

History 201

Lectures 5

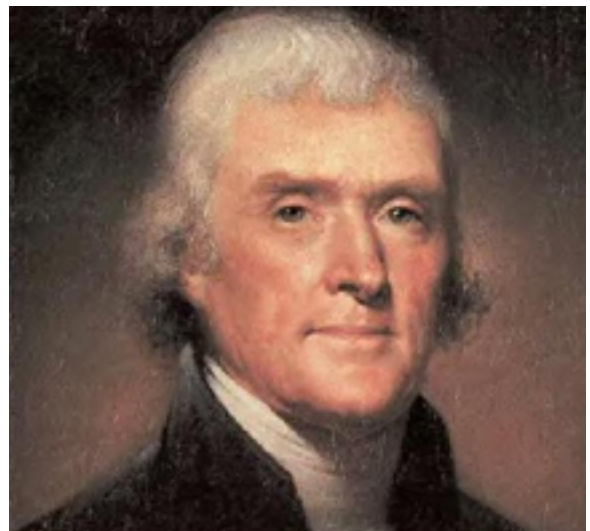


Thomas Jefferson and the Republican Regime

So who was Thomas Jefferson? Historians generally are mixed in terms of what to think about Jefferson. Here are a few facts. He was more folksy than Federalists, and a lot of members of his own party. He hated public pomp and ceremony. He hated powdered wigs, and wore plain clothes. He had red hair—that doesn't signify anything, but historians always mention it. He had bounced back from both personal and political disasters. In 1782, he was in debt, his house burned, he lost his wife, he had quite a few personal disasters. His revolutionary term as Virginia governor was marred when he retreated from a possible capture rather than risk it. He was labeled a coward. He was a Rationalist, or a Deist (we are not entirely sure which), at any rate he was neither a Christian nor a churchgoer.

Jefferson was brought up in the informal and carelessly intellectual atmosphere of Virginia. As a young man he was full of high spirits and high jinx, fond of riding, hunting, playing the violin and reading. As he matured he acquired an intellectual curiosity for practically everything. He was an inventor (dumbwaiters, wheeled desk chair), a naturalist, an architect, a natural mathematician and a political philosopher. He designed both his own house (Monticello) and the entire campus of the University of Virginia (which he founded). He wrote books and pamphlets on everything — natural history, math, politics and education especially. He was one of the greatest conversationalists of his time. Throughout his life he enjoyed freedom, leisure and meeting new people.

Politically, Jefferson was the opposite of Hamilton. Although he felt that a strong national government would be an asset in international affairs, he worried at what such a government might do on the domestic scene. He was a strong advocate of the saying that a government which governs least governs best. "I am not a friend" he said "to a very energetic government. He feared that a strong government would place limitations on the liberty of the people. He had fought for freedom against the British crown, and the control of an official church. He disliked



cities with their manufacturing interests and large banking organizations. He felt that these institutions were dangerous in a republic because they eroded the population of free, independent, landholding small farmers. He believed that Americans could remain free and happy if America remained a rural nation.

Historian's assessments of Jefferson are mixed. If a historian likes Alexander Hamilton, then they dislike Jefferson, and vice versa. Some progressive historians like to make Thomas Jefferson a sort of premature New Deal democrat. Some give him all of the trappings of a late 20th century liberal. Some conservative historians like to give him all the trappings of a Reagan Republican. A feature of Jefferson's life that helps make him fit so many molds is the fact that over a long and busy life, Jefferson wrote statements that range across a lot of subjects, and cover a wide range of ideas. His two most consistent and enduring themes, however, were agrarian republicanism, and a distrust of a federal government that was too energetic, too powerful, too domineering toward the states. So, having staked out a couple of areas that help to define what Jefferson was, let's look at a few that Jefferson wasn't, but some historians like to think he was.

