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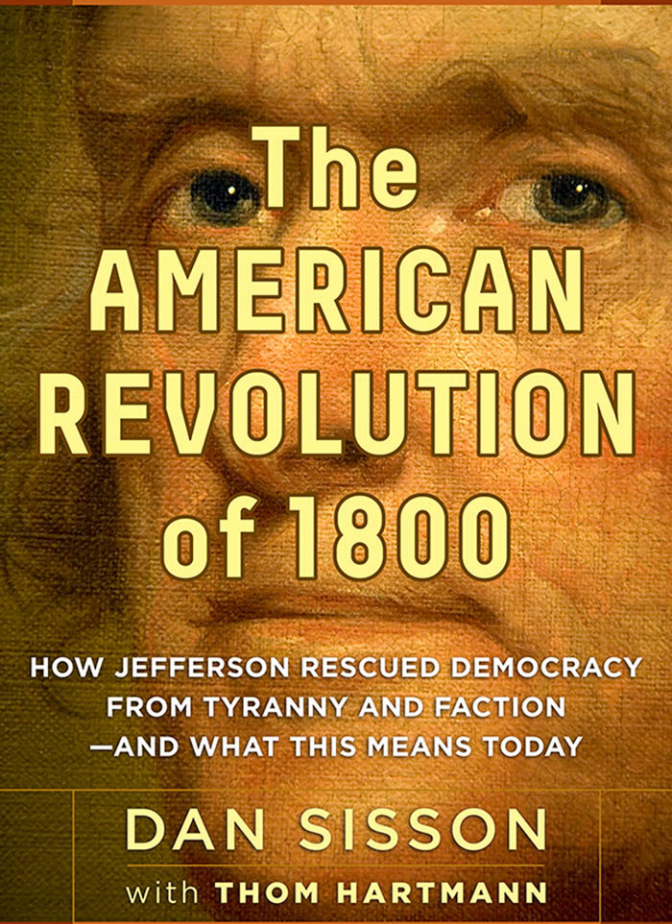

The AMERICAN REVOLUTION of 1800

HOW JEFFERSON RESCUED DEMOCRACY FROM TYRANNY AND FACTION —AND WHAT THIS MEANS TODAY

DAN SISSON
with THOM HARTMANN

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Berrett–Koehler Publishers, Inc.
San Francisco
a BK Currents book

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650
San Francisco, California 94104-2916
Tel: (415) 288-0260, Fax: (415) 362-2512
www.bkconnection.com

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First Edition
Hardcover print edition ISBN 978-1-60994-985-3
PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-986-0
IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-987-7

2014-1

Cover design by Brad Foltz. Cover illustration by Eric Van Den Bruelle/Getty Images.

Interior design and composition by Gary Palmatier, Ideas to Images.

Elizabeth von Radics, copyeditor; Mike Mollett, proofreader; Rachel Rice, indexer.

To **Bernard Bailyn**—
whose insights into our revolutionary heritage have defined my perspective for nearly fifty years. I believe Bailyn's writings are so original and imaginative no one will ever convince me he was not alive and present at the founding—listening, questioning, taking notes, even participating in the thousands of conversations about conspiracy, imperialism, corruption, and, yes, revolution, from 1760 on—when Otis, Adams, Jefferson, Paine, and Madison "began our world anew." My intellectual debt to him is incalculable.

To **William Appleman Williams**—
a dear friend, whose ongoing assessment of how revolutionary America transformed itself from a beacon of hope in the world into an imperial state is unmatched in modern American scholarship. We spent many days together, sitting on the beach near Waldport on the Oregon coast, leaning against an uprooted Douglas fir, sipping "clarity," and considering every angle of Jefferson's and Madison's theories about how and why and when and where and to what degree we were a nation dedicated to liberty. In every instance Bill never lost sight of the American idea, and at the end he always reaffirmed the Revolution of 1800. Moreover he did so with elegance, a touch of irony, and, above all, a marvelous sense of humor.

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Introduction

It is rare when a book about our early republic is relevant forty years after it was originally published. It is rarer still when that book provides insight into national problems we refuse to solve two centuries later.

You are therefore holding in your hands (or reading on your pad or computer) one of the most important books you will ever encounter. Here is why: Unlike other histories of this era, this book is written from a revolutionary perspective much like Jefferson's generation viewed the world.

The American Revolution of 1800 was not just about an election. It was about a life-and-death struggle for power between democratic-republican principles and oligarchic-plutocratic values based on corruption. In short, this book, by implication, is about the identical crisis America faces today.

The author's unique analysis is based on the idea of faction controlling party and how both undermine constitutional government. In an age where modern parties and the factions that control them have paralyzed our government, this book validates the politics of the Founders.

In still another contribution, the book demonstrates how preserving revolutionary ideas within our culture depends on understanding the classical tradition. The ability to recognize a demagogue is rooted deeply in the role Caesar played in destroying the republic of ancient Rome. That fear of a Caesar inspired Jefferson and others to organize citizens against the Federalists, thereby completely contradicting the political rules of their time.

The book, above all, presents a profoundly positive view of Jefferson and his creativity in the midst of crisis. It celebrates his gift—twenty-four years after he wrote the Declaration of Independence—and proves he never abandoned his principles or his revolutionary vision for America's future.

Ironically, it has become a cliché in political and economic circles that while we love Thomas Jefferson, we live in a country largely run by Alexander Hamilton's policies and John Adams's politics.

This may have been more true of the roughly two hundred years before the contemporary "free-trade" era, beginning in the 1970s under Richard Nixon and exploding in the mid-1990s, when Bill Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. (Alexander Hamilton must be rolling over in his grave.) Nevertheless we have become a mercantilist nation dominated by banks and big industries, as Hamilton envisioned.

It is true that there were huge differences between Hamilton and Jefferson, particularly in their visions for the future of America and its economy, and those divisions tend to dominate interpretations of our political discussion when we reference the era of our first few presidents.

But a much larger and more dramatic battle of worldviews played out in the late 1790s between President John Adams and Vice President Thomas Jefferson, leading directly to what is arguably the most transformational presidential election in American history: the election of 1800.

In other books and places, both Dan Sisson and I have written at some length about the differences between these two men and their respective visions of America. Adams relished throwing newspaper editors in prison and demanded that when he and his wife visited a town the local militia come out to fire their cannons in salute of him and shout: "God save President Adams!"

Jefferson was so horrified by Adams's Alien and Sedition Acts that he left town the day they were signed into law, and, as president, often wore simple homespun garments. He was known to answer the front door of the White House in his bathrobe, and more than one visitor mistook him for a servant. As president, Jefferson literally acted out his egalitarian vision of America.

In my book *The Crash of 2016: The Plot to Destroy America—and What We Can Do to Stop It,* I described Jefferson's concern about aristocracy in American politics. On October 28, 1813, in a letter to his old rival John Adams, Jefferson commented on his distrust of America's growing wealthy elite—naming in particular the Senate, which was not democratically elected by the people.

Referring to the "cabal in the Senate of the United States," Jefferson wrote, "You [John Adams] think it best to put the Pseudo-aristoi into a separate chamber of legislation [the Senate], where they may be hindered from doing mischief by their coordinate branches, and where, also, they may be a protection to wealth against the agrarian and plundering enterprises of the majority of the people."[1]

Then Jefferson countered in the letter, writing, "I [do not] believe them [the Senate] necessary to protect the wealthy; because enough of these will find their way into every branch of the legislation, to protect themselves."

Instead, Jefferson, wrote, "I think the best remedy is exactly that provided by all our constitutions, to leave to the citizens the free election… In general they will elect the really good and wise. In some instances, wealth may corrupt, and birth blind them; but not in sufficient degree to endanger the society."

And in a final warning about the largely Federalist "cabal in the Senate," Jefferson wrote, "The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its ascendancy.…I think that to give them power in order to prevent them from doing mischief, is arming them for it, and increasing instead of remedying the evil."

In a 1786 letter to George Washington, Jefferson gave his most explicit warning about this threat of a military allied with a plutocracy within and advocated for unwavering vigilance against it: "Tho' the day may be at some distance, beyond the reach of our lives perhaps, yet it will certainly come," he wrote, "when, a single fibre left of this institution, will produce an hereditary aristocracy which will change the form of our governments from the best to the worst in the world."[2]

He added, "I shall think little [of the] longevity [of our nation] unless this germ of destruction be taken out." It was not until 1913 that Americans became so disgusted by politicians dancing to the tune of state-level rich people essentially "buying" Senate appointments that the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed to provide for the direct election of senators by the people themselves. More recently, the Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* decisions have reinstated the ability of wealthy and powerful people to buy members of Congress and, by implication, our government.

In broad strokes these are the ideas that should occupy most political histories published these days—and especially any discussions about the era around the election and the Revolution of 1800. Unfortunately, the two most popular biographies of Adams and Jefferson published in the past fourteen years do not mention Jefferson's Revolution of 1800—not even once! Thus after forty years, the story of the final completion of the American Revolution, and by Jefferson's own words one of his chief contributions to America and the world, remains a little-known story.

