time and money that it took to move heavy goods. Turnpikes cut the cost of wagon transport, but goods traveled most cheaply on water. In 1816, freight rates on the Ohio–Mississippi system had been 1.3 cents per ton-mile for downriver travel and 5.8 cents for upriver travel. Steamboats cut both costs to a bit more than a third of a cent. The Erie Canal and the Ohio canals reduced the distance between East and West and carried goods at about one cent per ton-mile. By 1830, farmers in the Northwest and western New York could grow wheat and sell it at a profit on the New York market.

Improvements in speed were nearly as dramatic. The overland trip from Cincinnati to New York in 1815 (by keelboat upriver to Pittsburgh, then by wagon the rest of the way) had taken a minimum of 52 days. Steamboats traveled from Cincinnati

to New Orleans, and then passed goods on to coasting ships that finished the trip to New York City in a total of 28 days. By 1840, upriver steamboats carried goods to the terminus of the Main Line Canal at Pittsburgh, which delivered them to Philadelphia, which sent them on to New York City for a total transit time of 18 to 20 days. At about the same time, the Ohio canal system enabled Cincinnati to send goods north through Ohio, across Lake Erie, over the Erie Canal, and down the Hudson to New York City—an all water route that reduced costs and made the trip in 18 days. Similar improvements occurred in the densely settled and increasingly urbanized Northeast. By 1840, travel time between the big northeastern cities had been reduced to from one-fourth to one-eleventh of what it had been in 1790. These improvements in speed and economy made a northern market economy possible.



MAP 8.2 Rivers, Roads, and Canals, 1825–1860

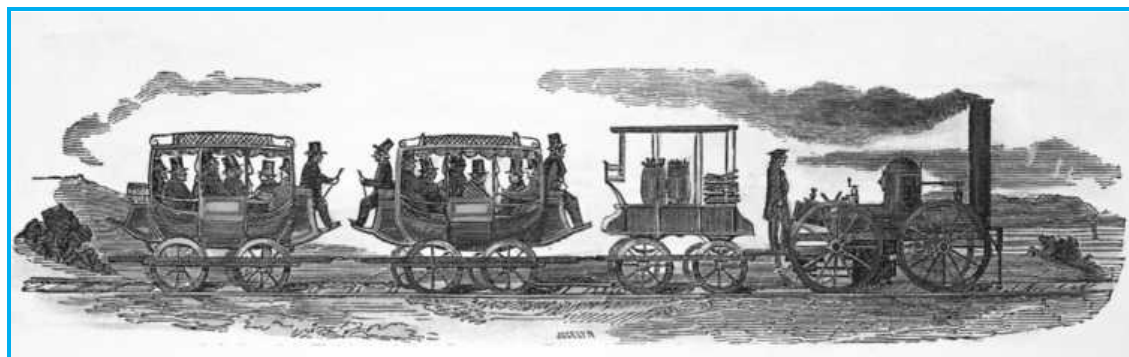
In the second quarter of the 19th century, transportation projects linked the North and Northwest into an integrated economic and social system. There were fewer improvements in the South: farm produce traveled down navigable rivers from bottomland plantations to river and seaport towns, thence to New York for shipment overseas; southern legislatures and entrepreneurs saw little use for further improvements.

By 1840, improved transportation had made a market revolution. Foreign trade, which had driven American economic growth up until 1815, continued to expand. The value of American exports in 1815 had stood at \$52.6 million, while imports totaled \$113 million. Both rose dramatically in the years of the market revolution: exports (now consisting more of southern cotton than of northern food crops) continued to increase, and the flow of imported manufactured goods increased as well. Yet foreign trade now accounted for a smaller proportion of American—particularly northern—market activity. Before 1815, Americans had exported about 15 percent of their total national product. By 1830, exports accounted for only 6 percent of a vastly increased national production. The reason for this shift was that after 1815, the United States developed self-sustaining domestic markets for farm produce and manufactured goods. The great engine of economic growth in the North and West was not the old colonial relationship with Europe but a self-sustaining domestic market.

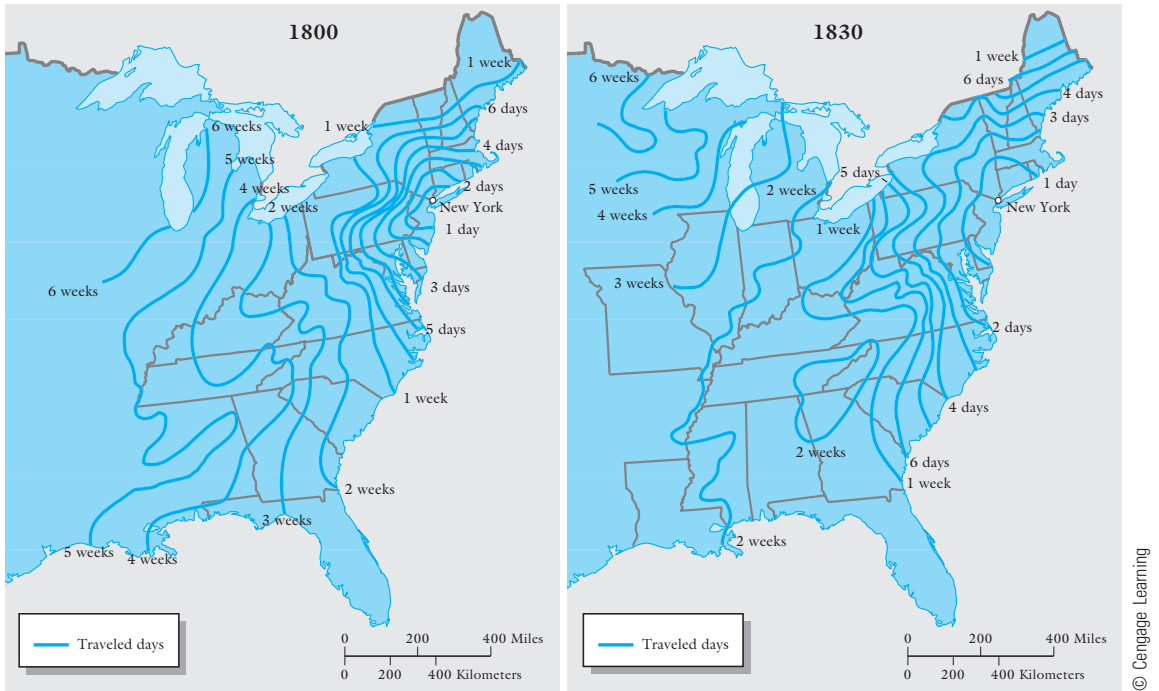
Markets and Regions

Henry Clay and other proponents of the **American System** (see Chapter 11) dreamed of a market-driven economy that would transcend sectionalism and create a unified United

States. But until at least 1840, the market revolution produced greater results within regions than between them. The farmers of New England traded food for finished goods from Boston, Lynn, Lowell, and other towns in what was becoming an urban, industrial region. Philadelphia traded manufactures for food from the farmers of the Delaware Valley. Although the *Erie Canal* created a huge potential for interregional trade, until 1839 most of its eastbound tonnage originated in western New York. In the West, market-oriented farmers fed such rapidly growing cities as Rochester, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, which in turn supplied the farmers with locally manufactured farm tools, furniture, shoes, and other goods. Thus until about 1840, the market revolution was more a regional than an interregional phenomenon. Yet it was clear to politicians, and to anyone else who looked at a map, that the New England, mid-Atlantic, and Northwestern states were on their way to becoming an integrated market society—one that did not include southern



View of the First American Railway Train. *The first locomotives were simply steam engines mounted on wheeled platforms, and the first coaches were stage coaches on metal wheels. Within a few years, both engines and coaches had taken on their familiar 19th-century designs.*



MAP 8.3 Time Required to Travel from New York City, 1800 and 1830

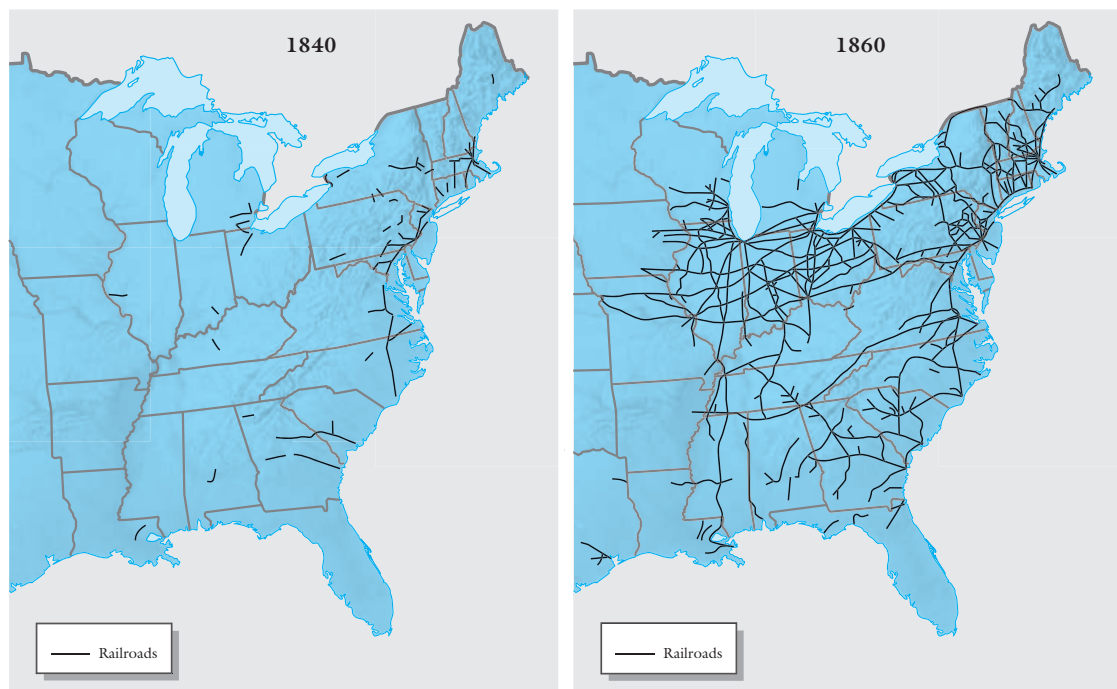
These maps illustrate the increasing ease of travel in the first third of the 19th century. In general, travelers could cover nearly twice as much territory in a day in 1830 than in 1800, although in both cases travel became more difficult as one left the densely settled east.

plantations that grew for export (see Chapter 9). It was not what Henry Clay had had in mind.

NORTHEASTERN FARMS, 1815–1860

In the old farming communities of the Northeast, the transformations of the early 19th century sent many young people off to cities and factory towns and others to the West. Those who remained at home engaged in new forms of agriculture on a transformed rural landscape, while their cousins in the Northwest turned a wilderness into cash-producing farms. In both regions, farmers abandoned the old mixed, safety-first agriculture and began to raise a single crop intended for distant markets. That decision committed them to buying things that their forebears had grown or made, participating as both producers and consumers in a new market economy.

An early 19th-century New England farm geared toward family subsistence required only three acres of cultivated land, 12 acres of pasture and meadow, another acre for the house, outbuildings, and vegetable garden, and a 30-acre woodlot to stoke the hearth that cooked the food and heated the house. Visitors to even the oldest towns found farmsteads, tilled fields, and pastures scattered across a heavily wooded landscape. Overcrowding had encouraged some farmers to turn woodlots into poor farmland, but New Englanders who tried to grow grain on their rocky, worn-out soil could not compete with the farmers of western New York and the Northwest. At the same time, however, the factories and cities of the



MAP 8.4 Railroads in the United States, 1840 and 1860

In these 20 years, both the North and South built railway systems. Northerners built rail lines that integrated the market economies of the Midwest and the East—both within sections and between them. For the most part, Southern railroads linked the plantation belt with the ocean. Revealingly, only a few lines connected the North and South.

Northeast provided Yankee farmers with a market for meat and other perishables. Beef became the great New England cash crop. Dairy products were not far behind, and the proximity to city markets encouraged the spread of poultry and egg farms, fruit orchards, and truck gardens. The burgeoning shoe industry bought leather from the farmers, and woolen mills created a demand for wool, and thus for great flocks of New England sheep. As a result, millions of trees were stripped from the New England landscape to make way for pastureland.

The rise of livestock specialization reduced the amount of land under cultivation. Early in the century, New Englanders still tilled their few acres in the old three-year rotation: corn the first year, rye the second, fallow the third. By the 1820s and 1830s, as farmers raised more livestock and less grain, the land that remained in cultivation was farmed more intensively. Farmers saved manure and ashes for fertilizer, plowed more deeply and systematically, and tended their crops more carefully. These improved techniques, along with cash from the sale of their livestock and the availability of food at stores, encouraged Yankee farmers to allocate less and less land to the growing of food crops. In Concord, Massachusetts—the home town of the agrarian republic—the portion of town land in tillage dropped from 20 percent to 7 percent between 1771 and 1850.

The transition to livestock-raising transformed woodlands into open pastures. As farmers leveled the forests, they sold the wood to fuel-hungry cities. It was a

lucrative, although short-term, market: in 1829, a cord of wood sold for \$1.50 in Maine and for \$7 in Boston. In the 1820s, manufacturers began marketing cast-iron stoves that heated houses more cheaply and more efficiently than open hearths, and canals brought cheap Pennsylvania anthracite to the Northeast. Farmers who needed pastureland could gain substantial one-time profits from the sale of cut wood. The result was massive deforestation. In 1790, in the central Massachusetts town of Petersham, forest covered 85 percent of the town lands. By 1830, the creation of pastureland through commercial woodcutting had reduced the forested area to 30 percent. (By 1850, woods covered only 10 percent of the town, the pasturelands were overgrazed and ruined, and the landscape was dotted with abandoned farms.)

With the shift to specialized market agriculture, New England farmers became customers for necessities that their forebears had produced themselves or had acquired through barter. They heated their houses with coal dug by Pennsylvania miners. They wore cotton cloth made by the factory women at Lowell. New Hampshire farm girls made straw hats for them, and the craftsmen of Lynn made their shoes. By 1830 or so, many farmers were even buying food. The Erie Canal and the western grain belt sent flour from Rochester into eastern neighborhoods where grain was no longer grown. Many farmers found it easier to produce specialized crops for market, and to buy butter, cheese, eggs, and vegetables at country stores.