Thomas Jefferson and slavery—how do we deal with the fact that the Father of the Declaration of Independence was a slave holder? Historians have squirmed around on that one for five generations. There are a couple of ways to explain it. 1) Jefferson

never meant the Declaration to apply to people of color. The problem is that he specifically stated that natural rights applied as much to black Africans as to white Americans. If they applied to blacks in Africa, and they were inalienable rights, then they must logically have applied to Africans in America. How about, Jefferson believed that Africans were biologically and intellectually inferior to Europeans? This is an accurate statement of Jefferson's thought (and just about every white thinker in the late 1700s as well), but Jefferson argued that such differences in humanity in no way lessened a person's natural rights. Well, did Jefferson believe that slavery was wrong? Yes he did. This is true in terms of his thought, certainly, but not his actions. Thomas Jefferson opposed slavery, on paper—he asked, how could Patriots inflict on others a form of bondage that was worse than that inflicted upon Patriots by Britain? But Jefferson was, and remained, a slaveholder all of his life.

When he married in 1774, he acquired ownership of 1800 acres and 300 slaves. He became one of the largest planters in Virginia. When a slave ran away, Jefferson went to the same lengths that any other planter would to get them back. He ran ads in the *Virginia Gazette*, and when the slaves were returned he flogged them. Jefferson was reluctant to sell his slaves, but when he was in debt and confronted with the alternatives of selling land or selling slaves, he sold slaves. Slave breeding was a profitable business for Thomas Jefferson, as it was for many

Jefferson's home, Monticello. Designed and built by Jefferson after he inheriting land from his father at age 26. Monticello sits on a hill overlooking the University of Virginia, which was founded, designed and built by Jefferson as an alternative to William and Mary College.



great planters. Historians use a statement from Jefferson to point to his essential humanity. He told his overseer to give his pregnant slave only light duties on the plantation. Historians often fail to quote the next sentence, where Jefferson says that he doesn't want to risk interrupting her pregnancy, because a slave child brings more money than a pregnant woman could possibly produce with her labor. Jefferson's manumission record isn't very good, he only freed two slaves in his lifetime. Two of his slaves bought their freedom, and on his death he freed five more. Five to seven of his slaves were related to him by blood. He deeded 200 slaves to his heirs. Not a very good record when compared to George Washington, for instance, who freed all of his slaves in his will, and provided them with funds to settle in the free Midwest. What we see in Thomas Jefferson's record on slavery is much like any other late 18th century southern planter aristocrat. Other planter aristocrats condemned slavery in their written works and kept slaves, his record on treatment of his slaves is not inhuman for his times, but neither was he a saint.

Another area to review his record is on Indian policy. The villain here is supposed to be Andrew Jackson, but Jefferson's record is very like Jackson's. He wrote a letter while president that said we should be friendly with Indians if they became farmers, spinners and weavers, and we could convert them from hunters to farmers by getting them into debt. Then they will either settle down and become like us, or will be forced to give up their ancestral lands and move across the Mississippi.

If a tribe went to war to protect their land, then the military should defeat them, forcibly move them across the Mississippi, and take their land. This is not quite a Jacksonian solution, after all the Cherokees had become farmers, spinners and weavers, and Jackson booted them anyway. But it is hardly much different. This is also a fairly typical white attitude toward Native Americans during the late 18th and 19th century. Native Americans should be respected, but, only at a distance from whites, or if they became, in effect, whites, by adopting white culture, and lifestyles.

A third area is education. In 1800, only the Northeast had public schools. Everywhere else education was one of the things that separated the haves from the have nots. In the South, the planters