The Real Concerns of the Founders

While it is true that many modern historians mean well, all too many have missed or failed to focus on the most important differences and similarities between that time and now.

If Jefferson, or even Hamilton or Adams, were to witness the political gridlock extant in today's state and national capitols, they would be horrified. James Madison, perhaps, would be the most outraged, as he left us such an eloquent warning about the politics of faction in his Federalist No. 10. It opens with the following two sentences: "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction. The friend of popular governments never finds himself so much alarmed for their character and fate, as when he contemplates their propensity to this dangerous vice."

But what is "faction"?

In our modern era, the word *faction* is often dismissed as an anachronism or simply interpreted to mean a "political party." But James

Madison, the Framer of our Constitution, and his contemporaries understood well the distinction between factions and political parties. And with that understanding, they would be shocked by how differently contemporary politics are interpreted today from similar events experienced by our Founders.

During that period the Framers saw faction *and* party paralyzing and then destroying governments—especially republics throughout history. As a consequence Jefferson suggested that "every generation" should have its own smaller form of revolution, reconfiguring the nation and its government to adapt to changing needs and changing times.

Jefferson wrote to his protégé, James Madison, the year the Constitution was ratified and our modern nation birthed: "The question, whether one generation of men has a right to bind another…is a question of such consequences as not only to merit decision, but place also among the fundamental principles of every government."[3]

No single generation, he wrote, has the right to saddle the next with a devastated commons [and/or environment], and it should be obvious "that no such obligation can be transmitted" from generation to generation.

Laying out his thinking on the issue, Jefferson continued: "I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self evident, that the earth belongs in usufruct [common ownership] to the living; that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it. The portion occupied by any individual ceases to be his when himself ceases to be, and reverts to the society."

Jefferson's logic that no person or generation should be able to bind the next one was one of his core beliefs throughout his life. He added, "For if he could, he might during his own life, eat up the usufruct [commons] of the lands for several generations to come, and then the lands would belong to the dead, and not to the living, which is the reverse of our principle."

They Were Revolutionaries!

But what was most revolutionary about Jefferson's thinking on this was the idea of *generational revolutions*—that the nation itself must fundamentally change roughly once every biological or epochal generation—and even that would not prevent larger periodic political transformations of the nation.

These were, he believed, not just ideals but a basic force of nature. He wrote,

> On similar ground it may be proved, that no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation: they may manage it, then, and what proceeds from it, as they please, during their usufruct [shared ownership].
>
> They are masters, too, of their own persons, and consequently may govern them as they please. But persons and property make the sum of the objects of government. The constitution and the laws of their predecessors are extinguished then, in their natural course, with those whose will gave them being.

Jefferson believed that even the laws enshrined in our Constitution came with a time limit and that once the generation that wrote those laws passed on out of power, those laws must be rewritten by the new generation or at least every second generation: "Every constitution, then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of thirty-four years," Jefferson wrote. "If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force, and not of right. It may be said, that the succeeding generation exercising, in fact, the power of repeal, this leaves them as free as if the constitution or law had been expressly limited to thirty-four years only."

A revolution every twenty to thirty-four years? Could Jefferson have actually been proposing—or predicting—that?

In fact, yes.

And this is where Dan Sisson does such a brilliant job of showing how that old revolutionary, Thomas Jefferson—the guy who, as a young man in his thirties, had put pen to paper and triggered the American Revolution—fomented, as that much older and wiser man, a *second* American revolution a generation after the War of Independence.

This "second American revolution" was carried out in 1800, when Jefferson openly challenged the conservative, Federalist direction in which John Adams and his cronies had been leading America. Jefferson, then Adams's vice president, decided to fight Adams for the presidency. It was a brutal and hard-fought battle, but ultimately Jefferson won.

His victory fundamentally transformed America, and if we hope to maintain any fidelity to our founding principles, to American history, and to the ideals of a constitutionally limited democratic republic, it is essential that we understand what led up to the Revolution of 1800, how it played out, and how it left this country permanently changed.

Read on—and prepare to have your view of America altered forever.

Thom Hartmann
Washington, DC

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The Idea of a Non-party State

'For it is the nature and intention of a constitution to prevent governing by party.

—Thomas Paine, 1795

So often in the past century, the political history of America reveals a paralysis in the highest levels of our government. Legislation fails to pass, budgets are voted down, compromise seems impossible, and the problems of the nation are neither addressed nor solved. There have been brief periods, of course, when this was not the case: the New Deal is usually held up as an example of a time when American politicians came together to fundamentally transform the nature and the political landscape of our country. But in the generations since then, more often than not we have seen gridlock rather than collaboration.

"That's the way it should be!" says conventional wisdom. "The Founders of our country, the men who wrote the Constitution, wanted there to be a 'loyal opposition' to serve as a 'balance' against excessive power in the hands of any one political party or even a president."

Not only is this *not* true but this pervasive myth has done considerable harm to our nation—and continues to do so.

The "Loyal Opposition"

The concept of a "loyal party opposition" has grown in the literature of the professional historians until it has assumed the stature of our most fundamental law. Not only historians but political scientists and everyone else who has sought to explain the stability of the American governmental

system have looked to the origin of parties for the confirmation of our genius. The two-party system was the dominating idea in history and political science in the twentieth century. Historians and political scientists were so mesmerized by it that they, like English Whig historians, went back and reread all of American history (as well as British history) to demonstrate the continuity of the twentieth-century party system with the past. When they did so, the Revolution of 1800 dissolved. It had to.

This chapter is an attempt to redress that historical perspective and to deal with the political structure of the eighteenth century as a man of the times saw it. I am trying to make a case for using the contemporary lens of faction and of revolution as opposed to emphasizing the later emergence of political parties.

Moreover, by examining the period from a classical revolutionary perspective, it is possible to state several conditions not generally recognized.

- First, the men in power from 1790 to 1801 did not even remotely conceive of a modern two-party system. In fact, the opposite is true. They wished to consolidate and perpetuate a one-party system of politics in America and were successful in their lifetime.
- Second, their view of political administration was a classic political view, necessitating only one faction in power and abhorring the existence of an "opposition."
- Third, because of this view it was necessary for those who were out of power to foment revolution, based on the classical political theory of "electoral Caesarism,"[1] simply to have access to or gain power. This last point will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

To develop these themes, it is necessary to realize that the eighteenth century had its own historical perspective. As one historian put it, "The most fruitful point of departure in studying their careers as statesmen is acceptance of the fact that all questions they asked and all the answers they found to them were eighteenth-century questions and answers that their intensive reading had already blocked out into a systematic pattern."[2]

These were not twenty-first-century concepts of political organization. Any attempt, therefore, to understand that "pattern," their political ideology, must examine the assumptions on which their political logic rested.

Nowhere is this truer than where the concepts *faction* and *party* are concerned. The former term belongs to the period generally up to Washington's Farewell Address, where the warnings against "factions" are often considered naïve. The latter term (*party*) is more confusing. It can be synonymous with faction, but it also is a term of opprobrium. It should not be confused with the establishment of political parties as we know them today.

Thus, for clarity's sake, and rather than discuss misconceptions of the terms *party* and *faction* by authors of secondary works in American history, it best suits our purpose to establish a working definition of the terms for an eighteenth-century politician.[3]

Common definitions before the nineteenth century treated the terms similarly, beginning in the sixteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives a reference to *party* in 1535 as "inclined to form parties or to act for party purposes; seditious." *Faction* was described as "violent." *Sedition* held a connotation of insurrection and treason against the state, both revolutionary kinds of activity. Lord Bolingbroke (Henry St. John) referred to faction as that which "hath no regard to National Interest."[4]

One dictionary used by contemporaries, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary,* explained that *party* and *faction* were synonymous.[5] Samuel Johnson in his dictionary suggested two meanings that essentially merged in the examples he cited. Giving similar descriptions of the two terms, he said *faction* was "a party in a state" and also "tumult, discord and dissension."[6]

Violence and dissension were common to both terms. It remained for Thomas Hobbes, however, to give the classic revolutionary description to *faction,* common from Aristotle's time to Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities.* He said *faction* "is as it were a city within a city."[7]

This was indeed recognition that potential revolutionary activity was associated with the term, for it raised the specter of the "two-city" theory of revolution.

These definitions perhaps sum up, better than any other, the eighteenth century's understanding of both terms. Seditious, revolutionary, "always with an opprobrious sense, conveying the imputation of selfish or mischievous ends or turbulent or unscrupulous methods."[8]

Distinctions between the words *party* and *faction* were slight, if made at all. Looking upon *party* as both a form of political organization and as an idea of violence, "most American writers seemed to have assimilated these two senses of the word to each other."[9]

Noah Webster throws an additional light on the term *party* if for no other reason than because he was an ardent foe of Jefferson. His original edition defined *faction* in a way that touched on all that we have discussed—including the importance of revolution.