The turning point came in the 1820s. The storekeepers of Northampton, Massachusetts, for instance, had been increasing their stock in trade by about 7 percent per decade since the late 18th century. In the 1820s, they increased it 45 percent and now carried not only local farm products and sugar, salt, and coffee, but also bolts of New England cloth, sacks of western flour, a variety of necessities and little luxuries from the wholesale houses of New York City and Boston, and pattern samples from which to order silverware, dishes, wallpaper, and other household goods. Those goods were better than what could be made at home, and for the most part they were cheaper. The price of factory-made cloth, for instance, declined sixfold between 1815 and 1830.

As a result, spinning wheels and handlooms disappeared from the farmhouses of New England. Farm families that bought the new cast-iron stoves enjoyed pies and bread baked from western white flour; the old “Rye and Injun” disappeared. All of these things cost money and committed farm families to increasing their cash incomes. Standards of living rose dramatically. At the same time, northeastern farmers depended on markets in ways that their fathers and grandfathers would have considered dangerous not only to family welfare but to the welfare of the republic itself.

THE NORTHWEST

One reason the market revolution in the Northeast went as smoothly as it did was that young people with little hope of inheriting land in the old settlements moved to towns and cities or to the new farmlands of the Northwest. Between 1815 and 1840—precisely the years in which northeastern agriculture became a cash-crop business—migrants from the older areas transformed the Northwest Territory into a working agricultural landscape.

Southern Settlers

In the Northwest until the 1820s, most settlers were yeomen from Kentucky and Tennessee, usually a generation removed from Virginia, the Carolinas, and western Maryland. They moved along the Ohio and up the Muskingum, Miami, Scioto, Wabash, and Illinois rivers to set up farms in the southern and central counties of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. When southerners moved north of the Ohio River into territory that banned slavery, they often did so saying that slavery blocked opportunities for poor whites. The Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright left Kentucky thinking, “I would get entirely clear of the evil of slavery,” and “could raise my children to work where work was not thought a degradation.” Similar hopes drew thousands of other southern yeomen north of the Ohio.

But even those who rejected slavery seldom rejected southern folkways. Like their kinfolk in Kentucky and Tennessee, the farmers of southern and central Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois remained tied to the river trade and to a mode of agriculture that favored free-ranging livestock over cultivated fields. The typical farmer fenced in a few acres of corn and left the rest of his land in woods to be roamed by hogs known as “razorbacks” and “land sharks.” These animals were thin and tough (they seldom grew to over 200 pounds), and they could run long distances, leap fences, and fend for themselves in the woods. They were notoriously fierce: more settlers were injured by their own hogs than by wild animals. When it was time to gather the hogs for slaughter, many settlers played it safe and hunted them with guns.

The southern-born pioneers of the Northwest, like their cousins across the Ohio River, depended more on their families and neighbors than on distant markets. Newcomers found that they could neither rent tools from their southern neighbors nor present them with “gifts” during hard times. Southerners insisted on repaying debts in kind and on lending tools rather than renting them, thus engaging outsiders in the elaborate network of “neighboring” through which transplanted southerners made their livings. As late as the 1840s, in the bustling town of Springfield, Illinois, barter was the preferred system of exchange. “In no part of the world,” said a Scotsman in southern Illinois, “is good neighborhood found in greater perfection than in the western territory.”

Northern Farmers

In the 1820s, with improved transportation and with the wars with Indians and Canadians at an end, northeastern migrants entered the Northwest. They settled near the Great Lakes, filling the new lands of Michigan and the northern counties of the older northwestern states. Most of them were New Englanders who had spent a generation in western New York (such settlers accounted for three-fourths of the early population of Michigan). The rest came directly from New England. Arriving in the Northwest along the market’s busiest arteries, they practiced an intensive, market-oriented agriculture. They penned their cattle and hogs and fattened them up, making them bigger and worth more than those farther south. They planted their land in grain and transformed the region—beginning with western New York’s Genesee Country in the 1820s and rolling through the Northwest—into one of the world’s great wheat-producing regions. In 1820, the Northwest had exported only

12 percent of its agricultural produce. By 1840, that figure had risen to 27 percent, and it stood much higher among northern-born grain farmers.

The new settlers were notably receptive to improvements in farming techniques. While there were plenty of southern proponents of progress and plenty of backward northerners, the line between new and old agricultural ways separated northern grain farmers from corn, hogs, and southern settlers. In breaking new land, for instance, southerners still used the old shovel plow, which dug a shallow furrow and skipped over roots. Northerners preferred newer, more expensive cast-iron plows, which cut cleanly through oak roots four inches thick. By the 1830s, the efficient, expensive grain cradle had replaced the age-old sickle as the principal harvest tool in northwestern wheat fields. Instead of threshing their grain by driving cattle and horses over it, farmers bought new horse-powered and treadmill threshers and used hand-cranked fanning mills to speed the process of cleaning the grain.

Most agricultural improvements were tailored to grain and dairy farming and were taken up most avidly by the northern farmers. Others rejected them as expensive and unnatural. They thought that cast-iron plows poisoned the soil and that fanning mills made a “wind contrary to nater,” and thus offended God. John Chapman, an eccentric Yankee who earned the nickname “Johnny Appleseed” by planting apple tree cuttings in southern Ohio and Indiana before the settlers arrived, planted only low-yield, common trees. He regarded grafting, which farmers farther north and east were using to improve the quality of their apples, as “against nature.” Southerners scoffed at the Yankee fondness for mechanical improvements, the systematic breeding of animals and plants, careful bookkeeping, and farm techniques learned from books. “I reckon,” said one, “I know as much about farming as the printers do.”

Conflict between intensive agriculture and older, less market-oriented ways reached comic proportions when the Illinois legislature imposed stiff penalties on farmers who allowed their small, poorly bred bulls to run loose and impregnate cows with questionable sperm, thereby depriving the owners of high-bred bulls of their breeding fees and rendering the systematic breeding of cattle impossible. When the poorer farmers refused to pen their bulls, the law was rescinded. A local historian explained, “there was a generous feeling in the hearts of the people in favor of an equality of privileges, even among bulls.”

FARM FAMILIES

Northern rural folk experienced these transformations not as individuals but as members of families, as commercialization changed relations between husbands and wives, parents and children, and their neighbors.

Households

The market revolution transformed 18th-century households into 19th-century homes. For one thing, Americans began to limit the size of their families. White women who married in 1800 had given birth to an average of 6.4 children. Those who married between 1800 and 1849 averaged 4.9 children. The decline was most pronounced in the North, particularly in

commercialized areas. Rural birthrates remained at 18th-century levels in the southern uplands, in the poorest and most isolated communities of the North, and on the frontier. (As New Yorker Washington Irving passed through the Northwest in the 1830s, he noted in his journal: “Illinois—famous for children and dogs—in house with nineteen children and thirty-seven dogs.”) These communities practiced the old labor-intensive agriculture and relied on the labor of large families. For farmers who used newer techniques or switched to livestock or grain, large families made less sense. Moreover, large broods hampered the ability of future-minded parents to provide for their children and conflicted with new notions of privacy and domesticity that were taking shape among an emerging rural middle class.

Before 1815, farm wives had labored in the house, the barnyard, and the garden while their husbands and sons worked in the fields. With the market revolution came a sharper distinction between male work that was part of the cash economy and female work that was not. Even such traditional women’s tasks as dairying, vegetable gardening, and poultry raising became men’s work once they became cash-producing specialties. A Pennsylvanian who lived among businesslike New Englanders in the Northwest was appalled at such tampering with hallowed gender roles and wrote the Yankees off as “a shrewd, selfish, enterprising, cow-milking set of men.”

At the same time, new kinds of women’s work emerged within households. Though there were fewer children to care for, the culture began to demand forms of child rearing that were more intensive, individualized, and mother-centered. Store-bought white flour, butter, and eggs and the new iron stoves eased the burdens of food preparation, but they also created demands for pies, cakes, and other fancy foods that earlier generations had only dreamed of. And while farm women no longer spun and wove their own cloth, the availability of manufactured cloth created the expectation that their families would dress more neatly and with greater variety than they had in the past, and women spent more time sewing, washing, and ironing. Similar expectations demanded greater personal and domestic cleanliness and taste, and farm women worked at planting flower beds, cleaning and maintaining prized furniture, mirrors, rugs, and ceramics, and scrubbing floors and children. The market and housework grew hand in hand: among the first mass-produced commodities in the United States was the household broom.

Housework was tied to new notions of privacy, decency, and domestic comfort. Before 1820, farmers cared little about how their houses looked, often tossing trash and garbage out the door for pigs and chickens that foraged near the house. In the 1820s and 1830s, as farmers began to grow cash crops and adopt middle-class ways, they began to plant shade trees and to keep their yards free of trash. They painted their houses and sometimes their fences and outbuildings, arranged their woodpiles into neat stacks, surrounded their houses with flowers and ornamental shrubs, and tried to hide their privies from view. The new sense of refinement extended into other aspects of country life. The practice of chewing (and spitting) tobacco was gradually banned in churches and meeting halls, and in 1823 the minister in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, ordered dogs out of the meetinghouse.

Inside, prosperous farmhouses took on an air of privacy and comfort. Separate kitchens and iron stoves replaced open hearths. Many families used a set of matched dishes for individual place settings, and the availability of finished cloth

A Soap Advertisement from the 1850s.

The rigors of “Old Washing Day” lead the mother in this advertisement to abuse the children and house pets, while her husband leaves the house. With American Cream Soap, domestic bliss returns: The children and cats are happy, the husband returns, and the wife has time to sew.



© CORBIS

permitted the regular use of tablecloths, napkins, doilies, curtains, bedspreads, and quilts. Oil lamps replaced homemade candles, and the more prosperous families began to decorate their homes with wallpaper and upholstered furniture. Farm couples moved their beds away from the hearth and (along with the children's beds that had been scattered throughout the house) put them into spaces designated as bedrooms. They took wash stands and basins out of the kitchen and put them into the bedroom, thus making sleeping, bathing, and sex more private than they had been in the past. At the center of this new house stood the farm wife, apart from the bustling world of commerce but decorating and caring for the amenities that commerce bought, and demanding that men respect the new domestic world that commerce had made possible.

The Landscape of Privacy

By 1830, the market revolution was transforming the rural landscape of the North. The forests had been reduced, the swamps had been drained, and most of the streams and rivers were interrupted by mill dams. Bears, panthers, and wolves had disappeared, along with the beaver and many of the fish. Now there were extensive pastures where English cattle and sheep browsed on English grasses dotted with English wildflowers like buttercups, daisies, and dandelions. Next to the pastures were neatly cultivated croplands that were regularly fertilized and seldom allowed to lie fallow. And at the center stood painted houses and outbuildings surrounded by flowers and shrubs and vegetable gardens. Many towns, particularly in New England, had planted shade trees along the country roads, completing a rural

landscape of straight lines and human cultivation—a landscape that looked both settled and comfortable, and that made it easy to think of nature as a commodity to be altered and controlled.

Within that landscape, old practices and old forms of neighborliness fell into disuse. Neighbors continued to exchange goods and labor and to contract debts that might be left unpaid for years, but debts were more likely to be owed to profit-minded storekeepers and creditors, and even debts between neighbors were often paid in cash. Traditionally, storekeepers had allowed farmers to bring in produce and have it credited to a neighbor/creditor's account—a practice that made the storekeeper an agent of neighborhood bartering. In 1830, half of all the stores in rural New England still carried accounts of this sort, but storekeepers increasingly demanded cash payment or charged lower prices to those who paid cash.

The farm newspapers that appeared in these years urged farmers to keep careful records of the amount of fertilizer used, labor costs, and per-acre yields, and discouraged them from relying on the old system of neighboring. Neighborly rituals like parties, husking bees, and barn raisings—with their drinking and socializing—were scorned as inefficient and morally suspect wastes of time. *The Farmer's Almanac* of 1833 warned New England farmers: “If you love fun, frolic, and waste and slovenliness more than economy and profit, then make a husking.”

By 1830, the efficient northern farmer concentrated on producing commodities that could be marketed outside the neighborhood, and used his cash income to buy material comforts for his family, to pay debts, and to provide a cash inheritance for his children. Although much of the old world of household and neighborhood survived, farmers created a subsistence and maintained the independence of their households not through those spheres but through unprecedented levels of dependence on the outside world.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

In the 50 years following 1820, American cities grew faster than ever before or since. The old seaports—New York City in particular—grew rapidly in these years, but the fastest growth was in new cities that served commercial agriculture and in factory towns that produced for a largely rural domestic market. Even in the seaports, growth derived more from commerce with the hinterland than from international trade. Paradoxically, the market revolution in the countryside had produced the beginnings of industry and the greatest period of urban growth in U.S. history.

Factory Towns: The Rhode Island System

Jeffersonians held that the United States must always remain rural. Americans, they insisted, could expand into the West, trade their farm surpluses for European finished goods, and thus avoid creating cities with their dependent social classes.

Some Federalists argued that Americans, in order to retain their independence, must produce their own manufactured necessities. Proponents of domestic manufactures argued that Americans could enjoy the benefits of factory production without the troublesome blight of industrial cities. They assured Americans that abundant water power—particularly the fast-running streams of the Northeast—would enable Americans to build their factories in the countryside. Such a

decentralized factory system would provide employment for country women and children and thus subsidize the independence of struggling farmers. It was on those premises that the first American factories were built.

The American textile industry originated in industrial espionage. The key to the mass production of cotton and woolen textiles was a water-powered machine that spun yarn and thread. The machine had been invented and patented by the Englishman Richard Arkwright in 1769, and the British government forbade the machinery or the people who worked with it to leave the country. Scores of textile workers, however, defied the law and made their way to North America. One of them was Samuel Slater, who had served an apprenticeship under Jedediah Strutt, a partner of Arkwright who had improved on the original machine. Working from memory while employed by Moses Brown, a Providence merchant, Slater built the first Arkwright spinning mill in America at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1790.

Slater's first mill was a small frame building tucked among the town's houses and craftsmen's shops. Although its capacity was limited to the spinning of cotton yarn, it provided work for children in the mill and for women who wove yarn into cloth in their homes. Thus this first mill satisfied American requirements: it did not require the creation of a factory town, and it supplemented the household incomes of farmers and artisans. As his business grew and he advertised for widows with children, however, Slater was greeted by families headed by landless, impoverished men. Slater's use of children from these families prompted respectable farmers and craftsmen to pull their children out of Slater's growing complex of mills. More poor families arrived to take their places, and during the first years of the 19th century, Pawtucket became a disorderly mill town.