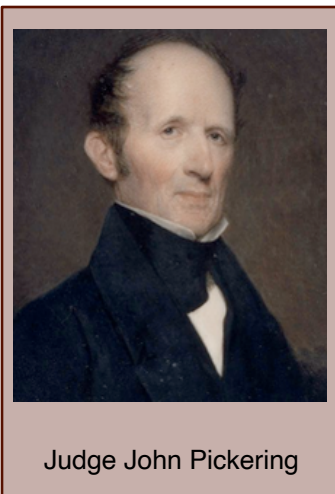
educated their children at home with tutors, then sent them either to William and Mary, or abroad to Britain or France for their later education. Jefferson is often cited as a Virginian with an opposing view, a champion for public education in the South—a kind of 18th century John Dewey. This argument rests on his *Plan of Education*. He proposed three levels of schools 1) elementary: every white child would attend for three years. 2) a system of boarding schools financed at public expense, or with tuition paid by wealthier parents (still cheaper than private tutors). Each year 1 poor deserving student from each 10 grade schools would be sent to a boarding school. Over 3 years all but ten of these poor students would be dropped. The others would be educated at William & Mary at public expense. As Jefferson put it, “ten talented students would be raked from the rubbish each year.” Remember that education is not necessarily a democratic thing, it is used just as frequently to indoctrinate the young into society, to promote conformity rather than democracy. Thomas Jefferson himself stated that his program was designed to fit the young into the social order. “to teach children that happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed them.” The chief beneficiaries would be the planters who would pay less tuition for their children's education. Jefferson argued that the plan would promote order in Virginia. The most intelligent poor youths would gain the opportunities that education provided the rich, and thus be less likely to lead the poor against that society. Jefferson was, after all, a student of revolution. As an aristocrat he feared them. He knew that rebellion and social change might be fomented by one gifted person who was frustrated by a society that held him down. His education plan was designed to place the ten most talented potential troublemakers each year, and incorporate them into the Virginia aristocracy. This is hardly a democratic view of education!

We've taken a look at Thomas Jefferson the man, so what can we say about him? He was brilliant, but he was also a product of the century (or perhaps centuries) in which he lived. to expect Jefferson, or any other person who lived in the 18th century to exhibit the same standards, values and ideas that we have in the 21st century would be a pretty ridiculous proposition. We might say that Jefferson was

reasonably enlightened *for his times*, but was, nevertheless a man *of his time*. That said let's take a look at his administration.

Some historians are a bit taken up with the notion of revolutions. They love to talk about them, and what's more, they often take to labeling periods of history or particular events as "revolutions," even when they might be stretching the point a bit. Several historians at one time or another have labeled the election of 1800 and ensuing Jefferson Administration "the Revolution of 1800." So, was there anything revolutionary about the "Revolution of 1800?" First, and perhaps, foremost it is the first peaceful transfer of power from one party to another in the history of the American federal system. It is an acid test of the Constitution. Some nations have failed in this process. Good examples exist in Latin America in the early 1800s. Most Spanish colonies in Latin America rebelled against Spain and created new republics with written constitutions that emulated the United States. But when the revolutionary party realized that they were about to lose elections and be replaced by the opposition party, those stalwart champions of liberty and democracy suspended their constitution, imprisoned or killed off the opposition and created despotic governments. When Jefferson was elected in 1800 along with majorities of Republicans in Congress, the Federalists who had been in power packed up their offices and went home, as has been the case after every shift of power in America since.

The second important feature of the election of 1800 is that Jefferson was able to successfully put together a coalition of interests and politics that transcended region. Jefferson's political base rested on an alliance between New York and Virginia, and as long as that alliance held together Republicans dominated national politics. The Jacksonian Democrats would be able to forge a New York/Virginia alliance that would also stand the test of time until regional issues became unavoidable. So this alliance becomes a precedent of sorts—a recipe for political dominance. Another important element in the election of 1800, was that Jefferson and his party learned the secret of public opinion in a republic. The way to political success is through the



Judge John Pickering



Republican victory banner celebrates Jefferson's election in 1800.

common man. It is a lesson that the Federalists never learned, and that the Republicans, within two decades, forgot.

Jefferson's first task as president was to install a new government. He began to purge Federalists from government service and replace them with Republicans. He used appointments to control Congress and his party. Burr supporters found that there were no federal appointments for them. By controlling state patronage Jefferson was able to control Congress; he would never need to resort to a veto. The dire warnings by federalists that Jefferson would destroy or replace the Constitution never came to pass. Jefferson said that it was a good constitution, but that under Adams and his Federalists, it had been abused by bad men. Jefferson, having replaced the "bad men" in the civil service, then went after the "bad men" in the judiciary. He impeached and removed Judge John Pickering (who was a Midnight Judge, and also happened to be a bit nuts), then went after Samuel Chase. Chase was also a Midnight Judge, but he wasn't nuts, in fact he was generally respected, and so Jefferson's attempt to remove him failed. After the Chase fiasco, Jefferson gave up trying to reduce the Federalist balance of power in the judiciary. He opined that



The First Barbary War (1802-1805)



the problem with the federal judiciary was that “if a due participation of office is a matter of right, how are vacancies to be obtained? Those by death are few. by resignation none.”