Webster said *faction* is: "A party, in political society, combined or acting in union, in opposition to the prince, government or state; usually applied to a minority, but it may be applied to a majority. Sometimes a state is divided into factions nearly equal. Rome was always disturbed by factions. Republics are proverbial for factions, and factions in monarchies have often effected *revolutions.*"[10]

Separating Out Faction from Party

The terms *faction* and *party,* though appearing synonymous to the average eighteenth-century American, were nevertheless partially separable. Not only did they connote violence, turbulence, and a revolutionary threat against the state—its administration and national interest—they also implied a relationship to one another based on the complexity of human nature and its involvement with politics.

Perhaps it is best said by an author read by virtually every educated member of the revolutionary generation. Lord Bolingbroke wrote,

> It is far from being an easy matter to state to you, fairly and clearly, what the words party and faction really mean…
>
> A Party then is, as I take it, a set of men connected together, in virtue of their having, or, which in this case is the same thing, pretending to have the same *private* opinion with respect to *public* concerns; and while this is confined to sentiment or discourse, without interfering with the management of affairs, I think it wears properly that

> denomination; but when it proceeds further, and influences men's conduct, in any considerable degree, it becomes *Faction*.
>
> In all such cases there are revealed *reasons,* and a reserved *Motive.* By revealed reasons, I mean a set of plausible doctrines, which may be stiled the *creed* of the party; but the reserved motive belongs to *Faction* only, and is the THIRST OF POWER.
>
> The creeds of parties vary like those of sects; but all Factions have the same motive, which never implies more or less than a *lust of dominion,* though they may be, and generally are, covered with the specious pretenses of *self-denial,* and that vehemence referred to *zeal* for the public, which flows in fact from Avarice, Self-Interest, Resentment and other *private views.*[11]

Bolingbroke, who had spent most of his political life opposing the administration of Robert Walpole, knew whereof he spoke. Acquainted with the motives of nearly all who objected to the Walpolean system, he could easily discern his colleagues' thirst for power no matter how they clothed it with patriotic disguises.

His distinction between *party* and *faction* looms important in the politics of the early republic if merely for the reason that most American statesmen complained about party and faction on the same grounds.

Two other observations by Bolingbroke about "motives" common to both terms deserve comment.

First, members of parties or factions, despite their "revealed" motives, were men obsessed with power and a "lust for dominion." It follows then that these same men, given and perhaps even creating the opportunity, are capable of reaching for power through seditious means. This would be especially true if the administration in power considered their opposition illegal.

Second, if parties *become* factions when their behavior affects the public realm, it is important to keep this distinction in mind. For one characteristic of eighteenth-century statesmen, little understood by twenty-first-century writers, is the absolute vehemence with which they denounced party and faction.

The reasons lay in their extreme fear and anxiety of what occurred once parties became factions and began to influence public opinion.

The results were almost guaranteed: disruption of the public realm. This distinction is important because it means that historians have misunderstood the terms *party* and *faction* by imputing public action only to the former. Nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century historians have brushed this distinction aside; and, in fact, they have *reversed* the distinction between party and faction.

David Hume's *The History of England,* widely read in the colonies before, but even more after, the American Revolution, described the idea of faction in this manner: "Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance to each other."

"Founders of…factions," he wrote, should be "detested and hated."[12]

Edmund Burke, who enjoyed immense popularity among Americans, spoke of party in 1770. His "Thoughts on the cause of the Present Discontents" laid the source of England's troubles at the door of party and its relationship to the court. Burke went beyond theory to include the actual consequences of party practice:

> The [party] machinery of this system is perplexed in its movements, and false in its principle. It is formed on a supposition that the King is something external to his government; and that he may be honoured and aggrandized, even by its debility and disgrace. The [court as well as party] plan proceeds expressly on the idea of enfeebling the regular executory power. It proceeds on the idea of weakening the State in order to strengthen the Court. The scheme depending entirely on distrust, on disconnection, on mutability by principle, on systematic weakness in every particular member; it is impossible that the total result should be substantial strength of any kind.[13]

In yet another famous remark, this time on the nature of a representative, Burke indicated a total unwillingness to sacrifice his views to those of any party. Here Burke presents the theory behind his observations on practical instruction from either his district or his party: "His [the representative's] unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not sacrifice to you, to any man, or any set of men living.…But government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, and not of inclination; and what sort of reason is that, in which

determination precedes the discussion; in which one set of men deliberate, and another decide; and where those who form the conclusions are perhaps three hundred miles from those who hear the arguments?"[14]

A more devastating intellectual critique of the function of party could hardly be made. Refusing to become the creature of party, stating that the very rationale of party—with its willingness to dispense with deliberation and dialectical reason—contradicted the basic reason for government, Burke had made his decision on party.

The terms *party* and *faction* had such a long history that they were widely assumed by American statesmen to be part of human nature. This at least was the approach taken by the two men most responsible for establishing the theoretical guidelines of the early republic. James Madison and Alexander Hamilton attempted to analyze the terms in light of their influence on the political system. Their *Federalist* essays presented an analysis of party and faction that is more than consistent with the history of the terms we have reviewed.

Madison referred to "the violence of faction" as a "dangerous vice" characteristic of free governments.

"By a faction," he says, "I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, *adverse* to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."

He continued, "The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere."

Thus party, as Madison understood it, was not something of recent origin. Parties have been around since the beginning of man. And, he noted, "the *most numerous party, or in other words, the most powerful faction* must be expected to prevail."

He ends his analysis on this note: "To secure the public good and provide rights against the danger of such a faction…is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed."[15]

Thus Madison captured the essence of the terms as they were understood by his contemporaries: that faction and party were inescapably

rooted in human nature and produced violence, zeal, animosity, oppression, and danger—all *adverse* to the interests of the community.

He added: "Men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs may, by intrigue, by corruption, or by other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people."[16]

His conclusion is that factions must be broken and controlled. They are, at all costs, not to be legitimately recognized or encouraged.

Madison was not alone in his aversion to party and faction.

Hamilton Agrees with Madison: Parties Are Evil

Alexander Hamilton too warns the reader: "Ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives not more laudable than these" were typical of that "intolerant spirit which has, at all times, characterized political parties."[17]

Registering his disgust for faction, Hamilton continued, "It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the…rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy."[18]

Hamilton, we might note, connects ancient history with modern America. "The tempestuous situation," he writes, "from which Massachusetts has scarcely emerged [Shays's Rebellion], evinces that dangers of this kind are *not merely speculative.* Who can determine what might have been the issue of her late convulsions, if the malcontents had been headed by a Caesar or a Cromwell?"[19]

In Federalist No. 77, he describes the influence of faction and party intrigue, connections, and "personal influence" in government in a way that was characteristic of the terms from classical times through the age of Robert Walpole: "Every mere council of appointment, however constituted, will be a conclave, in which cabal and intrigue will have their full scope.…And as each member will have his friends and connections to provide for, the desire of mutual gratification will beget a scandalous bartering of votes and bargaining for places."[20]

What is worth noting here is not only Hamilton's description of the influence of party and faction upon an administration but his general

description of politics. He is describing the politics of England for the past century and a half.

Moreover he understood that encouraging party and faction, at the theoretical as well as the practical level, guaranteed that the emergent system of American politics would be propelled into the futile violence and dissension that had plagued every republic in history.

Throughout the remainder of his political career, Hamilton reserved a special contempt for parties. At various times he caricatured them as "the petulance of party," "the rage of party spirit," "sedition and party rage," the "unaccommodating spirit of party," the "delirium of party," the "baneful spirit of party," and the "heats of party." One of Hamilton's biographers notes that "To the end of his life he refused to believe that the party he led was a party at all. It was, rather, a kind of *ad hoc* committee of correspondence of men with a large view of America's destiny."[21]

They Were All against Parties

Contrary to some historians' opinions, the consistency with which these statesmen held their views against faction and party in every phase of their political careers is indicative of a lifelong attachment to the antiparty cause. Moreover they were willing to write down their biases in theoretical terms, explaining in extreme detail the consequences of party activity.[22]

Indeed it is striking the quality of the men who expressed their opinions against party. They were the brightest, most reflective, often the wittiest, and easily the most philosophical men of their time. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, Sam Adams, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, Patrick Henry, Albert Gallatin, John Jay, Thomas Paine, John Taylor of Caroline, John Quincy Adams, Benjamin Rush, Fisher Ames—the list could go on, reading like a Who's Who of the 1790s.

Fisher Ames wrote,

> *Faction* is an adherence to interests foreign to the interests of the state; there is such a faction among us devoted to France.…There is some hope of reclaiming a very few of them; but if they travel far on the party road, or associate long with the desperados in the van, who explore the thorny and crooked by-ways, they will not remain honest. They will be corrupted, and so deeply, that, in every approach

> towards civil war and revolution, the dupes, who sincerely believe the whole creed of their *party,* will be found to go the farthest.[23]

Ames, writing in 1800, accepted the same definitions of the terms as his contemporaries. And like them he makes a connection among faction, party, and the idea of revolution. Ames also dealt with the origins and causes of party and faction exactly as did Madison and Hamilton. He asks, "Is it in the nature of free governments to exist without parties? Such a thing has never yet been and probably will never be. Is it in the nature of party to exist without passion? Or of passion to acquiesce, when it meets with opposers and obstacles? No.…Party moderation is children's talk. Who has ever seen faction *calmly* in a rage? Who will expect to see that carnivorous monster quietly submit to eat grass?"[24]

Ames's prose may seem lurid to us now, but to his contemporaries it was commonplace. The consequences of unbridled faction and party activity meant revolution, civil war, violence, and perhaps the most feared development of all: a change in the form of government.