Soon Slater and other mill owners built factory villages in the countryside where they could exert better control over their operations and their workers. The practice became known as the Rhode Island or "family" system. At Slatersville, Rhode Island, at Oxford, Massachusetts, and at other locations in southern New England, mill owners built whole villages surrounded by company-owned farmland that they rented to the husbands and fathers of their mill workers. The workplace was closely supervised, and drinking and other troublesome practices were forbidden in the villages. Fathers and older sons worked either on rented farms or as laborers at the mills. By the late 1820s, Slater and most of the other owners were getting rid of the outworkers and were buying power looms, thus transforming the villages into self-contained factory towns that turned raw cotton into finished cloth, but at great cost to old forms of household independence. When President Andrew Jackson visited Pawtucket in 1829, he remarked to Samuel Slater, "I understand you taught us how to spin, so as to rival Great Britain in her manufactures; you set all these thousands of spindles to work, which I have been delighted in viewing, and which have made so many happy, by a lucrative employment." "Yes sir," replied Slater. "I suppose that I gave out the psalm and they have been singing to the tune ever since."

Factory Towns: The Waltham System

A second act of industrial espionage was committed by a Boston merchant named Francis Cabot Lowell. Touring English factory districts in 1811, Lowell asked questions and made secret drawings of the machines. He also experienced a

HISTORY THROUGH FILM

A Midwife's Tale (1998)

Directed by Richard D. Rodgers (PBS).

The historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* won the Pulitzer Prize for history and biography in 1991. Shortly thereafter, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) turned the book into a documentary movie—a close and imaginative analysis of the diary of Martha Ballard, a Maine farm woman and midwife of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Events are acted out on screen, and period modes of dress, housing, gardening, washing, coffin making, spinning and weaving, and other details are reconstructed with labored accuracy.

The viewer hears the sounds of footfalls, horses, handlooms, and dishes, but the only human sounds are an occasional cough, exclamation, or drinking song. The principal narrative is carried by an actress who reads passages from the diary, and Thatcher occasionally breaks in to explain her own experiences with the diary and its interpretation. The result is a documentary film that knows the difference between dramatizing history and making it up. It also dramatizes the ways in which a skilled and sensitive historian goes about her work.

Martha Ballard was a midwife in a town on the Kennebec River. She began keeping a daily diary at the age of 50 in 1785, and continued until 1812. Most of the film is about her daily life: delivering

babies, nursing the sick, helping neighbors, keeping house, raising and supervising the labor of her daughters and niece, gardening, and tending cattle and turkeys. In both the book and the film, the busyness of an ordinary woman's days—and a sense of her possibilities and limits—in the early republic come through in exhausting detail. The dailiness of her life is interrupted only occasionally by an event: a fire at her husband's sawmill, an epidemic of scarlet fever, a parade organized to honor the death of George Washington, the rape of a minister's wife by his enemies (including the local judge, who is set free), and a neighbor's inexplicable murder of his wife and six children.

There is also the process of getting old. At the beginning, Martha Ballard is the busy wife in a well-run household. As she ages and her children leave to set up households of their own, Ballard hires local girls who—perhaps because an increasingly democratic culture has made them less subservient than Ballard would like, perhaps because Ballard is growing old and impatient, perhaps both—tend to be surly. Her husband, a surveyor who works for merchants speculating in local land, is attacked twice in the woods by squatters and spends a year and a half in debtor's jail—not for his own debts but because, as tax collector, he failed to

genteel distaste for the squalor of the English textile towns. Returning home, Lowell joined with wealthy friends to form the Boston Manufacturing Company—soon known as the Boston Associates. In 1813, they built their first mill at **Waltham**, Massachusetts, and then expanded into Lowell, Lawrence, and other new towns near Boston during the 1820s. The company built mills that differed from the early Rhode Island mills in two ways: (1) they were heavily capitalized and as fully mechanized as possible; they turned raw cotton into finished cloth with little need for skilled workers; and (2) their workers were young, single women recruited from the farms of northern New England—farms that were switching to

collect enough. While the husband is in jail and his aging wife struggles to keep the house going, their son moves his own family into the house and Martha is moved into a single room and is made to feel unwanted—a poignant and unsentimental case of the strained relations between generations that historians have discovered in the early republic.

A Midwife's Tale is a modest film that comes as close as a thorough and imaginative historian and a good filmmaker can to recreating the texture of lived experience in the northeastern countryside at the beginning of the 19th century. Students who enjoy the movie should go immediately to the book.



© Jerry and Marcy Monkman/Aurora Photos

The Kennebec River, in the half-wild country in which Martha Ballard lived her busy and remarkably well-recorded life.

livestock raising, and thus had little need for the labor of daughters. The company provided boardinghouses for them and enforced rules of conduct both on and off the job. The young women worked steadily, never drank, seldom stayed out late, and attended church faithfully. They dressed neatly—often stylishly—and read newspapers and attended lectures. They impressed visitors, particularly those who had seen factory workers in other places, as a dignified and self-respecting workforce.

The brick mills and prim boardinghouses set within landscaped towns and occupied by sober, well-behaved farm girls signified the Boston Associates' desire

to build a profitable textile industry without creating a permanent working class. The women would work for a few years in a carefully controlled environment, send their wages back to their families, and return home to live as country housewives. These young farm women did in fact form an efficient, decorous workforce, but the decorum was imposed less by the owners than by the women themselves. In order to protect their own reputations, they punished transgressions and shunned fellow workers who misbehaved. Nor did they send their wages home or, as was popularly believed, use them to pay for their brothers' college educations. Some saved their money to use as dowries that their fathers could not afford. More, however, spent their wages on themselves, particularly on clothes and books.

The owners of the factories expected that the young women's sojourn would reinforce their own paternalism and that of the girls' fathers. Instead, it produced a self-respecting sisterhood of wage-earning women. Twice in the 1830s, the women of Lowell went on strike, proclaiming that they were not wage slaves but "the daughters of freemen." After finishing their stint in the mills, many Lowell women entered public life as reformers. Most of them married and became housewives, but not on the terms their mothers had known. One in three of them married Lowell men and became city dwellers. Those who returned home remained unmarried longer than their sisters who had stayed on the farm, and then married men about their own age who worked at something other than farming. Thus the Boston Associates kept their promise to produce cotton cloth profitably without creating a permanent working class, but they did not succeed in shuttling young women between rural and urban paternalism and back again. Wage labor, the ultimate degradation for agrarian-republican men, opened a road to independence for thousands of young women.

Cities

The market revolution hit American cities—the old seaports as well as the new marketing and manufacturing towns—with particular force. Here there was little concern for creating a classless industrial society: Vastly wealthy men of finance, a new middle class that bought and sold an ever-growing variety of consumer goods, and the impoverished women and men who made those goods lived together in communities that unabashedly recognized the reality of social class.

The richest men were seaport merchants who had survived and prospered during the world wars that ended in 1815. They carried on as importers and exporters, took control of banks and insurance companies, and made great fortunes in urban real estate. Those in Boston constituted an urbane and responsible cluster of families known as the Boston Brahmins. The elite of Philadelphia was less unified and perhaps less responsible, and that of New York even less. These families continued in international commerce, profiting mainly from cotton exports and from a vastly expanded range of imports. They speculated in urban real estate, and they sometimes invested in manufacturing ventures.

Below the old mercantile elite (or, in the case of the new cities of the interior, at the top of society) stood a growing middle class of wholesale and retail merchants, small manufacturers, and an army of lawyers, salesmen, auctioneers, clerks, bookkeepers, and accountants who handled the paperwork for a new

market society. At the head of this new middle class were the wholesale merchants of the seaports who bought hardware, crockery, and other commodities from importers (and increasingly from American manufacturers) and then sold them in smaller lots to storekeepers from the interior. The greatest concentration of wholesale firms was on Pearl Street in New York City. Slightly below them were the large processors of farm products, including the meat packers of Cincinnati and the flour millers of Rochester, and large merchants and real estate dealers in the new inland cities.

Another step down were specialized retail merchants who dealt in books, furniture, crockery, and other consumer goods. In Hartford, Connecticut, for instance, the proportion of retailers who specialized in specific commodities rose from 24 percent to 60 percent between 1792 and 1845. Alongside the merchants stood master craftsmen who had become manufacturers. With their workers busy in backrooms or in household workshops, they now called themselves shoe dealers and merchant tailors. At the bottom of this new commercial world were hordes of clerks, most of them young men who hoped to rise in the world. Many of them—one study puts the figure at between 25 percent and 38 percent—did move up in society. Both in numbers and in the nature of the work, this white-collar army formed a new class created by the market revolution, particularly by the emergence of a huge consumer market in the countryside.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the commercial classes transformed the look and feel of American cities. As retailing and manufacturing became separate activities (even in firms that did both), the merchants, salesmen, and clerks now worked in quiet offices on downtown business streets. The seaport merchants built counting rooms and decorated their warehouses in the “new counting house style.” Both in the seaports and the new towns of the interior, impressive brick-and-glass storefronts appeared on the main streets. Perhaps the most telling monuments of the new business society were the handsome retail arcades that began going up in the 1820s. Boston’s Quincy Market (1825), a two-story arcade on Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street (1827), and Rochester’s four-story Reynolds Arcade (1828) provided consumers with comfortable, gracious space in which to shop.

Metropolitan Industrialization

While businessmen were developing a new middle-class ethos, and while their families were flocking to the new retail stores to buy emblems of their status, the people who made the consumer goods were growing more numerous and they were disappearing from view. With the exception of textiles and a few other commodities, few goods were made in mechanized factories before the 1850s. Most of the clothes and shoes, brooms, hats, books, furniture, candy, and other goods available in country stores and city shops were made by hand. City merchants and master craftsmen met the growing demand by hiring more workers. The largest handicrafts—shoe-making, tailoring, and the building trades—were divided into skilled and semi-skilled segments and farmed out to subcontractors who could turn a profit only by cutting labor costs. The result was the creation of an urban working class, not only in the big seaports and factory towns but in scores of milling and manufacturing towns throughout the North and the West as well.

The rise of New York City's ready-made clothing trade provides an example. In 1815, wealthy Americans wore tailor-made clothing. Everyone else wore clothes sewn by women at home. In the 1820s, the availability of cheap manufactured cloth and an expanding pool of cheap—largely female—labor, along with the creation of the southern and western markets, transformed New York City into the center of a national market in ready-made clothes. The first big market was in “Negro cottons”—graceless shirts, pants, and sack dresses in which southern planters clothed their slaves. Within a few years, New York manufacturers were sending dungarees and hickory shirts to western farmers and supplying inexpensive clothing to urban workers. By the 1830s, many New York tailoring houses, including the storied Brooks Brothers, offered fancier ready-made clothes to the new middle class.

High rents and costly real estate, together with the absence of water power, prohibited locating large factories in cities, but the nature of the clothing trade and the availability of cheap labor gave rise to a system of subcontracting that transformed needlework into the first “sweated” trade in America. Merchants kept a few skilled male tailors to take care of the custom trade and to cut cloth into patterned pieces for ready-made clothing. The pieces were sent out, often by way of subcontractors, to needle workers who sewed them together in their homes. Male tailors continued to do the finishing work on men's suits, but most of the work—on cheap goods destined for the countryside—was done by women who worked for piece rates that ranged from 75 cents to \$1.50 per week. Along with clothing, women in garrets and tenements manufactured the items with which the middle class decorated itself and its homes: embroidery, doilies, artificial flowers, fringe, tassels, fancy-bound books, and parasols. All provided work for ill-paid legions of female workers.

Other trades followed similar patterns. For example, northeastern shoes were made in uniform sizes and sent in barrels all over the country. Like tailoring, shoemaking was divided into skilled operations and time-consuming unskilled tasks. Men performed the skilled work of cutting and shaping the uppers. The drudgery of sewing the pieces together went to low-paid women. In the shops of Lynn, Massachusetts, in the shoemakers' boardinghouses in Rochester and other new manufacturing cities of the interior, and in the cellars and garrets of New York City, skilled shoemakers performed the most difficult work for taskmasters who passed the work along to subcontractors who controlled poorly paid, unskilled workers. Skilled craftsmen could earn as much as \$2 per day making custom boots and shoes. Men shaping uppers in boardinghouses earned a little more than half of that. Women binders could work a full week and earn as little as 50 cents. In this as in other trades, wage rates and gendered tasks reflected the old family division of labor, which was based on the assumption that female workers lived with an income-earning husband or father. In fact, increasing numbers of them were young women living alone or older women who had been widowed, divorced, or abandoned—often with small children.

In their shops and counting rooms, the new middle class entertained notions of gentility based on the distinction between manual and nonmanual work. Lowly clerks and wealthy merchants prided themselves on the fact that they worked with their heads and not their hands. They fancied that their entrepreneurial and managerial skills were making the market revolution happen, while manual workers

simply performed tasks thought up by the middle class. The old distinction between proprietorship and dependence, which had placed master craftsmen and independent tradesmen, along with farm-owning yeomen, among the respectable “middling sort,” disappeared. The men and women of an emerging working class struggled to find dignity and a sense of public worth in a society that hid them from view and defined them as “hands.”

CONCLUSION

In the first half of the 19th century, northern society became based in buying and selling. The Northeast—New York City in particular—sloughed off its old colonial status and moved from the periphery to the industrial and financial core of the world market economy. Other countries have made that transition: England was first and Japan the most recent. Both of those countries, however, deemphasized agriculture, drew their populations into cities, and relied on the export of manufactured goods as their principal source of income. The American North, on the other hand, built factories and commercial farms at the same time and as parts of the same process. The market for American manufactures was in the American countryside. (Industrial exports from the United States were insignificant until the end of the 19th century.) The principal market for American food was in American towns and cities, and even on farms whose proprietors were too busy with staple crops to grow the old array of food. The result was a massive commercialization of the Northwestern, mid-Atlantic, and New England states, and the beginnings of their integration into a unified northern capitalist democracy.

9

THE OLD SOUTH, 1790–1850

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Old Farms: The Southeast • New Farms: The Rise of the Deep South • The Southern Yeomanry • The Private Lives of Slaves • A Southern Market Revolution?