As part of his philosophy of reducing federal government Jefferson decided to reduce government expenditures. He closed several American diplomatic posts, began to pay off the national debt, he canceled and cut all existing taxes except tariffs.

Jefferson was especially concerned with the establishment and maintenance of a large and powerful navy. He argued that such things were very expensive, and benefitted only merchants and manufacturers, not farmers. Jefferson argued that a great navy wasn't necessary to an agrarian republic. He proposed the construction of a large number of gunboats which could be used as a defensive force to protect America waters. Jefferson felt that the United States would not need any ships to fight abroad. He felt that we needed naval vessels only for the defense of our shores from foreign invasion. These boats would be manned by a naval militia which would be quickly recruited in times of danger. The project was a failure. Many of the boats in Jefferson's "Mosquito Fleet" were unseaworthy. Of several dozen built only some eight were ever used. A big problem was that, in the age of sail, sailors had to have the skills necessary to make sail ships run. While a militia makes sense on land where the only skills necessary are the ability to load and fire a weapon, and to occasionally duck, a civilian naval militia was a pretty silly idea. Most of the “Mosquito Fleet” rotted in American ports. The eight that were

actually employed were used as troop transports in the war with Tripoli and were hauled by U.S. men of war.

The war with Tripoli—the rulers of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli on the North African coast were pirates. Their little kingdoms made their living by plundering commercial ships and selling the goods in the East. By about 1750 the governments of most European countries paid these kingdoms tribute so that their merchant ships would be left alone. The federal government had adopted the same policy. Jefferson felt that the payment of tribute was too costly and embarrassing to the United States government. He decided to end this system by a show of force. Between 1802 and 1805 an American squadron defeated the Tripolitanian pirates and the United States government finally secured a peace treaty with Tripoli that provided for peace without tribute. With the outbreak of the War of 1812 the Barbary pirates decided to challenge the U.S. again. The government was unable to react until the British were defeated, but in 1815 an American naval force under Commodore Stephen Decatur attacked and took Tripoli with a brilliant Marine landing. The pirates surrendered and never troubled Americans shipping again.

The political tranquility of Jefferson's first term was not to last through his second. His second administration was riddled by factional strife within his own party. Local quarrels within the Republican party, especially in New York and Pennsylvania led to serious trouble for Jefferson in Congress. Jefferson's greatest political opponent in Congress

was both a fellow Republican, and a fellow Virginian named John Randolph of Roanoke. Randolph led a small, but noisy, group of anti-administration Republicans called the *Tertium Quid* (Latin for “the third thing”) in the House of Representatives.

Randolph was a rather extraordinary character. He entered the House chamber with his dogs chasing at his heels and jumping around him. A member noted:

Mr. Randolph goes to the House booted and spurred, with his whip in hand, in imitation, it is said, of members of the British Parliament. He is a very slight man but of the common stature. At a little distance, he does not appear older than you are; but, upon a nearer approach, you perceive his wrinkles and grey hairs.

Among the most important House fights that Randolph waged against Jefferson were over expansion of federal territory. The important thing to remember here is that Jefferson’s administration was not without difficulties, not only with Federalists, but with members of his own party.

In 1800, Jefferson wanted to acquire the East Bank of the Lower Mississippi. He was in no hurry. It belonged to a weak and conciliatory European power, Spain, so he could safely wait. But France reacquired it from Spain by a secret treaty. Now a powerful nation held the fate of America western trade. Although technically France owned the port

of New Orleans, it was still administered by the Spanish. The United States engaged in sort of leisurely talks with France on the subject until Spain closed the port of New Orleans to American trade. At the same time, Napoleon got an urgent reason to sell. He had planned to create a sort of American empire from Haiti to Canada. Napoleon envisioned an empire in which French colonists in the Mississippi Valley farmed grain to feed to slaves in the French West Indies, who would produce sugar. Cane sugar was an expensive commodity in Europe, so Napoleon expected to make France very wealthy indeed. The wealth could be used to expand the French Empire in Europe. He put a large army together to make his