John Jay, writing to Jefferson in 1786, observed, "If faction should long bear down law and government, tyranny may raise its head, or the more sober part of the people may even think of a King."[25] It was a remark that left an indelible impression on his correspondent and was to become the most crucial issue of the next fifteen years.

Parties Destroy Liberty

Tom Paine was another writer who considered party an evil that must be kept within traditional bounds.

Writing in 1795, he states, "For it is the *nature and intention of a constitution to prevent governing* by *party,* by establishing a common principle that shall limit and control the power and the impulse of party, and that says to all parties, *thus far shalt thou go and no further.* But in the absence of a constitution, men look entirely to party; and instead of principle governing party, party governs principle."[26]

Paine placed the constitution as a barrier between the violence of party and the principles of republican government. He also noted in the absence of an effective constitution, even when rulers adhered to the

letter and the spirit of the constitution, the spirit of party will destroy those principles. This is an important observation, as it demonstrates the reasoning that Paine, as well as most of his colleagues, agreed on: party, if allowed to develop, would inevitably destroy the constitution, the principles of republican government, and the form of the republic itself.

This theme is important because it constitutes the main thrust of Jefferson's intriguing statement: "The Revolution of 1800…was as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form."[27] The reader will do well to keep Paine's construction in mind as he ponders the ideas of faction and revolution.

The One-Party State

James Monroe, one of Jefferson's closest confidants, urged Jefferson in 1801 to formally create a one-party state. He wrote, "This public expects some tone to be given your Administration immediately. There is a conflict of principle, and either democracy or royalty must prevail. The opposing parties can never be united…because their views are as opposite as light and darkness."[28] Monroe, who took an unusually hard line, believed the opposition could not be reconciled; therefore it must be controlled.

Another revolutionary figure, a Virginian, but one who could scarcely be considered a confidant of Jefferson's, also shared a horror of faction and party. Writing to Jefferson in 1799, anticipating the crisis of the approaching revolution of 1800, Patrick Henry declared, "United we stand, divided we fall. Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs…not exhaust it in civil commotion and intestine wars."[29]

The clearest statement on the theory of the one- or non-party state comes from a man whom everyone admired—George Washington. Father figure, warrior, model of virtue, a monument in terms of his symbolic value to the country, he was also considered a repository of wisdom and common sense. Therefore his specific warnings against party and faction in his Farewell Address merit special attention. Not only are they consistent with the definitions stated thus far, they were written in the context of a dissertation on the principles of constitutionalism and free government.

Washington notes,

> The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government. But the constitution which at any time exists till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.
>
> All obstructions to the execution of the laws, all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize *faction;* to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a *party,* often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community, and, according to the alternate triumphs of different *parties,* to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-concerted and incongruous projects of *faction*…
>
> [Faction and party] are likely in the course of time and things to become potent engines by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people, and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.[30]

Washington's exposition needs little commentary. Suffice it to say he sees parties as natural to society, realizes they cannot be destroyed, and urges his countrymen to control them. In all of this, he is in complete agreement with the best minds of his time.

While we have examined in detail the thoughts on party and faction expressed by leading statesmen of the period, we have reserved for the end of our review the comments of two thinkers and actors during the 1790s: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Adams, throughout his long career, had written and spoken out against the influence of faction and party. As early as 1780, he wrote two truly prophetic sentences, as strong an indictment of party as anyone

could possibly write: "There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This in my humble apprehension is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our constitution."[31]

Once Adams had reached the pinnacle of his own power, he raised the issue in his Inaugural Address, saying we must "preserv[e] our Constitution from its natural enemies, the spirit of sophistry, the spirit of party…[and] the profligacy of corruption."[32]

In another prophetic line, his address dealt with the relation between party and elections. He said, "We should be unfaithful to ourselves if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties if anything partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous, and independent elections. If an election is to be determined by a majority of a single vote, and that can be procured by a party through artifice or corruption, the Government may be the choice of a party for its own ends, not of the nation for the national good."

In correspondence with Jefferson, Adams said, "Every one of these Parties [monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical], when possessed of power, or when they have been Undermost, and Struggling to get Uppermost, has been equally prone to every Species of Fraud and Violence and Usurpation."[33]

While Jefferson agreed with every line of his friend's complaints, he probably would not have expressed himself so pungently. But beginning in 1789, he left a trail of evidence against party and faction that, over the years, adds up to the most severe indictment by anyone against the role they played. Jefferson characteristically began his onslaught by casting his opposition in philosophical and moral terms. Writing to a friend who attempted to sound him out as to whether he was a party member, Jefferson advised him: "I am not a Federalist, because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever, in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else, where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all."[34]

In 1798 Jefferson wrote John Taylor of Caroline an analysis of party:

> Be this as it may, in every free and deliberating society, there must, from the nature of man, be opposite parties, and violent dissensions and discords; and one of these, for the most part, must prevail over the other for a longer or shorter time. Perhaps this party division is necessary to induce each to watch and relate to the people the proceedings of the other. But if on a temporary superiority of the one party, the other is to resort to a scission of the Union, no federal government can exist.[35]

Here is no categorical statement of an endorsement of party. For Jefferson being involved in politics was a matter of principle, above both party and faction.

Jefferson and the One Party State

This concern about principles, strangely enough, is never connected with Jefferson's first Inaugural Address. And it is that address, conspicuous by its absence in the works of those who claim Jefferson was establishing the first modern political party, that brings together his philosophy of government without party rule. On the eve of his triumph, Jefferson could afford, indeed he needed, to be conciliatory by making a plea for harmony and unity in his new administration. Those who remain in "opposition," he says, will stand as "monuments," but their opposition, it is important to notice, is equated with civil war, violence, and changing the form of government:

> Let us then, fellow-citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things.…During the throes and convulsions of the ancient world, during the agonizing spasms of infuriated man, seeking through blood and slaughter his long-lost liberty, it was not wonderful that the agitation of the billows should reach even this distant and peaceful shore; that this should be more felt and feared by some and less by others, and should divide opinions as to measures of safety. But 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. If there be any among us who wish to dissolve this Union

> or to change the republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments."[36]

Jefferson's comment "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" is an appeal to every citizen to forsake party and return to the original principles of the American Revolution, the Constitution, and the republic—principles which, as Jefferson viewed them, rise above party and are the common property of everyone. Years later Jefferson would recollect the "sad realities" of the years before his successful drive for the presidency and remark, "I fondly hope we may now truly say, 'we are all republicans, all federalists,' and that the motto of the standard to which our country will forever rally, will be, 'federal union, and republican government.'"[37]

This then appears to be the true meaning of Jefferson's oft-quoted statement. What he expected was not the continuation of the Federalist party in opposition but the recognition by those Federalists that they had a dual responsibility to the government: to uphold the principles of federalism (the division of the Union's power into state and national jurisdictions) and the principles of republicanism (guaranteeing the people's right to self-government through the representative system). This was a central theme of his revolution: the renewal of a decentralizing process that had begun with the American Revolution. Nearing the end of his address, Jefferson makes an explicit connection between the principles of the American Revolution and those of his republican victory. In Jefferson's mind there was no difference:

> These principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety.[38]

After Jefferson came into power in 1801, he wrote to a friend, confirming his long-held antiparty bias: "I learn from all quarters that my inaugural Address is considered as holding out a ground for conciliation

and union....I was always satisfied that the great body of those called Federalists were real Republicans as well as federalists."[39]

A dozen years later, Jefferson placed his views in a philosophical and historical perspective:

> To me then it appears that there have been differences of opinion, and party differences, from the first establishment of governments, to the present day; and on the same question which now divides our country; that these will continue thro' all future time: that everyone takes his side in favor of the many, or of the few, according to his constitution, and the circumstances in which he is placed: that opinions, which are equally honest on both sides, should not affect personal esteem, or social intercourse: that as we judge between the Claudii and the Gracchi…of past ages, so, of those among us… the next generations will judge, favorably or unfavorably.[40]

Jefferson's letter might have been written for posterity, as it places considerable confidence in the judgment of future generations. He believes, of course, that history will vindicate the stand he and Adams took on party. We might also note the historical perspective that Jefferson reveals. The Gracchi brothers, who, two thousand years before, had dealt with party agitations of a similar nature, had, according to their constitutions, taken the side of the people. Jefferson, it seems, identified with them and not with Appius Claudius Caecus, one of the despotic emperors in Roman history. This identification was "natural," as the Gracchi had provided the model for Jefferson's democratic Revolution of 1800.