THE SOUTHERN STATES experienced a parallel market revolution, but it was transacted on southern terms. From the 1790s onward, international markets and technological innovation encouraged planters to grow cotton. Cotton became the great southern cash crop, and the plantation spread across an expanding deep south. The planters sent mountains of cotton (along with tobacco from the Upper South, rice from the Georgia-Carolina coast, and sugar from Louisiana) to Great Britain. They made a lot of money, and they bought a lot of nice things. Other southerners, however, were not as fortunate. Enslaved workers experienced longer hours and tighter discipline than in the past. They lost their families and friends to a soulless interstate slave trade, and they watched their masters' commitment to slavery harden into an unmovable political axiom. In addition, most white farmers moved to the edges of the commercial economy. They continued in the old-style mixed agriculture, and traded relatively little beyond their neighborhoods. In the North, country people became the great consumer market that drove regional economic development. In the South, slaves and most whites bought little, and what they bought was made outside of the region.

The South experienced stupendous economic growth between 1790 and 1850, but most southern investment and entrepreneurial talent went into producing plantation staples for export, an activity that produced wealth for the planters, but that strengthened the South's neocolonial dependence upon Great Britain and, increasingly, the northeastern United States. In addition, it gave the South a labor system, a leadership class, and an economic and political culture that set the region apart from the burgeoning capitalist democracy of the North and from dominant ideological trends in the North Atlantic world.

CHRONOLOGY

1792	Kentucky enters the union as the 15th state
1793	Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin
1796	Tennessee enters the union as the 16th state
1799	Successful slave revolution in Haiti
1800	Gabriel's Rebellion in Virginia
1803	Jefferson purchases the Louisiana Territory from France
1808	International slave trade ends
1812	Second war with Britain begins
1817	Mississippi enters the union
1819	Alabama enters the union ♦ Adams-Onís Treaty conveys Florida and the Gulf Coast to the United States
1822	Denmark Vesey's slave conspiracy in South Carolina
1831	Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia

OLD FARMS: THE SOUTHEAST

In 1790 the planters of Virginia and South Carolina were among the richest men in the new republic. But international markets for their tobacco and rice were declining, and they faced uncertain futures.

The Chesapeake, 1790–1820

In 1790, the future of plantation agriculture in the Chesapeake (the states of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, where slavery first took root in North America) was precarious. The market for tobacco, their principal crop, had been falling since before

the Revolution, and it continued to decline after 1790. Tobacco also depleted the soil, and by the late 18th century, tidewater farms and plantations were giving out. As lands west of the Appalachians opened to settlement, white tenants, laborers, and small farmers left the Chesapeake in droves. Many of them moved to Kentucky, Tennessee, or the western reaches of Virginia. Many others found new homes in nonslave states north of the Ohio River. Faced with declining opportunities within the slave societies of the Chesapeake, thousands of the poorer whites had voted with their feet.

With tobacco profits falling, many Chesapeake planters were switching to wheat, corn, and livestock. They did it on a large scale. In many parts of the region, the old tobacco lands gave way to grain fields and pastures, and by 1830, Richmond rivaled Rochester, New York, as the nation's leading flour milling center. It was a sensible move, but it left the Chesapeake with a huge investment in slaves who were less and less necessary. Grazing animals and raising wheat required less labor than tobacco. Enslaved workers planted individual tobacco plants and pruned and weeded them and picked worms off of them by hand. At harvest

time they picked the leaves one at a time, then hung them to cure, packed them, and shipped them off to market. In sharp contrast, grain and livestock took care of themselves through most of the year. Planters with large numbers of slaves had to think up new uses for them. Some divided their land into small plots and rented both the plots and their slaves to white tenant farmers; others, particularly in Maryland, recruited tenants from the growing ranks of free blacks; still others hired out their slaves as artisans and urban laborers.

Race, Gender, and Chesapeake Labor

The increasing diversification of the Chesapeake economy assigned new chores to slave women and men. Wheat cultivation, for example, meant a switch from the hoes used for tobacco to the plow and grain cradle, both of which called for

the upper-body strength of adult men. The grain economy also required carts, wagons, mills, and good roads, and thus created a need for greater numbers of slave artisans, who were nearly all men. Many of these artisans were hired out to urban employers, and lived as a semifree caste in cities and towns. In the new economy of the Chesapeake, male slaves did the plowing, mowing, sowing, ditching, and carting and performed most of the tasks requiring artisanal skills. All of this work demanded high levels of training and could be performed by someone working either alone or in a small group with little need for supervision.

Slave women were left with the lesser tasks. Contrary to legend, few slave women in the Chesapeake worked as domestic servants in the planter's houses. Some were assigned to such chores as cloth manufacture, sewing, candle molding, and the preparation of salt meat, but most female slaves still did farm work—hoeing, weeding, spreading manure, cleaning stables—that was monotonous, unskilled, and closely supervised. This new division of labor was clearly evident during the wheat harvest. On George Washington's farm, for example, male slaves, often working beside temporary white laborers, moved in a broad line as they mowed the grain. Following them came a gang of children and women on their hands and knees binding wheat into shocks. Thomas Jefferson, who had been shocked to see French women working in the fields, abandoned his concern for female delicacy when his own slaves were involved. At the grain harvest, he instructed his overseers to organize "gangs of half men and half women."

Flirting with Emancipation

Neither new crops nor new employments, however, erased the growing fact that Chesapeake proprietors needed less slave labor than they had in the past—or the parallel fact

that their slaves reproduced at a higher rate than almost any other Americans. Nothing, it seemed, could employ the great mass of enslaved people or repay the planters' huge investment in slaves. In this situation, some Chesapeake planters (who had, after all, fought a revolution in the name of natural rights) began to manumit their slaves. The farmers of Maryland and Delaware in particular set their slaves free. By 1810, 76 percent of Delaware blacks and 23 percent of Maryland blacks were free. (In 1790, these figures had stood at 31 percent and 7 percent, respectively.) Virginia's economic and cultural commitment to the plantation was stronger, but even in the Old Dominion there was a movement to manumit slaves.

George Washington stated that he wished “to liberate a certain species of property,” and manumitted his slaves by will. (The manumissions were to take place at the death of his widow, thus, as one wag declared, surrounding Mrs. Washington with 100 people who wanted her dead.) Robert Carter, reputedly the largest slaveholder in Virginia, also freed his slaves, as did many others. The free black population of Virginia stood at 3,000 in 1782, when the state passed a law permitting manumission. The number of free blacks rose to 12,766 in 1790, to 20,124 in 1800, and to 30,570 in 1810. These were impressive numbers, but the birthrate of Virginia slaves erased them. Between 1780 and 1810, the slave population of the state rose from 250,000 to 400,000.

Emancipation moved slowly in Virginia for several reasons. First, few Virginia planters could afford to free their slaves without compensation. Second, white Virginians feared the social consequences of black freedom. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, owned 175 slaves when he penned the phrase that “all men are created equal.” He lived off their labor, sold them to pay his debts, gave them away as gifts, sold them away from their families as a punishment, and kept one of them, a woman named Sally Hemings, as a mistress and fathered several children by her. Through it all he insisted that slavery was wrong. He could not imagine emancipation, however, without sending freed slaves far from Virginia. A society of free blacks and whites, Jefferson insisted, would end in disaster: “Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made ... [will] produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.” Jefferson went on to a virulently racist argument for black inferiority and to the insistence that “When freed, [blacks are] to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.” Near the end of an adult lifetime of condemning slavery but doing nothing to end it, Jefferson cried out that white Virginians held “a wolf by the ears”: they could not hold onto slavery forever, and they could never let it go.

The Lowcountry, 1790–1820

The other center of plantation slavery in 1790 was lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia. Here the principal crop was rice, which, along with other American foodstuffs, enjoyed a rise in international demand during the European wars between 1793 and 1815. But lowcountry planters faced increasing competition from rice farmers in India, Java, Burma, and Europe. The rice coast—one of the great sources of American wealth in the 18th century—remained profitable, but it was losing relative position to faster-growing regions. The planters of the lowcountry, like those in Virginia, remained wealthy men. Their long-term future, however, was in doubt.

Thousands of slaves in this region had either run away or had been carried off by the British in the Revolution, and planters knew that the African slave trade was scheduled to end in 1808. Lowcountry planters, unlike their Chesapeake counterparts, could not imagine emancipating their slaves. They rushed to import as many Africans as they could in the time remaining. Between 1783 and 1808, between 100,000 to 190,000 captive people were brought directly from Africa to the United States, nearly all of them to Charleston and Savannah. It was the busiest period in the history of the slave trade in North America.

The Task System

In the plantation counties of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, slaves made up 80 percent of the population, and more than 90 percent in many parishes. Farms and slave labor forces were big, and rice cultivation demanded intensive labor, often performed by workers who stood knee-deep in water. The work and the hot, sticky climate encouraged deadly summer diseases and kept white owners and overseers out of the fields. Many of the wealthiest planters built homes in Charleston and Savannah and hired others to manage their plantations. Both they and planters who stayed on their farms organized enslaved workers according to the so-called task system. Each morning the owner or manager assigned a specific task to each slave. When the task was done, the rest of the day belonged to the slave. Slaves who did not finish their task were punished, and when too many slaves finished early, the owners assigned heavier tasks. In the 18th century, each slave had been expected to tend three to four acres of rice each day. In the early 19th century, with the growth of a competitive rice market, the assignment was raised to five acres.

The task system encouraged slaves to work hard without supervision, and slaves turned the system to their own uses. Often several slaves would work together until all of their tasks were completed, and strong young slaves often helped older and weaker slaves after they had finished their own tasks. Once the day's work was done, the slaves shared their hard-earned leisure out of sight of the owner. A Jamaican visitor remarked that South Carolina and Georgia planters were “very particular in employing a negro, without his consent, after his task is finished, and agreeing with him for the payment which he is to receive.”

Slaves under the task system won the right to cultivate land as **“private fields,”** not the little garden plots common in the Chesapeake but farms of up to five acres on which they grew produce and raised livestock for market. There was a lively trade in slave-produced goods, and eventually slaves in the lowcountry not only produced and exchanged property but also passed it on to their children. The owners tolerated such activity because slaves on the task system worked hard, required minimal supervision, produced much of their own food, and made money for their owners. The rice planters in South Carolina and Georgia were among the richest men in the United States.

NEW FARMS: THE RISE OF THE DEEP SOUTH

While the old centers of slavery and southern power stagnated or declined, planters discovered a new and promising cash crop. British textile factories had been buying raw cotton since the mid-18th century. Southern planters knew they could sell all of the cotton they could grow. But long-staple cotton, the only variety that could be profitably grown, was a delicate plant that thrived only on the Sea Islands off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. The short-staple variety was hardier, but its sticky seeds had to be removed by hand before the cotton could be milled. It took a full day for an adult slave to clean a single pound of short-staple cotton—an expenditure of labor that took the profit out of cotton. In 1790, the United States produced only 3,000 bales of cotton, nearly all of it on the long-staple plantations of the Sea Islands.

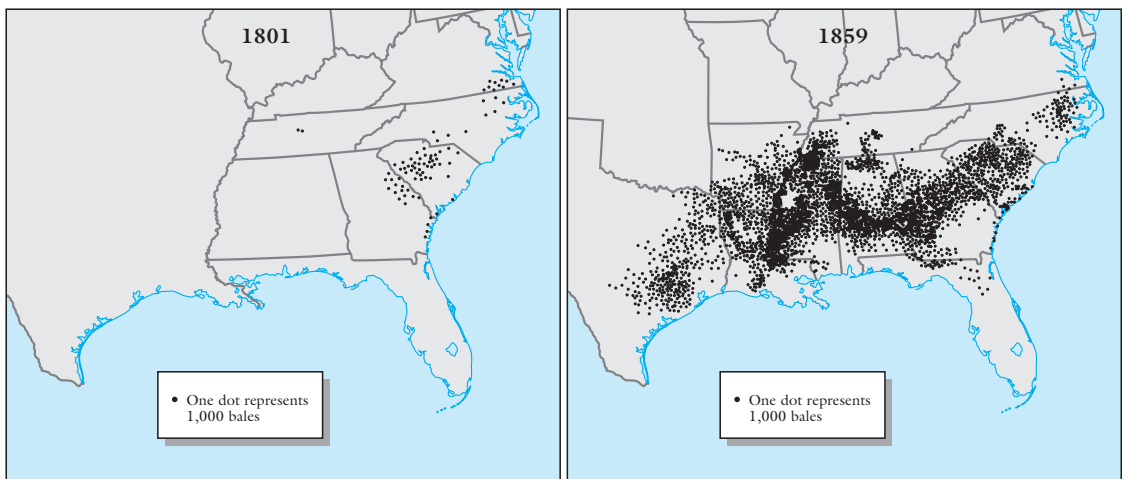
Scores of tinkers tried to devise a mechanical cottoncleaner, but it was **Eli Whitney**, a Connecticut Yankee who had come south to work as a tutor, who

made a model of a cotton “gin” (a southern contraction of “engine”) that combed the seeds from the fiber with metal pins fitted into rollers. Working with Whitney’s machine, a slave could clean 50 pounds of short-staple cotton in a day. Others quickly developed improved models, and amid a storm of patent disputes and litigation, cotton became the great southern cash crop. Slavery and plantation agriculture had a new lease on life.

The Rise of the Cotton Belt

Along with the profitability of short-staple cotton, it was the national government that made the southwestern cotton belt possible. Planters did not take their money and slaves into the interior until the government had ended Indian resistance in the War of 1812. Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase of 1803 had secured free navigation of the Mississippi Valley, and the United States gained Florida and the Gulf Coast under the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 (Chapter 7). Given military security and access to markets, the Southwest was safe for slavery.

Planters and their slaves had moved into upland South Carolina and Georgia in the 1790s, transforming a sparsely settled farm country into the first great short-staple cotton region. With the end of war in 1815, the plantation rolled west into a cotton belt that stretched beyond the Mississippi River. By 1834, the new states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana grew more than half of a vastly increased U.S. cotton crop. In 1810, the South produced 178,000 bales of ginned cotton, more than 59 times the 3,000 bales it had produced in 1790. With the opening of southwestern cotton lands, production jumped to 334,000 bales in 1820 and to 1,350,000 bales in 1840. In these years, cotton made up from one-half to two-thirds of the value of all U.S. exports. The South produced three-fourths of the world supply of cotton—a commodity that, more than any other, was the raw material of industrialization in Britain and Europe and, increasingly, in the north-eastern United States. Cotton, in short, was a very big business.