plan possible. The army would occupy the Mississippi Valley to defend the colonists that Napoleon intended to send. His plans fell apart when, just before his army left Europe, he discovered that Haitian slaves had revolted against the French who controlled the Island (Santo Domingo), so Napoleon decided to send his troops there to defeat the insurrection before they went to New Orleans. Napoleon’s army was soundly defeated with casualties over 100,000 men. At the same time Napoleon suffered a series of military setbacks in Europe, and needed to consolidate his efforts to his European empire. His drive for world domination would just have to be put on hold, so he decided to sell off his holdings in North America to the United States. Negotiations were rather sticky,



John Randolph of Roanoke

Napoleon's American plans interrupted by a slave rebellion in Haiti led by Toussaint Louverture (right).





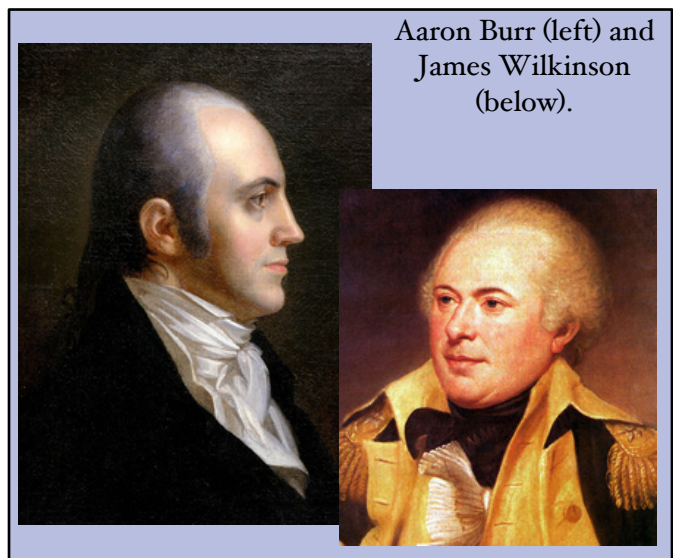
however, the French owned it, but hadn't actually paid for it, the Spanish possessed it, but didn't actually own it. The U.S. Government didn't actually want all of it, and didn't think that they could afford all of France's American holdings if they did want it. The British tried frantically to stall the sale.

At this point, in 1803, Congress appropriated \$2 million for the purchase of the Port of New Orleans, and sent James Monroe to Paris to join Robert Livingston in the negotiations. Monroe arrived in Paris on April 12, 1803. And was astonished that Napoleon had offered to sell all of Louisiana to the United States. for the bargain-basement price \$15 million. On April 30, Monroe signed a treaty to purchase the territory from France, although at the time the actual borders of the territory that he was purchasing were only sketchily described.

At this point Jefferson was faced with a number of problems. First the delegates who had signed the treaty with Napoleon had no authority to do so. Second, the federal government had just paid some \$15 million for a pig in a poke, that is, they had absolutely no idea of what comprised the borders of the territory they were about to purchase. Third, Thomas Jefferson, the strict constructionist, had to figure out how he could make this blatantly unconstitutional action constitutional! One of his cabinet members suggested that this wasn't a land purchase, but a border adjustment! That was a bit much. Jefferson finally decided that it was enough that it benefitted the nation. So the United States doubled in size at the stroke of a pen to become the

largest and most underdeveloped nation in the western world. But, after all was said and done, what did we have? All the land from the headwater of the Mississippi, the Red River, and the Missouri river. What that meant we didn't know. So Jefferson dispatched explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to find out. We also faced new question that had to be worked out as to the political situation of the new territory. Was Louisiana a territory of the United States to be treated as the Ohio territory had been treated? Was it a colony of the United States (that didn't sound good)? What rights did the residents already settled in Louisiana have?