Jefferson's final and complete statement on party was made to the Marquis de La Fayette in 1817. Relating the facts of the aftermath of the War of 1812, Jefferson told his friend that the "the best effect has been *the complete suppression of party.*"

The election of James Monroe was the final triumph against party: "Four and twenty years, which he will accomplish, of administration in *republican forms and principles,* will so consecrate them in the eyes of the people as to secure them against the danger of change."[41]

Indeed, when Tom Paine wrote, "It is the nature and intention of a constitution to prevent governing by party," he summarized the theory of an age.

The final observation is one that links the concern over party violence with the most important argument of all. As Jefferson framed the issue, it came down to a choice between "kingly government" or the principles of the American Revolution. It was a centuries-old battle in which everyone made their natural choice. Indeed he saw his and his contemporaries' efforts to construct a non-party state contained within a single ancient framework: the struggle of liberty against despotism.

And that, after all, is the story of revolution throughout history.

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2 The Idea of Revolution

'But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people…This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.

—John Adams to Hezekiah Niles
February 13, 1813

'The revolution of 1800…was as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form.

—Thomas Jefferson to Spencer Roane
September 6, 1819

While it is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate the continuity of revolutionary ideas from the 1760s through the 1790s, I intend to analyze the idea of revolution during the period after the Constitutional Convention and refer to the period before 1787 only when necessary. Anyone who has read Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* will realize that to begin my narration in the 1760s would be mere repetition. Indeed those who are revolutionary "quick-witted" will have already noted, by their perusal of the table of contents, my indebtedness to Bailyn's masterful work.

I intend to establish an ideological framework for revolution as it developed during the decade after the Constitution. From that perspective this chapter will deal with revolution as a complicated idea, what its

components were, and how it remained, at least in a definitional sense, a constant force in the minds of the revolutionary generation.

The most logical starting point, one used by Bailyn, is John Adams's oft-quoted remark on the American Revolution written fifty-five years after he believed it had begun. I begin with Adams's query because it throws into sharp relief, perhaps more succinctly than any other in eighteenth-century America, the most important elements regarding the nature of revolution.

It was characteristic of Adams to raise important questions like this—and fortunate for us that he did so with Thomas Jefferson—because it provoked a lengthy as well as an intriguing discussion between the two on the idea of revolution. They had both been pondering the American Revolution for years, writing back and forth, assessing the importance of that great event in their own lives and observing the success and the failure of all the revolutions that had taken place since then.[1]

Revolution Is in the Mind

Adams always worried that his ideas were "peculiar, perhaps even singular." And often, as befits an irascible individual, they were. But when Adams asked Jefferson, "What do we mean by the [American] Revolution?" he was not being stubborn or peculiar. He was seeking clarification of the most significant event of their lives and the most complex political phenomenon known to man. Adams, aware that limitations had already been placed on understanding that revolution, that the secrecy of the major decisions had made it impossible to discern the truth, that adequate histories were not being written, even in his own lifetime,[2] must have had posterity in mind when he addressed Jefferson:

> What do we mean by the Revolution? The War? That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an Effect and Consequence of it. The Revolution was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington. The Records of thirteen Legislatures, the Pamp[h]lets, Newspapers in all the Colonies, ought [to] be consulted, during the Period, to ascertain the Steps by which the public Opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the

> authority of Parliament over the Colonies. The Congress of 1774, resembled in some respects, tho' I hope not in many, the Counsell of Nice in Ecclesiastical History. It assembled the Priests from the East and the West, the North and the South, who compared Notes, engaged in discussion and debates and formed Results by one Vote and by two Votes, which went out to the world as unanimous.[3]

Adams stated explicitly that revolution was separate from war. Moreover, he believed that revolution had occurred over a long span of time and that not one drop of blood had been shed.

Revolution, then, had everything to do with ideas and opinions and less to do with battlefield confrontations. In his view the changing of ideas and opinions through the then-known media—newspapers, pamphlets, and legal records—was the real revolution. What Adams was also describing was a complete change of people's minds regarding the principles of their constitution (i.e., between their rights and the authority of Parliament).

Indeed, if one were to use the eighteenth-century definition of the term *revolution* and compare it with Adams's description, the meanings would be identical. In the Enlightenment all revolutions, whether political or mechanical in nature, were referred to in terms of the earth revolving around the sun, the full circle, and completion of a cycle.

And this was precisely what the American Revolution had been: the cyclical turning back to an original British constitution at the time of the Glorious Revolution.

Adams, far from being "singular," was supported by many of his generation in a general understanding of the term. For most of them, *revolution* also referred to the action of turning over an idea in the mind: reflection and consideration. Nathan Bailey described *revolution* as "the turning round, or motion of any body, till it returns to the same place that it was before," "a rolling back or change in government."[4]

Noah Webster gave several meanings to *revolution* that had a common theme: all dealt with changes in the principles of a constitution. Webster viewed revolution thusly: "In politics, a material change or entire change in the constitution of government. Thus the revolution in England, in 1688 produced…the restoration of the constitution to its

primitive state." Webster also referred to *revolutionized* as "changing the form and principles of a constitution."[5]

Revolution Is Separate from War

John Quincy Adams noted how the change in people's minds related to revolution in this way: "For if the people once discover (and you cannot conceal it from them long) that you maintain the war for the army, while you tell them you maintain the army for the war, you lose their attachment forever, and their good sense will immediately side against you.... You will have effected in *substance if not in forms a total revolution* in the government…and the chaos of civil war will ensue."[6]

The younger Adams's observation is worthy of notice because it points to more than simply a change in ideas; it calls attention to what he says is the "substance" of revolution. In Adams's mind it was not necessary to change the form of government to have a revolution. Like his father, John Quincy Adams also made a distinct separation between revolution and war.

Implicit in Adams's remarks is another distinction: the intellectual separation of violence from revolutionary change. This refers to physical violence, of course, unless one wishes to include psychological anguish, a form of violence that tears one's affections from family, friends, and the institutions we have been taught to revere.

If one ponders Adams's query for still another moment, it is possible to detect perhaps the most important and enduring fact of all revolutions throughout history: the democratic nature of the revolutionary process as it occurred from 1760 to 1775.

The appeal to the people through written and verbal forms, the election of representatives to a congress, and the rational discussion and debate that defined the course of revolution—all were calculated to extend revolutionary ideas to as many people as possible.

This last point—the influence of reason in discussion—also implied that revolution, at least as it was understood by the revolutionary generation, was not an irrational phenomenon. The ability to reason in the midst of political crisis was indeed one of their proudest achievements and seems lost to most twenty-first-century anatomists of revolution.

While the Adams quotation succinctly raises many important questions regarding the fundamental nature of revolution, his colleague, Thomas Jefferson, in rambling fashion and over a longer period of time, provides us with a more extensive treatment of the subject in both theory and practice.

Like Adams, Jefferson reveals a lifelong fascination with the idea. Yet Jefferson's letters go beyond Adams's and his attempts to understand the subject philosophically. Throughout his correspondence Jefferson revealed a passionate commitment to and an involvement with revolution that not only surpassed any other American statesman's but spanned his entire adult life.

Whatever differences there were between them stemmed from their basic attitudes toward governmental authority, despite the fact that they had had similar, almost identical, political careers. It was Adams who nearly suffered a nervous breakdown making the psychological commitment to revolution in the 1760s.

By contrast, Jefferson, as a young lawyer, never gave the slightest evidence that he suffered in his decision to undermine British authority. Jefferson had a belief, as we shall see later, that authority, especially constitutional authority, was limited in duration and ought to be renewed periodically—that governments should adapt to change like a man refuses to wear the coat of a boy. His was a "generational" idea of change.

Adams, on the other hand, saw government and even administration as the repository of authority and, certainly in a new nation, even of tradition. No one admired tradition, especially the tradition of the British constitution, more ardently than John Adams.

Adams also had a longer view of constitutional government than Jefferson did. He believed that continuity, over time, provided stability without which any government would fail. Consequently, Adams's view of government was one that spanned many generations. His faith in human nature, more pessimistic than Jefferson's, failed to believe that man could change rationally or reasonably in a short time.

For Adams, men were creatures of habit. Writing to Jefferson in 1794, he remarked, "The Social compact and the laws must be reduced to writing. Obedience to them becomes a national habit and they cannot

be changed but by Revolutions which are costly things. Men will be too economical of their blood and property to have recourse to them very frequently."[7]

This view expressed by Adams may be the source of their disagreement, for Jefferson firmly believed that rebellions and revolutions, like "a storm in the atmosphere," should be as frequent as necessary. Adams saw stable governments resisting or putting to rest all fears and threats of revolution. Contrarily, Jefferson, committed to his belief that any government could not enjoy stability for long, was certain that there could be no post-revolutionary society.

This meant Jefferson, more than Adams, feared that the social compact and the laws would have only limited success in checking the power of government. Revolution would then become a necessity to maintain liberty against the encroachments of tyranny.