MAP 9.1 Cotton Production, 1801 and 1859

Short-staple cotton thrived wherever there was fertile soil, heat and humidity, low altitude, and a long growing season. As a result, a great belt of cotton and slavery took shape in the Lower South, from the midlands of South Carolina through East Texas.

The Interstate Slave Trade

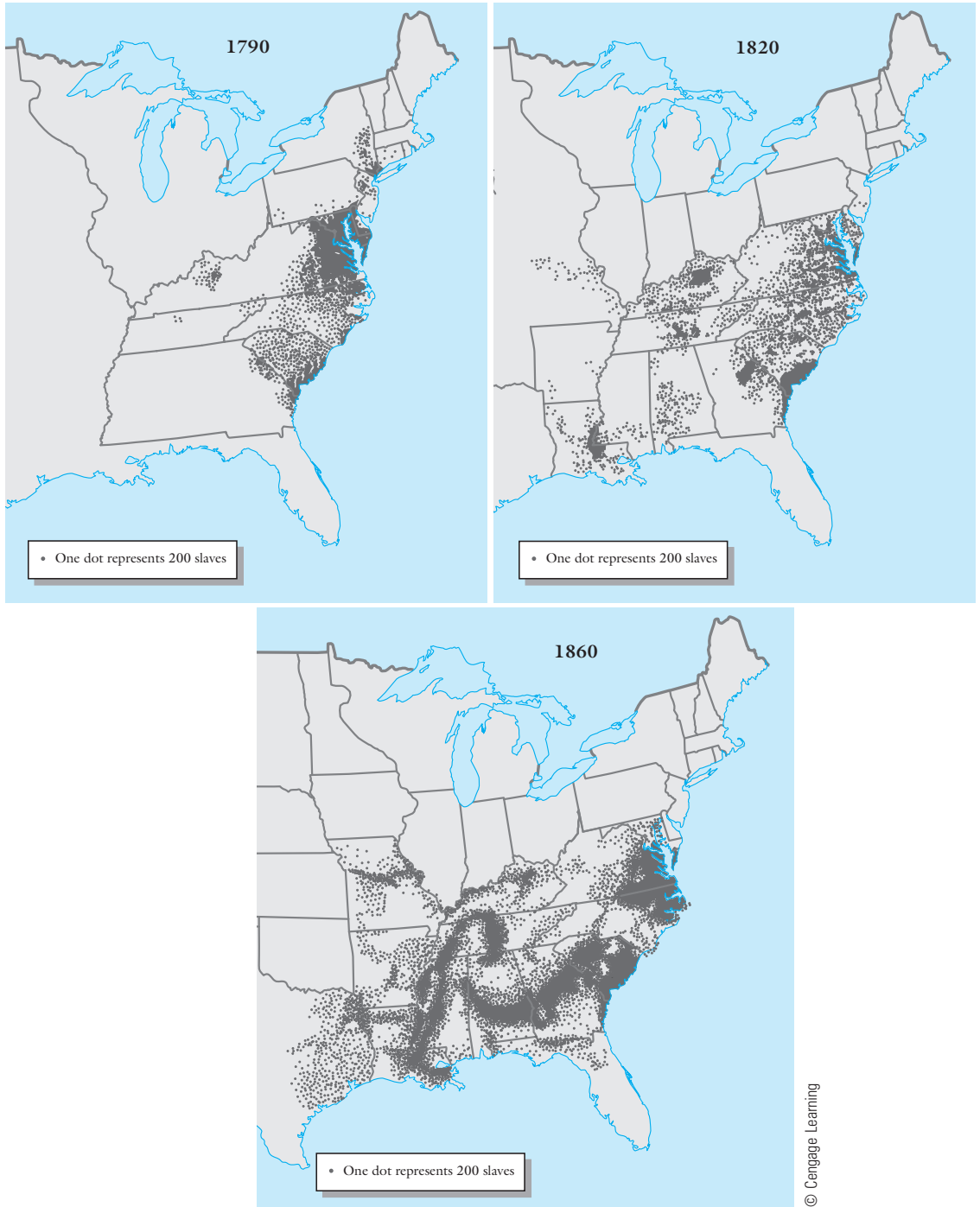
With the international slave trade abolished in 1808, the source of slaves for the Southwest was the old seaboard states—states with a huge population of slaves and a shrinking need for them. As early as the 1790s, the Chesapeake states of Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland were net exporters of slaves. Those states sent 40,000 to 50,000 enslaved workers south and west in that decade. The number rose to 120,000 in the 1810s. The slave families and slave communities of the Chesapeake lost 1 in 12 of their members in the 1790s, 1 in 10 between 1800 and 1810, and 1 in 5 between 1810 and 1820. In the 1820s, South Carolina and Kentucky joined the slave-exporting states, and 150,000 slaves left their homes and crossed state lines. The trade in slaves reordered the human geography of the South. In 1790, Virginia and Maryland had held 56 percent of all American slaves. By 1860, they held only 15 percent.

Some enslaved migrants—estimates run as high as 30 percent—left their old neighborhoods in the company of masters (or masters' sons) and familiar fellow slaves. These slaves made new plantations and new lives in the Southwest surrounded by some of the people they had known at home. But most were sold and resold as individuals in an organized interstate slave market. Soon after the Revolution, men known as "Georgia Traders" appeared in the Upper South, buying slaves on speculation and selling them farther south. By 1820, the slave trade had become an organized business with sophisticated financing, sellers who had an accurate knowledge of slave prices in various southern markets, a well-traveled shipping route between Norfolk and New Orleans, and systems of slave pens and safe houses along the roads of the interior. With the exception of the plantation itself, the domestic slave trade was the biggest and most modern business in the South. The centrality of that trade advertised the nature of southern economic development: while northerners exchanged wheat, furniture, books, and shoes with each other, southerners exchanged slaves.

Most slaves moved into the cotton belt with other slaves who were strangers, under the temporary ownership of traders who knew them only as merchandise. Those who were transported by ship experienced some of the horrors of the old Middle Passage from Africa: cramped quarters, minimal food, discipline at the hands of nervous white crewmen, and the odd murder or casual rape. Those who walked from the old plantations to the Southwest experienced their own share of terrors. The journey could take as long as seven weeks, and traders organized it with military precision. The slave Charles Ball remembered walking south in an unwilling parade of about 50, in which the women

were tied together with a rope, about the size of a bed cord, which was tied like a halter round the neck of each; but the men ... were very differently caparisoned. A strong iron collar was closely fitted by means of a padlock round each of our necks. A chain of iron about a hundred feet long was passed through the hasp of each padlock, except at the two ends, where the hasps of the padlocks passed through a link of the chain. In addition to this, we were handcuffed in pairs....

The poor man to whom I was ironed, wept like an infant when the blacksmith, with his heavy hammer, fastened the ends of the bolts that kept the staples from slipping from our arms.



MAP 9.2 Distribution of Slave Population, 1790, 1820, and 1860

In 1790, slaves were concentrated in the Chesapeake and in the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry. Over the next 70 years, Chesapeake planters put thousands of slaves into the interstate trade, which sold them into a Black Belt that stretched from the interior of the Carolinas to East Texas.

Traders and slaves camped along the roads or spent nights crammed into public houses and slave pens. Beatings, rapes, and other abuses along the road entered black folk memory and stayed there. One often-repeated (and apparently true) story told of a small boy taken from his mother's arms and left with a tavern keeper to pay a bar bill.

Cotton and Slave Labor

The cotton plantations operated more efficiently than the old estates on the Chesapeake and in the lowcountry. First, cotton planters exerted a more disciplined and direct control over their enslaved workers. Masters on the seaboard had hired their slaves out, given them time and land with which to grow their own food, and worked them by the task system or under slave overseers—all of which reduced the costs of supervising and providing for slaves. On the cotton frontier, good land and slave labor were too valuable to be worked in casual ways, and new farms had to become profitable in a short time. Enslaved men and women who had grown up with the relatively loose work routines of the lowcountry and the Chesapeake now performed the backbreaking labor of turning forests into farms. (They had to “whittle a plantation right out of the woods,” recalled one slave.) Slaves worked in gangs, usually under white owners or overseers. Clearing trees, rolling logs, pulling stumps, clearing and burning brush, and building cabins, fences, and outbuildings was hard labor. The planters preferred crews of young men for these tasks, but such slaves were expensive, and everyone was put to work. A teenaged boy sold from the Chesapeake to Mississippi saw women clearing brush from new land, and remarked that “such work was not done by women slaves in Virginia.” Another slave recalled that her mother drove a two-horse plow “when she warn’t cleanin’ new ground or diggin’ ditches.” The labor of making new farms lasted from dawn to dusk, and enslaved men and women worked under the eyes of owners who knew that they must turn the forest into cash-producing farms or go broke.

Once established, southwestern plantations were among the most intensely commercialized farms in the world. Many of them grew nothing but cotton, buying food from their neighbors or from merchants who sold corn meal and salt pork in bulk. Others grew supplementary crops and produced their own food. But nearly all of the plantation owners, from the proudest grandee to the ambitious farmer with a few slaves, organized labor in ways that maximized production and reinforced the dominance of the white men who owned the farms.

Slaves from the Chesapeake and the rice coast experienced cotton cultivation as a difficult step down. Cotton required a long growing season and a lot of attention, but it did not demand much skill. Early in the spring, the land was cleared and ploughed, and gangs of slaves walked the furrows dropping seeds. During the growing season, black laborers constantly thinned the plants and cleared the fields of weeds, “chopping” the fields with hoes in the hot, humid Deep South summer. The cotton ripened unevenly. In a harvest season that could last long past Christmas, pickers swept through the fields selecting only the ripe bolls, then repeated the task until the full crop was harvested. Cotton, in short, required a lot of unskilled labor. Slaves in the diversifying Chesapeake had made barrels and crates, boats, wagons, barns, and storage sheds; slaves on the rice coast farther

south had built complex systems of dikes and levees and had mastered the science of moving and controlling large amounts of water. In the cotton belt, they gave up those skills and went to work with axes, hoes, and their hands. (Tobacco and sugar, the other western plantation crops, were no less labor intensive.)

The work was relentless. Planters in the east had found it economical to allow slaves to work at varied tasks, at irregular times, or under the tasking system. They gave slaves only part of their food (often cornmeal and nothing else), then provided time and land with which slaves grew their own vegetables, chickens, and pigs. Planters on the cotton frontier did away with all that. Only a few cotton-belt planters retained the task system, and these were looked upon as eccentrics by their neighbors, who worked their slaves in gangs from dawn to dusk six days a week. Cotton land was too valuable to permit slave gardens. It made more sense to keep the slaves constantly at cotton cultivation and to supply them with all of their food. It was a more efficient and productive way of growing cotton. It was also a way of reducing the slaves' customary privileges within slavery, and of enforcing the master's role as the giver and taker of all things. Even slaves who grew their own food did so in white-supervised fields and not in family plots. An Alabama planter put it bluntly: "Allow it once to be understood by a Negro that he is to provide for himself, and you that moment give him an undeniable claim on you for a portion of his time to make this provision; and should you from necessity, or any other cause, encroach upon his time, disappointment and discontent are seriously felt." In order to create "a perfect dependence," this master insisted that "my Negroes have no time whatever." The Louisiana planter Bennet H. Barrow explained that the master must make the slave "as comfortable at home as possible, affording him what is essentially necessary for his happiness—you must provide for him your self and by that means creat[e] in him a habit of perfect dependence on you."

The masters set harsher working conditions and longer hours than slaves had known in their old homes. Slaves could not hope to reinstitute the task system, the family gardens and little farms, the varied tasks, or the uneven hours of labor that they had known on the coast. Yet despite masters' lack of encouragement, gardens—some of them large and profitable—quickly appeared in the new slave quarters, and enslaved workers found that they could hold masters to agreed-upon standards of time and work. Masters who demanded extra hours of labor on Sunday found the work going



The Historic New Orleans Collection,
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Hauling the Whole Week's Picking. William Henry Brown made this collage of a slave harvest crew near Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1842. The rigors of the harvest put everyone, including small children, into the fields.

slower. In the 1840s, a Mississippi planter noted that slaves had adapted to the long hours, close supervision, and pace of work under the gang system, but would perform the new customary workload and nothing more. “All of them know what their duty is upon a plantation, and that they are generally willing to do, and nothing more.” When asked to work harder or longer “they will not submit to it, but become turbulent and impatient of control, and all the whips in Christendom cannot drive them to perform more than they think they ought to do, or have been in the long habit of doing.”

On the whole, the exploitation of slave labor after 1820 became both more rigorous and more humane. Planters imposed a new and more total control over their slaves, but they clothed it within a larger attempt to make North American slavery paternalistic and humane, and to portray themselves as gentlemen and not as heartless slavedrivers. Food and clothing seems to have improved, and individual cabins for slave families became standard. State laws often forbade the more brutal forms of discipline, and they uniformly demanded that slaves be given Sunday off.

Material standards seem to have risen. One rough indicator is physical height. On the eve of the Civil War, southern slaves averaged about an inch shorter than northern whites, but they were fully three inches taller than newly imported Africans, two inches taller than slaves on the Caribbean island of Trinidad, and an inch taller than British Marines. Slaves suffered greater infant mortality than whites, but those who survived infancy lived out “normal” life spans. Brazil, Cuba, and other slave societies had to import Africans to make up for the deaths of slaves, but the slave population of the southern states increased threefold—from 657,000 to 1,981,000—between 1790 and 1830. With the importation of new Africans banned after 1808 (and with runaways outnumbering new Africans who were smuggled into the country), the increase was due entirely to the fact that—alone among the slave societies of the Western Hemisphere—the American slave population was healthy enough to reproduce itself.

Material conditions on the plantations sprang from both planter self-interest and an attempt to exert a kindly, paternal control over slaves, whom planters often called “our people” or “our family, black and white.” But humane treatment came at a high price. At the same time that they granted slaves protection from the worst kinds of brutality, cotton-belt states enacted slave codes that defined slaves as persons without rights. The Louisiana code of 1824, for instance, stated that “[The slave] is incapable of making any kind of contract.... They can transmit nothing by succession.... The slave is incapable of exercising any public office, or private trust.... He cannot be a party in any civil action.... Slaves cannot marry without the consent of their masters, and their marriages do not produce any of the civil effects which result from such contract.” It was an exact negative image of the rights enjoyed by the white men who owned the plantations, controlled the slaves, and wrote the laws.