Another problem with the Louisiana Purchase was posed when Aaron Burr decided that he might want to help himself to some of it! So, another question that we quickly came to face over Louisiana was



Aaron Burr (left) and James Wilkinson (below).

could we keep it? We owned it, we had bought it from France, but owning and keeping are often two different things. Louisiana was certainly large enough to be a viable nation on its own. Two people who seemed to have thought so was Aaron Burr and James Wilkinson. Burr you have met. Wilkinson was a U.S. General. He was the poorly paid governor of the Louisiana territory. He was also a double agent, spying on the Spanish for the United States, and on the U.S.. For the Spanish. Burr ceased to be vice president in 1804. He was under indictment for killing Alexander Hamilton. He went west. Burr and Wilkinson met and concocted a scheme for Louisiana. We don't know exactly what they had planned, at most it was a grandiose idea to put together a vast empire that included not only North America west of the Mississippi, but also Central America, an empire that would run from Canada to Panama. Burr visited a lot of important and influential westerners, the most important of whom was Andrew Jackson. He began to hire troops, build boats, and stockpile arms, as well. We don't know exactly what he told Jackson, but whatever it was, Jackson pondered the offer, liked the idea, assumed that it was really Jefferson behind it, and wrote a letter to Jefferson and said what a great plan it was that Burr had told him about. By 1806 more information had begun to leak about Burr's activities, as well, and Jefferson began to worry.

Jefferson got the military in Louisiana to arrest the Burr conspirators. Wilkinson was in command of the army, so at first he stalled, then finally decided better Burr than him, and betrayed Burr, who was captured in Mississippi by U.S. Marshals. Burr was

lucky. Had his old crony, Wilkinson, managed to arrest him, he probably would have been "shot while trying to escape." Burr was carted to Washington and tried for treason. The trial was conducted by John Marshall. Marshall played the role of both judge and quasi-defense attorney. The rule of law in the Constitution, taken from the English Common Law was that you had to have at least two witnesses to any particular act of treason. This made conviction impossible. There were several witnesses who gave evidence of one particular treasonable act, but none who were witness to more than one particular act. Burr walked. Jefferson then had him arrested on a charge of state treason. Marshall bailed him out, but by this time Burr is beginning to get the message that the U.S. was not a healthy place for him, so he went abroad. He returned many years later. We know this because he appears in New York City practicing law, marrying in his 70s and fathering two children, then, in his 80s his wife sued the old scoundrel him for divorce on grounds of adultery!

Near the end of his first term, Jefferson found himself caught between two warring super powers. While France and Britain plunged all of Europe into war, Jefferson struggled to maintain neutrality for the United States. British merchant interests had become alarmed at the growth of American shipping and trade after Europe had gone back to war with France in 1803. British merchants were able to get the British government to create a policy that was hostile to American shipping. The British forbade neutral shipping to trade with France. They also made it difficult for neutral ships which attempted



An 1808 political cartoon depicting U.S. President Thomas Jefferson addressing a group of disgruntled men as he defends the policy of his Embargo Act.

to land in French ports to go on to neutral ports in Europe or the Indies. Finally, by about 1806, there simply were no more ports in Western Europe that were independent of France. In 1807, the British Navy blockaded all ports in Europe that refused to fly the British flag. This policy was designed to force neutrals to trade only with Great Britain.

The British persisted in attempts to apprehend deserters from the British navy. British warships stopped and searched American vessels on the seas and removed suspected deserters. The *Chesapeake* incident is an example. In June of 1807, a British warship, the *HMS Leopard* ordered the American frigate, the *Chesapeake* to stand to for boarding. The captain of the *Chesapeake* refused and the *Leopard* fired on the *Chesapeake* after receiving fire the American ship complied. After a brief exchange of fire, in which three American sailors were killed and ten wounded, British officers boarded the *Chesapeake* and impressed four members of her crew. Americans were outraged! For a British naval ship to treat a neutral vessel in this manner was an act of war. To make matters worse, the incident had taken place in or very near American waters off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia. The incident prompted Jefferson to change U.S. policy with respect to Great Britain.

The British policies against trade on the Continent seriously hindered French trade. Napoleon retaliated with a series of policies of his own. In November of 1806, he created the *Berlin Decree* which forbade commerce with the British isles and ordered that all ships coming from England or her colonies should be seized. In the *Milan* decree of 1807, the French declared that all ships that traded with British ports were legitimate prizes of war to French military and privateer vessels. By the end of 1810, French authorities began to confiscate all American ships that entered French or French allied ports.