At the same time, Jefferson realized that the state had been the enemy of revolution throughout history, and this was why revolutions had been so bloody and costly. He knew that if a people once lost their liberty, there was one recourse that the state would oppose over all others: revolution. For revolution was always directed against the existing political order, and those currently in power would resist being overthrown with all the resources at their command. Despotic rulers would, almost by instinct, develop engines of repression that in turn would make revolution inevitable.

To Jefferson this dynamic struggle had seemed to be the entire history of Western civilization.

Revolution Involves Systemic Change

There was another dimension to this reasoning that placed Jefferson in sharp opposition to Adams. As we have seen, Jefferson was deeply committed to principles and to substantive change. This might be described more accurately, especially in reference to revolutionary theory, as "systemic change."

Jefferson's constant references to despotic regimes indicate that he viewed them as a system with an internal logic of their own. That logic had, as its prime motivation, the aggrandizement of wealth and power for

a privileged few at the expense of the many. "History has informed us," said Jefferson, "that bodies of men, as well as individuals, are susceptible to the spirit of tyranny."[8]

As his statements about the character of parties and the men who choose sides according to the "few or the many" show, tyranny manifested a character and a condition that could be broken only by a complete constitutional (read systemic) revolution. This tension, this necessity to break apart an old system and replace it with a new one, was the primary reason why Jefferson believed revolutions would continue throughout history.

Revolution Is a Permanent Force in the World

Despite their basic disagreements, however, there were many areas where their opinions overlapped. Here is Jefferson anticipating Adams's separation of war and revolution almost thirty years before the latter's famous query:

> There is always war in one place, revolution in another, pestilence in a third, interspersed with spots of quiet. These chequers shift places but they do not vanish, so that to an eye which extends itself over the whole earth there is always uniformity of prospect.[9]

Jefferson is recording here a profound observation on the nature of revolution: It is a permanent force in the world we inhabit. It does not vanish; it merely breaks out in another place. Jefferson's recognition of this permanence of revolutionary activity was in the classical political tradition. It meant that he saw revolution as others saw wars—a recognizable, permanent phenomenon in history that could be studied, analyzed, and perhaps made predictable. But this was an old story.

Polybius, one of the few who grasped the significance of revolution in ancient times, saw that all societies were subject to the dynamics of revolution and could look forward to one immediately or in some future time. This was a cyclical view of history, believed by most educated men in eighteenth-century America.

Like Polybius, what Jefferson was pointing to was a historical dialectic of revolution. Because the cycle of governments revealed a state

of constant change, in principle as well as in form, it meant that changes, no matter what they might be (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, polity, tyranny, or oligarchy), would be constantly challenged by revolutionary forces and ideas.

From time immemorial revolution had been in opposition to the state. Indeed that was the very meaning of the word—against the regime in power. It was therefore the antithesis of "the system," hated, feared, and detested by rulers throughout history. By viewing itself as a negating force, revolution would be successful; otherwise it could be coopted, mere reform; or, worse, it would signify a return to greater repression. These conditions, recognized by Jefferson, fulfilled the requirements of a true dialectic in history and made his theories revolutionary.

In Jefferson's mind the Revolution of 1776 had taken on this dialectical, negating quality that over the years influenced the checkered pattern of war and revolution around the globe.

In fact, at the end of his life Jefferson saw the Revolution of 1776 as a permanent revolutionary force in the world. Included in this idea was the implication that the forces unleashed in a particular revolution, if universalized, might be the catalyst for revolutions elsewhere. That is, if a revolutionary "engine" could be developed capable of destroying the "engines" of despotism, systemic change could be accomplished on a world scale.

This was the dream of a true revolutionary: the creation of a theory of revolution that could be applied to any and every condition of man.

The evidence that Jefferson believed he had formulated a revolutionary ideology can be seen at varying intervals throughout his career. His family motto, *Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God,* nearly summed up his entire political philosophy. Jefferson's original Declaration of Independence firmly established the "right to revolution" among all mankind and introduced a notion of equality that, he believed, would democratize the idea of revolution. It was in this context of speaking for all men, in all future ages, "the memory of the American revolution will be immortal,"[10] that one can see Jefferson's identification with a world revolutionary perspective.

During the period of the French Revolution, Jefferson endorsed Tom Paine's universal application of the Rights of Man. All his life he subscribed to the revolutionary ideology of republicanism, which at the time no one knew how to translate successfully into a functional government. Republicanism was revolutionary simply because no one, for at least two thousand years, had seen a republic. Yet reminiscing on the origins of the nation's commitment to republicanism, Jefferson revealed that at the first idea of independence the revolutionaries were determined to try it: "From the moment that to preserve our rights a change of government became necessary, no doubt could be entertained that a republican form was most consonant with reason [and] with right."[11]

Jefferson thus made it a principle to urge it upon others whenever possible.

Jefferson wrote to Joseph Priestley in 1802, "We feel that we are acting under obligations not confined to the limits of our own society. It is impossible not to be sensible that we are acting for all mankind."[12]

Seven years later Jefferson would carry the torch of revolution even further and define the United States as a revolutionary nation: "The station which we occupy among the nations of the earth is honorable, but awful. Trusted with the destinies of this *solitary republic of the world,* the only monument of human rights, and the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth."[13]

Twelve years later Jefferson wrote Adams a letter that showed his consistent faith in the power of the revolutionary ideas he had helped formulate:"I will not believe our labors are lost. I shall not die without a hope that light and liberty are on steady advance…in short, the flames kindled on the 4th of July 1776 have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism. On the contrary they will consume those engines, and all who work them."[14]

Thus Jefferson observed the struggle that has throughout history characterized the nature of revolution; that is, the struggle of men to become free of despotism.

We might also note ironically that Jefferson firmly believed that the Spirit of 1776, crystallized in the election of 1800, would make it

impossible that this nation would ever ally itself with the despotic forces in the world but would work to destroy them.

Revolutions Take Time to Accomplish

Jefferson's optimism, within realistic bounds, had always comprehended a time span that reflected his understanding of the historical forces at work in any century, including his own. Writing to Adams again, he concurred with him on the difficulty that revolutions experience in their transition from despotism to freedom. In the letter Jefferson supplies us with his notion of revolution in history:

> The generation which commences a revolution can rarely compleat it. Habituated from their infancy to passive submission of body and mind to their kings and priests, they are not qualified, when called on, to think and provide for themselves and their inexperience, their ignorance and bigotry make them instruments often, in the hands of the Bonapartes and Iturbides to defeat their own rights and purposes. This is the present situation of Europe and Spanish America. But it is not desperate. The light which has been shed on mankind by the art of printing has eminently changed the condition of the world. As yet that light has dawned on the midling classes only of the men of Europe. The kings and the rabble of equal ignorance, have not yet received its rays; but it continues to spread. And, while printing is preserved, it can no more recede than the sun return on his course. A first attempt to recover the right of self-government may fail; so may a 2d. a 3d etc., but as a younger, and more instructed race comes on, the sentiment becomes more and more intuitive, and a 4th. a 5th. or some subsequent one of the ever renewed attempts will ultimately succeed.[15]

Jefferson's observation that the bourgeoisie, or "midling class," was emerging as a revolutionary class is worth noting here because it reveals Jefferson's dependence on it to advance the idea of revolution.

Revolutions Always Possess a Dual Character

Pervading this statement is a doctrine of inevitability, as if the forces of revolution represented in the dialectic of history are so powerful they cannot be denied. In fact, what Jefferson was hinting at is a theory that

reflects not just an emerging revolutionary dialectic but the logic of faction and the non-party state mentioned in chapter 1. Jefferson's description of revolution deals with a similar idea. Taking this view, one can read his letter as an analysis of the basic components of the idea of revolution.

The first component, Jefferson's description of an "eminently changed" condition in parts of the world, reflects his recognition of the potential for revolutionary societies in Europe and Latin America, something no statesman had ever referred to before.

Here Jefferson is painting a picture of the dual character of societies in which two cities exist, each opposing the other. This opposition, according to Jefferson, has taken on among the younger generation an ingrained "instinct," which in time produces "two competing cultural systems warring against each other in the same society."[16]

Next, Jefferson described the "institutional" and "ideological" components in this emerging two-city thesis. The institutions were monarchy and its trappings—religious superstition and ignorance—versus the more enlightened institutions of "self-government." The ideological components were the divine-right theories of the state versus the emerging republican ideology. The monarchical types represent "the establishment"; the successive generations represent the competing classes or counterculture.

Jefferson's notion of "intuitive" sentiments is merely another way of expressing the strengthening of the second city—the faction in society that challenges the establishment.

In the third component, represented by the historical view that Jefferson held, the revolutionary dialectic would increase in intensity until a crisis situation was reached. The influence of science and the printing press would spread among the younger generation, almost invisibly; yet it would be denied by the kings and the priests who refused to understand the changes around them. That was, and is, the characteristic behavior of an establishment that fails to respond to or solve its crises.