Mastery as a Way of Life

Plantation masters, both the old southeastern nabobs and the cotton planters of newer regions, were the acknowledged economic, social, cultural, and political elite of the South.

Their authority rested on economic power and on their connections—often family relationships—with each other. But they dressed their power in gentility and an

aura of mastery, a visible “right to rule” that few others, North or South, could match. That power and authority was tied intimately to the ownership of slaves. When assessing a planter’s standing, contemporaries seldom added up his acreage or his money. Instead, they counted slaves. In the most common calculation, the ownership of 20 slaves separated planters from farmers.

It was a good enough measure, for the planter class made itself out of slaves. Slave labor bought the carpets, chandeliers, fine clothes, English chivalric novels, and racehorses with which planters displayed their social mastery. Just as important, slaves enabled planters and their ladies to distinguish themselves as gentlefolk who did not work. An observer of one plantation mistress noted that “She has a faithful nurse (Negro) to whose care she abandons her babes entirely, only when she has a fancy to caress them does she see them. Eight children and cannot lay to their charge the loss of a single night’s rest.” In short, the ownership of a slave transformed a harried housewife into a lady. A southern publicist boasted that “The non-slaveholder knows that as soon as his saving will admit, he can become a slaveholder, and thus relieve his wife from the necessities of the kitchen and the laundry and his children from the labors of the field.” Southern farmers without slaves tended to sire very large families and to keep their children in the fields. The women worked outdoors as well. Southerners who owned slaves had fewer children, sent them to school, and moved their wives indoors. The skin of farm women was weathered, cracked, and darkened by the sun; plantation mistresses were smoother and less exhausted, and their skin was literally whiter. “Laborers was respected,” recalled a small farmer, “but the men that owned slaves did not work and did not have there [sic] children do any work.”

The opposite of gentility was the South Carolina farmer who, according to a neighbor, “used to work [his daughters] in the fields like Negroes.” According to northern visitors, this association of labor with slavery encouraged laziness among southern whites and robbed work of the dignity it enjoyed in other parts of the country. Most southern white farmers would have disagreed, but the association of black labor, white leisure, and white gentility was central to the plantation regime. The South would not have been the South without it.

Southern Families

Antebellum white southerners remained localistic and culturally conservative. Farm and plantation labor and the routines of daily life still centered in the household, and prospects for most whites remained rooted in inherited land and family help. While the new northern **middle class** nourished a cosmopolitan culture and a domestic sentimentalism that subverted traditional authority, southerners—planters and yeomen alike—distrusted outsiders and defended rural neighborhoods grounded in the authority of fathers and the integrity of families.

Most southern whites regarded themselves less as individuals than as representatives of families. Southern boys often received the family names of heroes as their first names: Jefferson Davis, for example, or Thomas Jefferson (later, “Stonewall”) Jackson. More often, however, they took the name of a related family—Peyton Randolph, Preston Brooks, Langdon Cheves—and carried it as a proud and often burdensome badge of who they were. Children learned early that their first duty

was to their family's reputation. When young Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina was away at school, his sister wrote, "Don't relax in your efforts to gain a good education.... I want you to be an ornament to your family." Two years later, another sister wrote, "Do, Bud, study hard and make good use of your time.... I want you to do something for the Tillman name."

In the white South, reputation and the defense of family honor were everything. Boys and girls were taught to act as though everyone were watching them, ready to note any hint of inadequacy. A boy with a reputation for cowardice, for ineptness at riding or fighting, or for failure to control his emotions or hold his liquor was an embarrassment to his family. An "unsullied reputation," insisted Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi, placed a man "on a social level with all his fellows." As John Horry Dent, an Alabama slaveholder and bad amateur poet, put it:

Honor and shame from all conditions rise;
Act well your part and there the honor lies.

Among southern white men, wealth generally counted for less than did maintaining one's personal and family honor and thus winning membership in the democracy of honorable males.

The code of honor, although it forged ties of equality and respect among white men, made rigid distinctions between men and women and whites and blacks. Women and girls who misbehaved—with transgressions ranging from simple gossip to poor housekeeping to adultery—damaged not only their own reputations but also the honor of the fathers or husbands who could not control them. Such a charge could mean social death in a rural community made up of patriarchal households and watchful neighbors. In 1813, Bolling Hall of Alabama advised his daughter, "If you learn to restrain every thought, action, and word by virtue and religion, you will become an ornament." A "good man" or a "good woman" was someone who upheld the family by acting within a prescribed social role ("Act well your part"), and not, as the children of the northern middle class were being taught, by acting as an autonomous, self-governing individual.

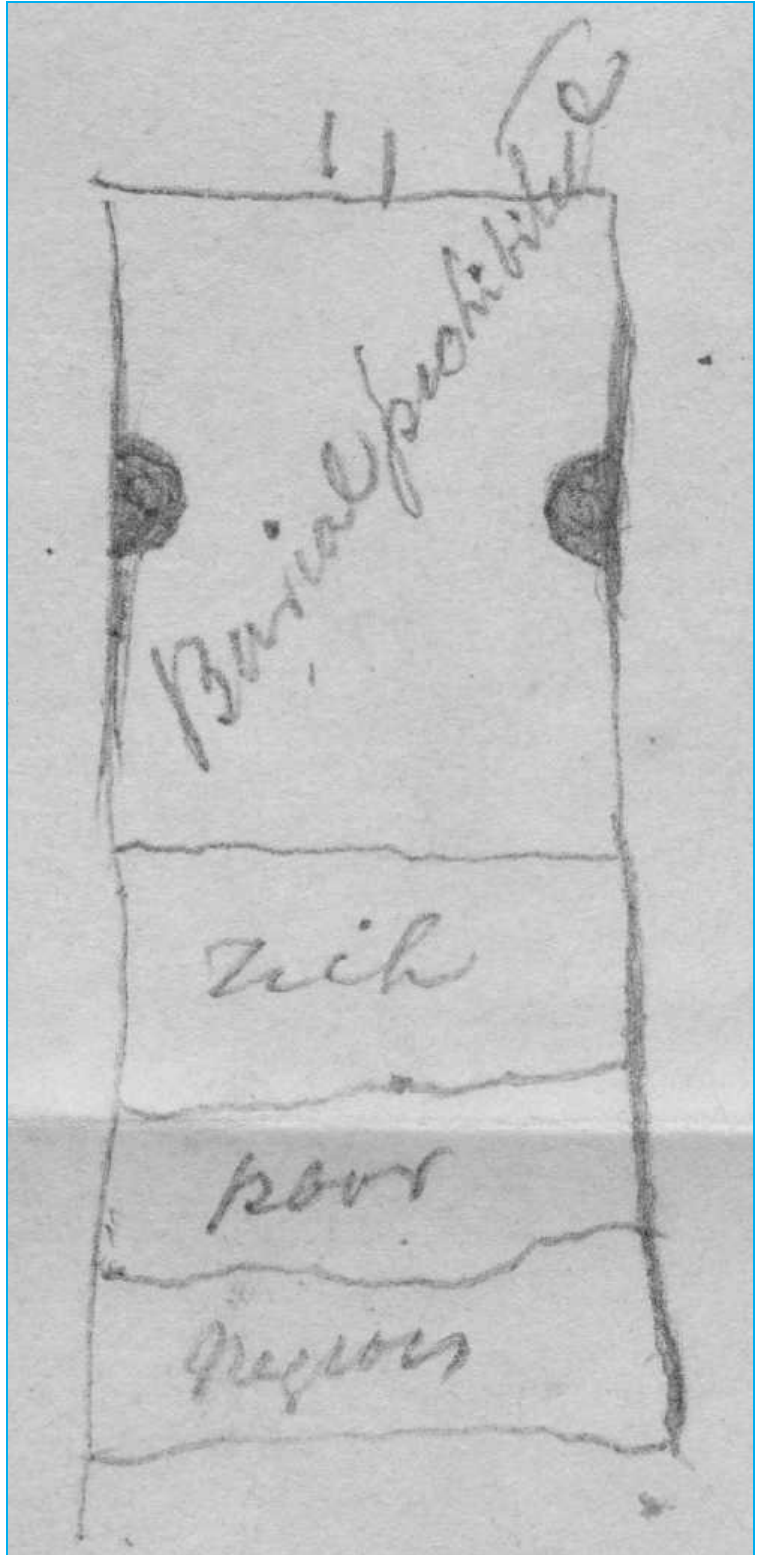
When northerners attacked slavery because it denied the freedom of the individual, one southerner responded in a way that was meant to end the argument: "Do you say that the slave is held to involuntary service? So is the wife, [whose] relation to her husband, in the great majority of cases, is made for her and not by her." Few white southerners would have questioned the good sense of that response. Southern life was not about freedom, individual fulfillment, or social progress. It was about honoring the obligations to which one was born.

THE SOUTHERN YEOMANRY

Some southern boosters advertised cotton as a "democratic" crop that could be cultivated at a profit by almost any southern farmer, but that is not how it worked. Cotton, like other plantation crops, rewarded economies of scale: planters with big farms and many slaves operated more efficiently and more profitably than farmers with fewer resources. The wealthier planter families bought up good cotton land with ready access to markets. They also bought up the majority of slaves. Only 30 percent to 35 percent of southern white families owned at least one slave in 1830,

A Map of the Burial Ground in Farmville, Virginia.

In 1840, a lawyer sketched the map of a graveyard in slaveholding country near the Appomattox River to make a point in a court case. It was a map of the living as well: rich whites at the top, poor whites in the middle, blacks at the bottom, yet all occupying the same ground.



and that percentage dropped as time passed. On the eve of the Civil War, only one white family in four owned a slave. Among the minority of southerners who were slave owners, half owned fewer than five, and less than 5 percent owned 20 or more slaves—the roughly agreed-upon number that separated planters from farmers. Cotton, it turned out, was not democratic: among southern whites it produced not only an unequal distribution of wealth but a dual economy: plantations at the commercial center and a marginally commercial yeomanry on the fringes.

Yeomen and Planters

As land prices and local taxes rose in the plantation counties, many of the poorer whites moved out. Those who stayed subsisted on poor, hilly land far from navigable rivers. They tended to be commercial farmers, growing a few bales of cotton with family labor and perhaps a slave or two. Many of them were poor relatives of prosperous plantation owners. They voted the great planters into office and used their cotton gins and tapped into their marketing networks. Some of them worked as overseers for their wealthy neighbors, sold them food, and served on local slave patrols. Economic disparities between planters and farmers in the plantation belt continued to widen, but the farmers remained tied to the cotton economy and its economic and social imperatives.

Most yeomen, however, lived away from the plantations in neighborhoods with few slaves and limited commercial activities. Large numbers of them moved into nonslave territory north of the Ohio River, but most stayed in the South: in the upcountry and the eastern slopes of the Appalachians from the Chesapeake through Georgia, the western slopes of the mountains in Kentucky and Tennessee, the pine-covered hill country of northern Mississippi and Alabama, and in swampy, hilly, heavily wooded lands throughout the southern states. All of these areas were unsuitable for plantation crops. Here the farmers built a yeoman society that retained many of the characteristics of the 18th-century countryside, North and South. But while northern farmers commercialized in the 19th century, their southern cousins continued in a household- and neighborhood-centered agriculture until the Civil War and beyond.

Many southern farmers stayed outside the market almost entirely. The mountaineers of the southern Appalachians sent a trickle of livestock and timber out of their neighborhoods, but the mountains remained largely outside the market until the coming of big-business coal mines in the late 19th century. Moreover, farmers in large parts of the upcountry South preferred raising livestock to growing cotton or tobacco. They planted cornfields and let their pigs run loose in the woods and on unfenced private land. In late summer and fall, they rounded up the animals and sold them to drovers who herded them cross-country and sold them to flatland merchants and planters. Thus these hill-country yeomen lived off a market with which they had little firsthand experience. It was a way of life that sustained some of the most fiercely independent neighborhoods in the country.

A larger group of southern yeomen practiced mixed farming for household subsistence and neighborhood exchange, with the surplus sent to market. Most of them owned their own land. The settlement of new lands in the old backcountry and the southwestern states reversed the 18th-century drift toward white tenancy. Few of

these farmers kept slaves. In the counties of upland Georgia, for instance, between seven and nine out of 10 households were without slaves. These farmers practiced a mixed agriculture that was complicated by the nature of southern cash crops. Northern yeomen before 1815 had grown grain and livestock with which they fed their families and traded with neighbors. Whatever was left over, they sent to market. But cotton, like tobacco and other southern cash crops, was not a food. It was useful only as a market crop. Most middling and poor southern farmers played it safe: they put their improved land into corn and sweet potatoes, and set pigs and cattle loose to browse the remaining land. The more substantial and ambitious of them cultivated a few acres of cotton. They grew more cotton as transportation made markets more accessible, but few southern yeomen became wholly dependent on the market. With the income from a few bales of cotton, they could pay their debts and taxes and buy coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco, cloth, and shoes. But they continued to enter and leave the market at will, and to retain the ability to subsist within their neighborhoods. In the yeoman neighborhoods of the southern states, the economic and social practices of the 18th century were alive and well.

Yeoman Neighborhoods

The way of life in most southern farm neighborhoods discouraged business-like farming and individual ambition.

Because few farms were self-sufficient, farmers routinely traded labor and goods with each other. In the plantation counties, such cooperation tended to reinforce the power of planters, who put some of their resources at the disposal of their poorer neighbors. In the upcountry, cooperation reinforced neighborliness. As one upland Georgian remarked, "Borrowing ... was neighboring." Debts contracted within the network of kin and neighbors were generally paid in kind or in labor, and creditors often allowed their neighbors' debts to go unpaid for years.

Among southern neighborly restraints on entrepreneurialism, none was more distinctive than the region's attitude toward fences. Northerners never tired of comparing their neatly fenced farms with the dilapidated or absent fences of the South. In the capitalist North, well-maintained fences were a sign of ambitious, hardworking farmers. The poorly maintained fences of the South, they said, were a sign of laziness. Actually, the scarcity of fences in most southern neighborhoods was the result of local custom and state law. Georgia, for instance, required farmers to fence their planted fields but not the rest of their land. In country neighborhoods where families fished and hunted for food, and where livestock roamed freely, fences conflicted with a local economy that required neighborhood use of privately owned land. In this sense, the northerners were right: the absence of fences in the South reflected neighborhood constraints on the private use of private property, and thus on individual acquisitiveness and ambition. Such constraints, however, were necessary to the subsistence of families and neighborhoods as they were organized in the upland South.