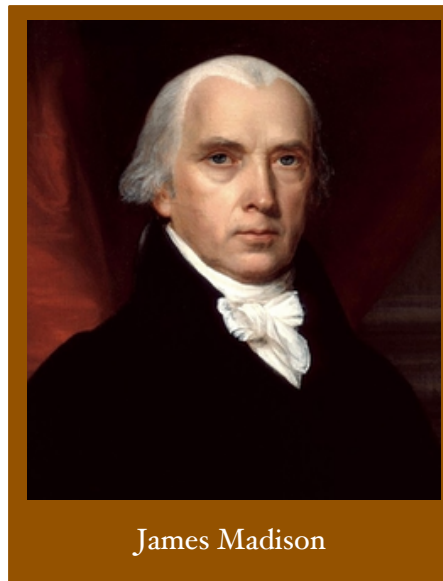
Jefferson felt that the best way to stop this war of policy was to practice “peaceful coercion.” Jefferson was convinced that he could make the European powers honor neutral trade again by

beginning an economic boycott. Congress passed a series of non-importation acts between 1806-1807 that excluded British manufacturers’ goods from American ports. After the *Chesapeake* incident, Congress passed the Embargo Act. This act placed an embargo on all foreign commerce. It remained in effect until 1809. It aroused far more protest from New-England merchants than from French or British commercial interests, however. After the repeal of the Embargo Act, Congress passed the Non-Intercourse with Great Britain and France Act (1809). This act opened up trade with all countries except Great Britain and France. The problem was, however, by 1809, the only nations in Europe that weren’t part of Napoleon’s empire were British allies, and were eager to keep Britain happy. So there wasn’t much of anywhere American trade vessels could go.

In 1809, James Madison succeeded Jefferson to the presidency. Madison hoped that the United States could negotiate its way out of commercial difficulties with the European powers. The British minister at Washington, David Erskine, convinced Madison and his Secretary of State, Robert Smith, that Great Britain would rescind her policies if the United States would reopen trade with Britain. Accordingly, Madison reopened trade with Britain. As it turned out, the British government repudiated Erskine’s agreement and when American ships arrived in British ports, the ships were confiscated and the goods were seized. Madison, humiliated at having been had by Erskine, was forced to restore

the embargo with Britain. All this so-called *Erskine Fiasco* really did was worsen U.S./British relations.

Macon’s Bill No. 2 (1810) - with Madison’s approval, Congress passed a bill submitted by Representative Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina which reopened trade with both France and Great Britain. The bill stated that if either country would cease to violate American neutrality then nonintercourse would be started against the other country. Napoleon reacted by stating that the French would repeal all restrictions against Americans



James Madison

shipping. Napoleon lied. French ships continued to seize U.S. merchant ships; French ports in Europe and the Indies continued to stay closed to American shipping. Nevertheless, perhaps still stinging from the Erskine Fiasco, Madison reacted to the announcement by restoring the boycott against Britain. Madison severed diplomatic relations with Britain altogether in mid-1811.

Ironically. A few months later the British Foreign Secretary announced the immediate repeal of all restrictions on American trade (but not impressment). The announcement came about as the result of pressure on the British government brought by British merchants the merchants were losing money because of the American boycott. But the announcement came too late. On June 1, 1812, Madison asked for a declaration of war against Britain, and he got it on June 18. Thus began the War of 1812.

A Brief Summation of Thomas Jefferson: Overall Jefferson did a pretty incredible job. 1) he reduced the federalist party to ashes, virtually creating a one party nation; 2) during his presidency the size and population doubled (although he is directly responsible for only the former); 3) he dedicated the nation to continental territorial expansion; 4) manufacturing boomed, primarily as a result of the embargo which both created a demand for American made goods and moved investment capital out of international shipping and into domestic industry. 5) he kept the United States out of war; 6) he presided over a period of nationwide prosperity; 7) ironically, he went a long way to expand both the power and the legislative role of the president. Jefferson used party organization and patronage to control Congress. He had a legislative program and he exerted party leadership to push his agenda through. He was the first president to realize that in order to be a national leader he had to be a party leader. He went a long way to develop the presidency into a power in national government. Ironically, the Jefferson presidency was in some ways a victory for Alexander Hamilton's vision of a strong and energetic central government.