It also signaled to Jefferson that the second city would grow in strength and resolve. It might be ten, forty, or sixty years in the future, but when the crisis occurred—when traditional, institutional, ideological, and cultural reforms failed—the revolution would inevitably succeed.

Revolutions Always Experience Crises

Jefferson's realistic sense of what must be accomplished over generations was not limited to time. Included in his assessment was the toll that permanent revolution would exact in violence. He completed his letter to Adams by warning that the price would not be cheap: "To attain all this however rivers of blood must yet flow, and years of desolation pass over. Yet the object is worth rivers of blood…for what inheritance so valuable can man leave to his posterity?"[17]

This notion of leaving a legacy of revolution and violence to posterity was not the idle speculation of a philosopher in old age. Jefferson had, as a young man of thirty-one, been immersed in the political violence of the Revolutionary War. He had also seen firsthand limited violence at the beginning of the French Revolution and knew of the purges that followed his departure. Thus a recognition of potential violence had been a consistent part of Jefferson's experience from the beginning.

Revolution Must Be Distinguished from Revolt and Rebellion

This recognition expressed itself in the references Jefferson made to rebellion and revolution. Strangely, he seemed to have merged the two. At least he was not careful about making distinctions between them. But from past experience, Jefferson felt that revolt or rebellion was directed against individual rulers or specific abuses and not against states. He also felt that rebellion was spontaneous, often a reaction to specific grievances that had nothing to do with the society as a whole. Yet *Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God* was Jefferson's credo, and the inference is that he saw rebellion on a continuum with revolution. Had he lived in the seventeenth century, he might have founded a divine-right theory of revolution; as it was, the Declaration nearly amounted to the same thing.

While Jefferson might have acknowledged that rebellions rarely threaten the state, they had the potential to, and that made them important. Rebellions also had the potential to enlarge—at least in a ruler's mind—and therefore their utility lay in keeping rulers honest.

There was also another characteristic of rebellion that appealed to Jefferson's principles—that their actions were often directed against

a consolidating and distant power. This consolidation of power was something that Jefferson feared. Moreover, if rebellions could prevent the gradual growth of power in the state, he wished to encourage them. If they occurred regularly, they would have the effect of maintaining society on a course consistent with its principles of government.

Thus Jefferson, in what amounted to a convergence theory of revolt and revolution, might be regarded as a rebel who was profoundly revolutionary. Incapable of tolerating injustice in any form, Jefferson seemed unwilling, like many nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutionaries, to play a counterrevolutionary role. Rather than wait for the opportune moment in history, when the "objective conditions" were favorable, Jefferson simply wished to see injustice eradicated. Because injustice would always exist in an imperfect world, a theory of permanent rebellion emerged along with his idea of revolution through history.

Violence could not be divorced from either rebellion or revolution. Referring to the "rivers of blood" that would flow in the future revolutions of Europe and Latin America, Jefferson believed in the classical sense that liberty could grow and flourish only through bloodshed. Indeed it was as if violence against tyrants was liberty's "natural manure." Referring to Shays's Rebellion at the time of the Constitutional Convention, Jefferson stated explicitly his notion of rebellion and its relation to violence. No American statesman before or since has so completely embraced the idea of violence as a means to realize the end of state. He wrote,

> Can history produce an instance of a rebellion so honourably conducted? I say nothing of its motives. They were founded in ignorance, not wickedness. God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion. The people cannot be all, and always well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions it is a lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.…What country before ever existed a century and a half without a rebellion? And what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? *Let them take arms.* The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty

> must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.[18]

Because Jefferson linked his idea of revolution to a constitution, he must have been considering total and systemic change. Revolution, then, must have a plan; it must be systemic in its approach. Rebellion, on the other hand, labors under misconception and ignorance. Therefore it could not be systemic in the changes it wrought unless, of course, it became something else.

In that same year, 1787, Jefferson again expressed his strong commitment to the idea of rebellion. Writing to James Madison in January of that year, he said with a warning: "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions indeed generally establish encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government."[19]

The Spirit of Rebellion Must Always Be Kept Alive

Shays's Rebellion was one of those thunderstorms that Jefferson felt was necessary. Comparing the political events of Europe with those of America, he had determined that the furor over Shays's Rebellion was highly exaggerated. In strong language to his friend Madison, Jefferson warmed to his favorite theme, the topic of rebellions:

> No country should be long without one. Nor will any degree of power in the hands of government prevent insurrections. France, with all its despotism, and two or three hundred thousand men always in arms, has had three insurrections in the three years I have been here every one of which greater numbers were engaged than in Massachusetts and a great deal more blood was spilt. In Turkey, which Montesquieu supposes more despotic, insurrections are the events of every day. In England, where the hand of power is lighter than here [France], but heavier than with us they happen every half dozen years. Compare again the ferocious depredations of their insurgents with the order, the moderation and the almost self extinguishment of ours.[20]

What seems different about this letter is the comparison Jefferson is making between despotism and free governments and their relationship to rebellion. Normally, one assumes that a free society is the most tumultuous. Jefferson, however, seems to be saying the opposite: in those states where absolutism prevails, the citizens tend toward greater extremes of violence.

While his reference to "insurrection" is unclear in the sense that he is drawing a sharp distinction between it and revolution, the implication of his first sentence is crystal clear: no "degree of power" held by the state will prevent either rebellion or revolution from occurring. Both are natural phenomena.

As Jefferson went about his duties in France, the Constitutional Convention was meeting to decide the future of the American states. This event loomed significantly in Jefferson's mind, for, as we shall see later, it held the connotations of a "second" American revolution.

While Jefferson argued that we ought to have a revolution every century and a half, he was also pointing to the *object* of the revolution, namely despotism or governments "of force." In his mind those governments were synonymous with monarchies and aristocracies, the kind of regimes whose power to abuse was rarely limited. This is important because it registers the eighteenth century's great concern for the forms of government and the influence that form had on the conduct of administration.

On this last point, Jefferson seems to be sliding over distinctions between insurrection and revolution. The comparison between American and European governments keeps the distinction; but his hope is that a revolutionary change—in principle and systemic in nature—will emerge from insurrection: the proof that men can govern themselves without kings. This would indicate that the relationship between the two is almost indistinguishable for Jefferson in 1787.

A Revolution Must Avoid Provoking the Military

The role that violence would play in any revolution, measured against the nature of the regime, was crucial to the success the revolution would enjoy. Jefferson had agreed with Adams that revolution was separate from

war. He had even observed to a friend that war "is not the most favorable moment for divesting the monarchy of power. On the contrary, it is the moment when the energy of a single hand shews itself in the most seducing form."[21]

Although Jefferson was, in this instance, observing the emerging revolution in France, his statement is in the form of a principle and can be generalized. His idea of revolution, which always seemed to be opposed to monarchy or aristocracy, was becoming practical.

Jefferson was developing an idea of peaceful revolution.

He was already aware of the connection between the idea of revolution and his own fame. His authorship of the Declaration of Independence had established his reputation as a hero to the most "ardent spirits" in Europe and especially to those in France. Wherever revolutionary activity was potential, contemplated, or in the process of taking place, Jefferson was a man to be consulted. His colleagues at home, many of whom did not understand, often caricatured him as a "man of some acquirements…but [having] opinions upon Government…the result of fine spun theoretic systems, drawn from the ingenious writings of Locke, Sydney and others of their cast which can never be realized."[22]

While this was true of those he would later accuse of courting the principles of "kingly government,"[23] his admirers in France and elsewhere appreciated his talents with deeper understanding. Even at the risk of violating his diplomatic neutrality, Jefferson was willing to engage in revolutionary intrigue.

Once, after presiding over a revolutionary dialogue in his own home "truly worthy of being placed in parallel with the finest dialogues of antiquity," Jefferson felt moved to explain his behavior to the French minister, Armand Marc, Count de Montmorin. Montmorin's guarded reply furnishes a good insight into Jefferson's ability to influence, in a practical way, the developing idea of revolution. "He [Jefferson] told me… he earnestly wished I would habitually assist at such conferences, being sure I should be useful in moderating the warmer spirits, and promoting a wholesome and practicable reformation only."[24]

But in truth Jefferson did not need encouragement or flattery. By May 1787 he was already writing long letters to his friends in America, keeping them abreast of the progress of the idea of revolution throughout the world. Referring to Brazil he wrote,

> The men of letters are those most desirous of a revolution. The people are not much under the influence of their priests, most of them read and write, possess arms, and are in the habit of using them for hunting. The slaves will take the side of their masters. In short, as to the question of revolution, there is but one mind in that Country. But there appears to be no person capable of conducting a revolution, or willing to venture himself at its head, without the aid of some powerful nation.…There is no printing press in Brazil. They consider the North American revolution as a precedent for theirs.… [And] in case of a successful revolution, a republican government in a single body would probably be established.[25]

Here Jefferson is making a distinction between those who may be expected to participate in revolution and those who will languish in despotism. Jefferson's assessment seems to be made on the basis of the population's *literary* skills and how receptive they are to *written* appeals. Noting the absence of a printing press, he seems to believe that this device, used to disseminate revolutionary ideas, is crucial—in practical terms—to a burgeoning revolution.