Southern farmers marketed their cotton and food surpluses at country stores, and again the patterns of the 18th and early 19th centuries persisted. Northern stores, particularly in the more commercializing regions, were stocking their shelves with a wider variety of imported and domestic goods to serve farm families that no

longer produced for themselves and that had money to spend. Southern yeomen, on the other hand, bought very little. A relatively prosperous backwoods farmer in South Carolina recalled that “My farm gave me and my whole family a good living on the produce of it, and left me, one year after another, one hundred and fifty silver dollars, *for I never spent more than ten dollars a year*, which was for salt, nails and the like. Nothing to wear, eat or drink was purchased, as my farm provided all.”

Families such as these continued to live without carpets or curtains, to eat homegrown food from wooden or pewter plates, and to wear everyday cloth spun and woven by the women of the family, although many who could afford it wore clothing fashioned from machine-made cloth on Sunday. And like the rest of their transactions, yeomen seldom bought items or settled transactions in cash. The store of Leach Carrigan and Samuel Carrigan in South Carolina, for instance, traded 85 percent of its merchandise for cotton. While the northern countryside and the low-land plantation districts functioned in businesslike ways, the old barter economy—and the forms of family independence and neighborly cooperation on which it rested—persisted in the southern upcountry.

Unlike the plantations, the farm neighborhoods of the South were places in which white people worked. Most farmers relied solely on family labor. They sired many children and put them to work at an early age. Farm wives often labored in the fields, particularly at peak times. Even those who were spared from field work took up heavy burdens. A southern yeoman remembered that his mother worked “in the house sutch as cooking carding spinning and weaving and washing. Thare [were] 14 in the family,” and “she did not have any servant to help her.” George Washington Lewis, who grew up on his father’s southern farm, recalled a boyhood filled with hard labor. He “chopped, plowed, hoed, carded, reaped, mowed and bound sheaves, in fact all kinds of work necessary on a farm and lots of it. Split rails, built fences, log roled and danced with the girls at quiltings.” We may be happy to learn that this boy found time for fun, but we must note—as northern critics did not—that he spent most of his waking hours at hard physical labor.

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF SLAVES

In 1790, slaves in the Chesapeake had lived for generations in the same neighborhoods—old communities filled with kinfolk, ancestral graveyards, family gardens, and familiarity with each other and with local whites. They had made a distinctively African American way of life within the boundaries of slavery. Slaves along the South Carolina–Georgia rice coast, living and working in large groups under minimal white supervision, had made their own African American ways. In the first half of the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of these people were torn from their communities and sold into the cotton states. It began a period of cultural destruction and reconstruction equaled only by the process of enslavement itself. We can view that process intimately by looking into the most vital of slave institutions: the slave family and slave religion.

Slave Families

In law, in the census, and in the minds of planters, slaves were members of a plantation household over which the owner exercised absolute authority as owner, paternal protector, and lawgiver. Yet

both slaveholders and slaves knew that slaves could not be treated like farm animals or little children. Wise masters learned that the success of a plantation depended less on terror and draconian discipline (though whippings—and worse—were common) than on the accommodations by which slaves traded labor and obedience for privileges and some measure of autonomy within the bonds of slavery. After achieving privileges, the slaves called them their own: holidays, garden plots, friendships and social gatherings both on and off the plantation, hunting and fishing rights, the right to trade slave-made goods, and—most vitally—the right to make their own families. These hard-won privileges provided some of the ground on which slaves in the old plantation states had made their own lives within slavery. The domestic slave trade and movement onto the cotton frontier cut that ground from beneath them. Slaves learned painfully that they were not members of families or communities—either the masters’ or their own. They were property, and they could be bought and sold.

The most precious privilege on Chesapeake plantations had been the right to live in families. As early as the Revolutionary era, most Chesapeake slaves lived in units consisting of a mother, a father, and their small children. On Charles Carroll’s Maryland farms in 1773, for example, 325 of the 400 slaves lived in such families. At Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, most slave marriages were for life, and small children almost always lived with both parents. The most common exceptions were fathers who had married away from their own plantations and who visited “broad wives” and children during their off hours. Owners encouraged stable marriages because they made farms more peaceful and productive and because they flattered the owners’ own religious and paternalistic sensibilities. For their part, slaves demanded families as part of the price of their labor.

Yet slave families had always been vulnerable. Many slaveholders coerced sex from female slaves. Some kept slaves as mistresses. The planters tended, however, to keep these liaisons within bounds. While the slave community seldom punished sex before marriage, it took adultery seriously. Slaveholders knew that violations of married slave women could be enormously disruptive and strongly discouraged them. Slave sales also threatened families, but most sales before 1800 or so took place within neighborhoods, damaging slave families and communities without destroying them. The most serious threat was the death or bankruptcy of the slaveholder, which led to the division of property among heirs. Yet even these events, in comparison to what came later, tended to keep slaves in the same extended neighborhood.

The Slave Trade and the Slave Family

This all changed with the growth of the Southwest and the interstate slave trade. Masters in the seaboard states claimed (often truthfully) that they tried to keep slave families together and that they sold slaves to traders only out of dire necessity or as a means of getting rid of troublesome individuals. The latter category could be used as a threat. One slave remembered: “Slaves usually got scared when it became clear that Negro-Trader [John] White was in the community. The owners used White’s name as a threat to scare the slaves when they had violated some rule.” “If a man did anything out of the way,” recalled another slave, “he was in more danger of being sold than being whipped.” Thomas Jefferson,



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Five Generations of a Slave Family on a South Carolina Sea Island Plantation, 1862.

Complex family ties such as those of the family shown here were among the most hard-won and vulnerable cultural accomplishments of enslaved blacks.

reputedly the kindest of masters, punished a troublesome slave by selling him in 1803, declaring that he would be sent into “so distant an exile ... as to cut him off completely from ever being heard of [again].”

Chesapeake planters and slaves knew, however, that the slave trade was more than a means of settling debts or punishing individuals. It had become an important source of income. Myths of slave “breeding farms” in the Chesapeake are just that—myths. Slaves in the exporting states continued to live in families that produced and nurtured their own children, but the children could expect to be sold into long-distance markets when they came of age. The systematic selling of teen-aged and young adult slaves, who commanded the highest prices, became a standard way in which Chesapeake gentlemen maintained their status. John Randolph of Roanoke, one of the great planter-politicians of Virginia, routinely translated younger members of his “plantation family” into cash. In 1823, he traveled to New York to see the great match race between the northern horse American Eclipse and the southern horse Henry. In a moment of pride and exuberance, he shouted from the grandstand that he would bet “a year’s crop of negroes” on the southern champion.

Professional slave traders made no effort to hide their willingness to break slave families. Neither did the southwestern planters who bought slaves from the older states. One planter insisted that “it is better to buy *none in families*, but to *select only choice, first rate, young hands from 14 to 25 years of age*, (buying no children

or aged negroes.)” Seaboard planters, trying to convince themselves and anyone who would listen that they were responsible paternalists, made a sharp division between the plantation “family” and the well-known horrors of the domestic slave trade, but the slaves knew better. A Virginia slave woman had this to say of the planter who had sold her daughters: “he was a mean dirty slave trader.”

Separated from their kinfolk and communities, cotton-belt slaves began the old process of negotiation with their masters, and they reconstructed families. Cotton planters preferred young men for the labor of clearing the land, but they soon began importing nearly equal numbers of women, encouraging marriage, and providing cabins for slave families. Families made for greater peace and quiet on the plantations, and they were a good long-term investment in the production of new slaves. The slaves grasped the opportunity. As early as the 1820s, 51 percent of rural Louisiana slaves lived in families composed of two parents and their children. That figure was smaller than it had been on the old farms, but in view of what the slaves had been through, it was surprisingly large.

Slaveholders who encouraged slave marriages—perhaps even solemnizing them with a religious ceremony—knew that marriage implied a form of self-ownership that conflicted with the slaves’ status as property. Some conducted ceremonies in which couples “married” by jumping over a broomstick. Others had the preacher omit the phrases “let no man put asunder” and “till death do you part” from the ceremony. Slaves knew that such ceremonies had no legal force. A Virginia slave remarked, “We slaves knowed that them words wasn’t bindin’. Don’t mean nothin’ lessen you say, ‘What God has jined, caint no man pull asunder.’ But dey never would say dat. Jus’ say ‘Now you married.’” A South Carolina slave preacher routinely ended the ceremony with “Till death or buckra [whites] part you.”

Slaves built their sense of family and kinship around such uncertainties. Because separation from father or mother was common, children spread their affection among adult relatives, treating grandparents, aunts, and uncles almost as though they were parents. In fact, slaves often referred to all of their adult relatives as “parents.” They also called nonrelatives “brother,” “sister,” “aunt,” and “uncle,” thus extending a sense of kinship to the slave community at large. Slaves chose as surnames for themselves the names of former owners, Anglicized versions of African names, or names that simply sounded good. They rarely chose the name of their current owner. Families tended to use the same given names over and over, naming boys after their father or grandfather, perhaps to preserve the memory of fathers who might be taken away. They seldom named girls after their mothers, however. Unlike southern whites, slaves never married a first cousin, even though many members of their community were close relatives. The origins and functions of some of these customs are unknown. We know only that slaves practiced them consistently, often without the knowledge of the slaveholders.

The Beginnings of African American Christianity in the Chesapeake

Until the mid-18th century, neither enslaved Africans nor their masters showed much interest in Christianizing slaves. That changed with the rise of evangelical Christianity in the South (see Chapter 10). Blacks participated in the revivals of the southern Great Awakening, and the number of Christian

slaves increased steadily in the second half of the 18th century. In the slave communities of the Upper South, as well as the burgeoning free and semifree black populations in the towns, the evangelical revivals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries appealed powerfully to African Americans, who sensed that the bonds of slavery were loosening. By 1820, most blacks in the Chesapeake considered themselves Christians. They would take their religion with them when they went farther south.

Between the Revolution and 1820, Chesapeake slaves embraced Christianity and began to turn it into a religion of their own. Slaves attended camp meetings, listened to **itinerant preachers**, and joined the Baptist and Methodist congregations of the southern revival. The revivalists, in turn, welcomed slaves and free blacks to their meetings and sometimes recruited them as preachers. Evangelical preaching, singing, and spiritual exercises were much more attractive than the cold, high-toned lectures of the Anglicans. So were the humility and suffering of evangelical whites, most of whom were poor men and outsiders. Finally, the slaves gloried in the evangelicals' assault on the slaveholders' culture and in the antislavery sentiments of many white evangelicals (see Chapter 10). The result was a huge increase in the number of African American Christians. Methodists, who counted converts more carefully than some others, claimed 20,000 black members in 1800—one in three American Methodists.

The integrated congregations, however, did not last. There were exceptions, but most congregations were in fact internally segregated, with blacks sitting in the back of the church or upstairs in the gallery, and with only whites serving in positions of authority. Blacks, with both positive and negative encouragement from whites, organized independent churches in Baltimore, Wilmington, Richmond, Norfolk, and the scattered villages that had risen to serve the Chesapeake's new mixed economy. Even Charleston boasted an independent Methodist conference made up of 4,000 slaves and free blacks in 1815. By 1820, roughly 700 independent black churches operated in the United States. There had been none at all 30 years earlier. And on the plantations, slaves met informally—sometimes with the masters' permission, sometimes without it—to preach and pray.

Slave Theology

Slaves understood and used the message of Christianity in their own ways. The biblical notion that slavery could be punishment for sin and the white southern notion that God intended blacks to be slaves never took root among enslaved Christians. Hannah Scott, a slave in Arkansas, remarked on what she heard a white preacher say: "But all he say is 'bedi-ence to de white folks, and we hears 'nough of dat without him telling us." One slave asked a white preacher, "Is us slaves gonna be free in heaven?" The preacher had no answer. As one maid boldly told her mistress, "God never made us to be slaves for white people."

Another way in which slave religion differed from what was preached to them by whites was in the practice of conjuring, folk magic, root medicine, and other occult knowledge, most of it passed down from West Africa. Such practices provided help in areas in which Christianity was useless. They could reputedly cure illnesses, make people fall in love, ensure a good day's fishing, or bring harm to one's

enemies. Sometimes African magic was in competition with plantation Christianity. Just as often, however, slaves combined the two. For instance, slaves sometimes determined the guilt or innocence of a person accused of stealing by hanging a Bible by a thread, then watching the way it turned. The form was West African; the Bible was not. The slave root doctor George White boasted that he could “cure most anything,” but added that “you got to talk wid God an’ ask him to help out.” “Maum Addie,” a slave in coastal South Carolina, dealt with the malevolent African spirits called plat-eyes with a combination of African potions, the Christian God, and a stout stick: “So I totes mah powder en sulphur en I carries mah stick in mah han en puts mah truss in Gawd.”

While Christianity could not cure sick babies or identify thieves, it gave slaves something more important: a sense that they were a historical people with a role to play in God’s cosmic drama. In slave Christianity, Moses the liberator (and not the slaveholders’ Abraham) stood beside Jesus. The slaves’ appropriation of the book of Exodus denied the smug assumption of the whites that they were God’s chosen people who had escaped the bondage of despotic Europe to enter the promised land of America. To the slaves, America was Egypt, they were the chosen people, and the slaveholders were Pharaoh. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Boston abolitionist who went south during the Civil War to lead a Union regiment of freed South Carolina slaves, wrote that his men knew the Old Testament books of Moses and the New Testament book of Revelation. “All that lies between,” he said, “even the life of Jesus, they hardly cared to read or to hear.” He found their minds “a vast bewildered chaos of Jewish history and biography; and most of the events of the past, down to the period of the American Revolution, they instinctively attribute to Moses.”

The slaves’ religious songs, which became known as spirituals, told of God’s people, their travails, and their ultimate deliverance. In songs and sermons, the figures of Jesus and Moses were often blurred, and it was not always clear whether deliverance—accompanied by divine retribution—would take place in this world or the next. But deliverance always meant an end to black slavery, often with a reversal of relations between slaves and masters. “The idea of a revolution in the conditions of the whites and blacks,” said the escaped slave Charles Ball, “is the cornerstone of the religion of the latter.”