Jefferson also helped to make his successor, James Madison, the first wartime president. It often happens that great presidents leave big messes for their successors. So it was with Jefferson. He had avoided a war, but his policies, and subsequent history, made it virtually impossible for Madison to do so. By late 1811, Madison decided that he had to go to war with Great Britain. Tecumseh, the Shawnee Native leader who promoted war against American settlers in Ohio, was thought to be backed by the British. Americans in the West were increasingly an important voice in national politics, and they wanted war. The British still refused to compromise on the most important public opinion issues that created friction between the United States and Great Britain. So Madison asked for war, and promptly plunged us into one of the most boring lecture topics in American history.

The causes of the War of 1812 included impressment, Indian affairs, forts on the Ohio frontier, War Hawks who wanted to use the war as an excuse to annex Canada. There was some opposition, but not much. Federalists said that Madison was on the French payroll. A lot of the reason for the war was a residual revolutionary attitude -- Americans must, and will be independent, never a satellite to any other nation.

As always the U.S. Entered the war unprepared. We had an army of 6,000 soldiers and a navy of 18 war class ships. The British had 250,000 men in arms and 600 ships. Most of our army was on the frontier trying to contain hostile Indian activity. The war would be fought primarily on the East Coast. The best militia units were on the frontier fighting Indians, and were, thus unavailable. The second best was in the Northeast (especially New England), but the Federalist-fomented anti-war movement in New England prevented them from doing anything in the war. The governors of Massachusetts and Connecticut even refused to call up their state militia.

Britain occupied most of Maine, they burned Washington after the brave local militia broke and ran before the first shot was fired. The American defense of the capital collapsed so quickly that British officers who occupied the deserted White House found the president's dinner set on arrival, and managed to eat it for him while it was still warm. After dinner they tried to burn the White House. It got its name from the white wash used to disguise the burn marks. The British Navy successfully blockaded the Eastern Seaboard, and suppressed American trade.

There were a few firsts of the war: It was the first war in which canned goods were used for rations on both sides. An American invented floating anti-ship mines, basically garbage cans filled with black powder. They

were pretty effective until the British started carrying American prisoners of war on their ships in order to stop it.

The war began with wild enthusiasm, until people began to realize that it was real, people were getting killed, and the U.S. wasn't doing very well. Then the war fever soured in a number of areas, especially New England, where it was never really popular anyway. The height of opposition occurred with the Hartford Convention in 1814-15. Angry New England Federalists demanded that their states be let out of the war. They were terminally embarrassed when they made their demands public just before news broke of the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans. They appeared to be demanding that the United States surrender at the moment when we were actually winning. Ironically, we had already won. The battle of New Orleans was fought a few days after the British at Ghent in Belgium signed a peace treaty giving the United States most of what she demanded. The British were not particularly worried about the U.S., but Napoleon had recently broken free and had raised another French war machine. Napoleon was a much more worrisome enemy, and closer to home. So the British were willing to make peace so that their hands were free to fight Napoleon.

Madison always gets less good press than Jefferson. It's probably not very fair. Madison didn't suspend the war. We didn't get much out of it in the short run, but it's the last time we had to fight Britain, and a growing friendship began between the two nations thereafter. The victory was a big morale boost at home, we had established credibility as a world power, and established our right to economic independence. Our trade was never dictated by an outside power again. At the end of the war Britain cut her Indian allies loose. Without British support the Indians were easily smashed by a veteran American army.

The end of the war marks the high-water mark of American nationalism. It is the birth of that period of our history called the "Era of Good Feelings," nearly a decade-long period of one-party rule. It also marks a shift in focus among Americans. Until 1816 we tended to look east to the seaboard where our population was concentrated, where our trade with Europe was. After the war Americans began to look west, and soon so shall we.



At the same time that the newspapers were filled with news of a glorious American victory near New Orleans, news of the Federalist Hartford Petition appeared demanding U.S. surrender. It spelled the end for the Federalists in national politics.