Religion and Revolt

In comparison with slaves in Cuba, Jamaica, Brazil, and other New World plantation societies, North American slaves seldom went into organized, armed revolt. The environment of the United States was unfriendly to such events. American plantations were relatively small and dispersed, and the southern white population was large, vigilant, and very well armed. Whites also enjoyed—until the cataclysm of the Civil War—internal political stability. There were thus few situations in which slaves could hope to win their freedom by violent means. Thousands of slaves demonstrated their hatred of the system by running away. Others fought masters or overseers, sabotaged equipment and animals, stole from planters, and found other ways to oppose slavery, but most knew that open revolt was suicide.

Christianity convinced slaves that history was headed toward an apocalypse that would result in divine justice and their own deliverance. It thus contained the

possibility of revolt. But slave preachers seldom indulged in prophecy and almost never told their congregations to become actively engaged in God’s divine plan, for they knew that open resistance was hopeless. Slave Christians believed that God hated slavery and would end it, but that their role was to have faith in God, to take care of one another, to preserve their identity as a people, and to await deliverance. Only occasionally did slaves take retribution and deliverance into their own hands. Each time, they were armed with some mix of republican equalitarianism and evangelical Christianity.

Gabriel's Rebellion

Masters who talked of liberty, natural rights, and equality before God sometimes worried that slaves might imagine that such language could apply to them. The Age of Democratic Revolution took a huge step in that direction in 1789, when the French Revolution—fought in the name of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity”—went beyond American notions of restored English liberties and into the heady regions of universal natural rights. Among the first repercussions outside of France was a revolution in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue. That island’s half-million slaves fought out a complicated political and military revolt that began with the events in Paris in 1789 and resulted—after the defeats of Spanish, English, and French armies—with the creation of the independent black republic of Haiti on the western one-third of the island. Slave societies throughout the hemisphere heard tales of terror from refugee French planters and stories of hope from the slaves they brought with them (12,000 of these entered South Carolina and Louisiana alone). In 1800, a conservative Virginia white complained: “Liberty and Equality has been infused into the minds of the negroes.” A South Carolina congressman agreed that “this newfangled French philosophy of liberty and equality” was stirring up the slaves. Even Thomas Jefferson, who applauded the spread of French republicanism, conceded, “the West Indies appears to have given considerable impulse to the minds of the slaves ... in the United States.”

Slaves from the 1790s onward whispered of natural rights and imagined themselves as part of the Democratic Revolution. This covert republic of the slaves sometimes came into the open. In Richmond in 1800, a slave blacksmith named **Gabriel** hatched a conspiracy to overthrow Virginia’s slave regime. Gabriel had been hired out to Richmond employers for most of his adult life; he was shaped less by plantation slavery than by the democratic, loosely interracial underworld of urban artisans. In the late 1790s, the repressive acts of the Federalist national government and the angry responses of the Jeffersonian opposition (see Chapter 7), along with the news from Haiti, drove the democratic sensibilities of that world to new heights.

Gabriel, working with his brother and other hired-out slave artisans, planned his revolt with military precision. Working at religious meetings, barbecues, and the grog shops of Richmond, they recruited soldiers among slave artisans, adding plantation slaves only at the last moment. Gabriel planned to march an army of 1,000 men on Richmond in three columns. The outside columns would set diversionary fires in the warehouse district and prevent the militia from entering the town. The center would seize Capitol Square, including the treasury, the arsenal, and Governor James Monroe.

Although his army would be made up of slaves, and although his victory would end slavery in Virginia, Gabriel hoped to make a republican revolution, not a slave revolt. His chosen enemies were the Richmond “merchants” who had controlled his labor. Later, a co-conspirator divulged the plan: The rebels would hold Governor Monroe hostage and split the state treasury among themselves, and “if the white people agreed to their freedom they would then hoist a white flag, and [Gabriel] would dine and drink with the merchants of the city....” Gabriel expected “the poor white people” and “the most redoubtable republicans” to join him. He in fact had the shadowy support of two Frenchmen, and rumors indicated that other whites were involved, although never at levels that matched the delusions of the conspirators or of worried whites. Gabriel planned to kill anyone who opposed him, but he would spare Quakers, Methodists, and Frenchmen, for they were “friendly to liberty.” Unlike earlier slave insurgents, Gabriel did not plot violent retribution or a return to or reconstruction of West Africa. He was an American revolutionary, and he dreamed of a truly democratic republic for Virginia. His army would march into Richmond under the banner “Death or Liberty.”

Gabriel recruited at least 150 soldiers who agreed to gather near Richmond on August 30, 1800. The leaders expected 500 to 600 more to join them as they marched upon the town. On the appointed day, however, it rained heavily, washing out bridges and making roads impassable. Rebels could not reach the meeting point, and amid white terror and black betrayals, Gabriel and his henchmen were hunted down, tried, and sentenced to death. In all, the state hanged 27 supposed conspirators, while others were sold and transported out of Virginia. The condemned carried their republican dreams to their graves. A white Virginian marveled that the rebels on the gallows displayed a “sense of their [natural] rights, [and] a contempt of danger.” When asked to explain the revolt, one condemned man replied in terms that could only have disturbed the white republicans of Virginia: “I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause.”

Denmark Vesey A second major slave conspiracy may not have been a conspiracy at all. In 1822 **Denmark Vesey**, a free black of Charleston, South Carolina (he had won a lottery and bought himself), stood trial for plotting rebellion. Vesey was a leading member of an African Methodist congregation that had seceded from the white Methodists and had been independent from 1817 to 1821. Vesey and some of the other members read widely in political tracts, including the antislavery arguments in the Missouri debates (see Chapter 11). They also read the Bible, and talked openly of their delivery out of Egypt. According to testimony coerced from slaves who wanted to avoid prosecution themselves, Vesey and his co-conspirators planned the destruction of Charleston in 1822. A few dozen Charleston blacks would take the state armory, the story went, then arm rural slaves who would rise up to help them. They would kill the whites and commandeer ships in the harbor and make their getaway to black-controlled Haiti.

We cannot know how much of that was true. But Charleston’s white authorities pulled the story out of terrified blacks, believed it, and hanged Vesey and 35

other accused conspirators—22 of them on one day. For many years afterwards, frightened whites “knew” that most of the conspirators (estimates ranged from 600 to 9,000) remained at large and living among them.

Nat Turner

The revolt in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831 was real: some 60 slaves shot and hacked to death 55 white men, women, and children. Their leader was **Nat Turner**, a Baptist lay preacher. Turner was not a republican visionary like Denmark Vesey or the Richmond slave Gabriel. He was, he told his captors, a Christian prophet and an instrument of God’s wrath. As a child, he had prayed and fasted often, and the spirit—the same spirit that had spoken to the prophets of the Bible—had spoken to him. When he was a young man, he had run away to escape a cruel overseer, but God said that He had not chosen him merely to have him run away, and Nat had returned. He explained his return with one of the slave owners’ favorite verses of scripture: “He who knoweth his master’s will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” Turner knew, however, that his Master was God, not a slave owner.

Around 1830, Turner received visions of the final battle in Revelation, recast as a war between white and black spirits. He saw Christ crucified against the night sky, and the next morning he saw Christ’s blood in a cornfield. Convinced by a solar eclipse in February 1831 that the time had come, Turner began telling other slaves about his visions, recruited his force, and launched his bloody and hopeless revolt.

The revolts of Gabriel, Turner, and Vesey, along with scores of more limited conspiracies, deeply troubled southern whites. Slaveholders were committed to a paternalism that was increasingly tied to the South’s attempt to make slavery both domestic and Christian. For their part, slaves recognized that they could receive decent treatment and pockets of autonomy in return for outward docility. Gabriel, Vesey, and Turner opened wide cracks in that mutual charade. During the Turner revolt, slaves whose masters had been murdered joined the rebels without a second thought. A plantation mistress who survived by hiding in a closet listened to the murders of her husband and children, and then heard her house servants arguing over possession of her clothes. A Charleston grandee named Elias Horry, upon finding that his coachman was among the Vesey conspirators, asked him, “What were your intentions?” The formerly docile slave replied that he had intended “to kill you, rip open your belly, and throw your guts in your face.”

A SOUTHERN MARKET REVOLUTION?

The South experienced explosive economic growth between 1790 and 1860, but in different ways and with different results than in the North. The plantation was a profitable business, and it was big. In 1860 the cash value of the southern slave population was \$3 billion. That was more than the value of investments in banking, railroads, and manufacturing combined. The annual rate of return on the larger plantations stood at 10 percent—higher than factories or banks.

Southern expansion, however, had its limits. Economic growth was concentrated on the largest farms, and prosperity and change did not reach far beyond those farms. Planters invested their profits in more slaves and more land. The result



Nat Turner. *This contemporary woodcut depicts scenes from Nat Turner's rebellion. In this bloodiest of all North American slave revolts, 55 whites, most of them women and children, were shot and hacked to death.*

was a lack of diversification and an increasing concentration of resources in the hands of the planter class. The South was a poor market for manufactured goods. Most white farmers relied on the production of their households and neighbors, and they remained marginal to the market economy. They bought finished goods from the outside, but at a rate that was far lower than their northern counterparts. The slaves wore shoes and cheap cloth made in the Northeast and bought by their masters, and their trade in slave-made goods, while it was crucial to subsistence and a valued form of “independence” within slavery, resulted in only low-level (often furtive) entry into the market. For their part, the larger planters furnished themselves and their homes with finery from Europe. The South continued to export its plantation staples and to pay outsiders for shipping, financial services, and finished goods. In contrast, the commercialization of northern farms created a rural demand for credit, banking facilities, farm tools, clothing, and other consumer goods and services—most of them provided by other northerners—and thus made a market revolution that included most northern families. In the South, economic growth produced more cotton and more slavery and comparatively little else.

Not that the South neglected technological change and agricultural improvement. Southerners developed the early cotton gin into big milling machines. They also improved steamboat design, making flat-bottomed boats that could travel far up shallow rivers. They also developed, among others, a machine with a huge wooden screw powered by horses or mules to press ginned cotton into tight bales for shipping. Jordan Goree, a slave craftsman in Huntsville, Texas, won a reputation for being able to carve whole trees into perfect screws for these machines. There were, however, few such innovations, and they had to do with the processing and shipping of cotton. Despite the experiments of a few gentleman-planters, there were almost no improvements in the *cultivation* of cotton. The truth is that cotton

was a labor-intensive crop that discouraged innovation. Moreover, slaves often resisted “progress.” They sabotaged tools and draft animals, scattered manure in haphazard ways, and passively resisted innovations that would have added to their drudgery. The cotton fields continued to be cultivated by enslaved people working with clumsy, mule-drawn plows that barely scratched the soil, by women wielding heavy hoes, and by gangs who harvested the crop by hand.

Southern state governments spent comparatively little on **internal improvements**. A Virginia canal linked the flour mills at Richmond with inland grain fields, and another would connect Chesapeake Bay with the National Road, thus realizing—too late—Washington’s and Jefferson’s dreams of a thoroughfare between the Chesapeake and the Ohio Valley. But planters built their farms on alluvial land with access to the South’s magnificent system of navigable rivers. They had little interest in expensive, state-supported internal improvements that their own neighborhoods did not need. Upcountry whites, particularly in the Upper South, sometimes campaigned for roads and canals, but they seldom got such measures through planter-dominated legislatures.

Nor did the South build cities, much less a regional *system* of cities. In 1800, about 82 percent of the southern workforce and about 70 percent of the northern workforce were employed in agriculture. By 1860, only 40 percent of the northern workforce was so employed. In the South, the proportion had risen to 84 percent. The old northern seaports grew dramatically in the early 19th century, and they extended their sway over systems of satellite cities. New York, which became America’s great city in the first third of the 19th century, exercised commercial and cultural power over the old capital at Albany, as well as new Erie Canal cities such as Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. Between 1800 and 1840, the urban population of New York State rose from 12.7 percent to 19.4 percent, despite the settlement of huge tracts of new agricultural land. In Massachusetts, the urban population rose from 15.4 percent to 37.9 percent in these years. By 1840, every northeastern and mid-Atlantic state with the exceptions of Maine and Vermont had at least 10 percent of their people living in cities. No southern state urbanized at that level. Virginia, at 6.9 percent, had the largest urban population of any of the future Confederate states.

Commercial and manufacturing cities sprouted up throughout the interior of the North. The few southern cities were located on the periphery of the region and served as transportation depots for plantation crops. River cities like Louisville, Memphis, and St. Louis were little more than stopping places for steamboats. The great seaports of New Orleans, Charleston, and Baltimore had in the past shipped plantation staples directly to British and European markets. But as the 19th century progressed, they sent more and more of their goods by coasting vessel to New York City to be trans-shipped to foreign ports. In turn, Europe’s manufactured goods were funneled into New York, and then sold off to the southern (and northern) countryside. The commercial metropolis of the southern United States was becoming less London and more New York. What had *not* changed was the colonial status of the South.

Thus while the North and the Northwest developed towns and cities throughout their regions, southern cities continued to be few and to perform the colonial functions of 18th-century seaport towns. Southern businessmen turned to

New York City for credit, insurance, coastal and export shipping, and finished goods. *De Bow's Review*, the principal business journal of the South, reported that South Carolina storekeepers who bought goods from Charleston wholesalers claimed they had bought them directly from New York City, for it was well known that New York provided better goods at lower prices than any supplier in the South. De Bow testified to the superior skill and diversification of the North when, after trying several New Orleans sources, he awarded the publishing contract for his *Review* to a northern printer. That was not surprising in any case, because De Bow received three-fourths of his income from northern advertisers.

CONCLUSION

On the eve of the Civil War, James H. Hammond, a slaveholding senator from South Carolina, asked, "What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years.... England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her save the south. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war on cotton. Cotton is king." Hammond was arguing, as Jefferson had argued in 1807, that farmers at the fringes of the world market economy could coerce the commercial-industrial center. He was wrong. The commitment to cotton and slavery had isolated the South politically. It had also deepened the South's dependence on the world's financial and industrial centers. The North transformed its role as a part of the old colonial periphery (the suppliers of food and raw materials) into a part of the core (the suppliers of manufactured goods and financing) of the world market economy, while the South continued to export plantation staples in exchange for imported goods. In the process, the South worked itself deeper and deeper into dependence, now as much upon the American Northeast as upon the old colonial rulers in London.