He also recognizes, in a limited way, that certain objective conditions must exist in the society before revolution is possible. For revolution to occur, there must be someone who has the will to lead it, someone who can assimilate a view of a future society and act on his vision. Jefferson would have argued that men must have some awareness of their place in history. They must know or realize from past examples in history that they can actually complete a revolution.

At the same time, he implied the people themselves must be conscious of their role in a revolution. Like their leaders, they must understand the idea of liberty sufficiently to expand it. If they are either ignorant or illiterate, with no understanding of the potential of a constitutional system, they merely endanger their lives and the few rights they enjoy.

A Revolution Must Be Connected to Ideology

We ought to note, too, that Jefferson *assumes* a "probable" connection of the revolutionary ideology of his time—"republicanism"—to the successful outcome of revolution. This would imply that Jefferson, like revolutionaries in all ages, linked the prevailing ideology to any successful revolution, whether probable, potential, or actual.

Jefferson was aware that you could not simply say you were going to start a revolution and then have one. His concern for "enlightening and emancipating the minds" of the people was uppermost in his notion of what was important in an emerging revolution. It was, he felt, the very first consideration one had to make in assessing the possibility of revolution.

To show his consistency on this position, Jefferson was still concerned about educating the people of Latin America thirty years later. He seemed to believe it was better to have revolution piecemeal than to endure a violent confrontation that would set back the cause of liberty, perhaps for generations. Answering a query from John Adams on the revolutionary potential in South America, he wrote,

> I enter into all your doubts as to the event of the revolution of South America. They will succeed against Spain. But the dangerous enemy is within their own breasts. Ignorance and superstition will chain their minds and bodies under religious and military despotism. I do believe it would be better for them to obtain freedom by degrees only; because that would by degrees bring on light and information, and qualify them to take charge of themselves understandingly; with more certainty…as may keep them at peace with one another.[26]

Thus Jefferson, serving in the capacity of a revolutionary adviser, was always tailoring his advice to the conditions he found locally or nationally. No blanket theorist, he found himself making distinctions regarding the potential for revolutions in a way that many critics, and even a few revolutionaries in the twenty-first century, have lost sight of. Jefferson was always speaking of an "appeal to the nation…and yet not so much as to endanger an appeal to arms."[27]

A Revolution Must Not Initiate Armed Struggle

Jefferson's greatest fear was that revolutionaries would act prematurely, before the "public mind was ripened by time and discussion and was one opinion on the principal points."[28] He seemed to believe that without an understanding of what the forces of power were, what the delicate balance of the constitution was, even what was worth fighting for, any revolution would be strangled in its cradle.

At the same time, Jefferson also kept in mind that unity or agreement among the people was essential if only to demonstrate that a sufficient force of public opinion existed in the state. That was the first objective of any revolution. Means must be found to communicate that force to those in power, who, hopefully, would then change their policies or realize that resistance was futile. Jefferson never abandoned his hope that revolution could be successful without a resort to arms.

Thus Jefferson writes to Washington, informing him what the issue of revolution has been so far: "The nation [France] is pressing on fast to a fixed constitution. Such a revolution in the public opinion has taken place that the crown already feels its powers bounded, and is obliged by its measures to acknowledge limits."[29]

It is obvious that Jefferson is studying the emerging constitutional developments, hoping the French Revolution would continue its nonviolent course during this early period of consolidation.

One critical factor in furthering any revolution was to "cleverly" prevent any violent turn from taking place. It was the responsibility of the leaders to nurture a rational policy that would not provoke those in power to "draw the sword." Indeed Jefferson's reflections on the future of France, placed in the context of the favorable issue of the second American revolution, raised the question of whether other nations could imitate America.

As Jefferson had seen just two months earlier, the forces of despotism in France were so powerful that a peaceful solution was by no means guaranteed. Another critical factor he sees as a problem for any revolution is the question of the army. Writing to a friend, he notes rather

sharply the tragic role that party and the armed forces play in producing counterrevolution:

> We can surely boast of having set the world a beautiful example of a government reformed by reason alone without bloodshed. But the world is too far oppressed to profit of the example. On this side of the Atlantic [France] the blood of the people is become an inheritance, and those who fatten on it, will not relinquish it easily. The struggle in this country is as yet of doubtful issue. It is in fact between the monarchy, and the parliaments. The nation is no otherwise concerned but as both parties may be induced to let go some of its abuses to court the public favor. The danger is that the people, deceived by a false cry of liberty may be led to take side with one party, and thus give the other a pretext for crushing them still more. If they can avoid an appeal to arms, the nation will be sure to gain much by this controversy. But if that appeal is made it will depend entirely on the dispositions of the army whether it issue in liberty or despotism.[30]

By the middle of 1788, as the first sentence would imply, Jefferson has the model of the second American revolution firmly in mind. Moreover, he is now preparing that model on a global scale, explicitly stating that other nations would do well to imitate America's example.

His is a recommendation for revolution without violence and bloodshed. Yet nothing is lost in the sense that he and Adams defined the term almost three decades earlier. Pondering the potential violence of the emerging French Revolution, Jefferson made a distinction between the ongoing revolution and civil war.

Political Conditions Required for Revolution

By March 1789 Jefferson was still optimistic that France would avoid bloodshed. One reason was a belief that the idea of revolution must be accepted by the people. And from his vantage point in Paris, he daily saw the public becoming deeply involved. Jefferson traced this involvement in a letter that outlined the essential politics of a developing revolution. The conditions included the following:

- The nation's intellectual potential to become aware of a political crisis

- The role of the press in shaping public opinion
- An economic crisis, especially one related to taxes
- The rate of nonviolent change
- The differences between the newly emerging and the past forms of government
- The people's understanding of their relation to the constitutional powers present in the government of the day and even of the hour
- The degree of liberty expressed in a declaration of rights toward which the revolution aims

Each of these points must be seen in relation to the others as they occur. Considered collectively, they compose a near complete idea of revolution. Judged singly, they simply represent another problem in government or administration that can be adjusted to or solved.

In this letter to his friend David Humphreys, Jefferson is conveying the picture of a "complete revolution":

> The change in this country, since you left it, is such as you can form no idea of.…The king stands engaged to pretend no more to the power of laying, continuing or appropriating taxes, to call the States general periodically, to submit *letters de cachet* to legal restriction, to consent to freedom of the press, and that all this shall be fixed by a fundamental constitution which shall bind his successors. He has not offered a participation in the legislature, but it will surely be insisted on. The public mind is so ripened on all these subjects, that there seems to be now but one opinion.…In fine I believe this nation will in the course of the present year have as full a portion of liberty dealt out to them as the nation can bear at present, considering how uninformed the mass of their people is.[31]

At the same time, Jefferson's optimism regarding the avoidance of bloodshed in a revolution was not without qualification. He even seems to be saying that despite all precautions, some merging of the two is inevitable. In what was to be a prophetic warning to his friend Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de La Fayette, Jefferson revealed his pessimism

regarding the future progress of the French Revolution. On the eve of his departure, he wrote,

> So far it seemed that your revolution had got along with a steady pace; meeting indeed occasional difficulties and dangers, but we are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty, in a feather-bed. I have never feared for the ultimate result, tho' I have feared for you personally…Take care of yourself, my dear friend. For tho' I think your nation would in any event work out her salvation, I am persuaded were she to lose you, it would cost her oceans of blood, and years of confusion and anarchy.[32]

As Jefferson contemplated the idea of revolution during the year before he left France, he could not help but believe that the most important concern of any revolutionary movement must be the constitutional process.

Role of Elections in an Emerging Revolution

From his own experience in the 1770s, Jefferson realized that only when the ideals of a revolution were written into law was it possible for the people to realize them. If ideals remained pure rhetoric, they would continue to divide the people and lead to confusion and anarchy.

One major part of this concern was the process of electing officials to represent the people. Elections had played a major role in Jefferson's rise to power during the American Revolution. Being a delegate to the Continental Congress had thrust him suddenly onto the national stage. But more significant was the fact that elections had made the revolution appear legitimate in the eyes of the people.

Like the "men of influence" in the midst of revolution in America, Jefferson had resigned his seat in Congress and taken his "place in the legislature of Virginia." There he introduced bills in 1776 that had as their goal the complete destruction of the British administration. Among them were the "establishment of courts of justice" and "trial by jury"; a "bill declaring tenants in tail to hold their lands in fee simple"; a "bill to prevent…the…further importation" of slaves, abolish primogeniture, abolish the tyranny of the Church of England, "establishing religious

freedom"; and finally an attempt to revise the "whole code" of laws and adopt them to "our republican form of government."[33]

These were the revolutionary aims Jefferson had in mind in 1789, and he hoped that the French might also. Certainly, he believed they were capable of promoting those aims.

In sum, Jefferson's experience of constitution making had become an integral part of his notion of how a revolution was to proceed.

Critical Role in Calling a Constitutional Convention in the Midst of Revolution

A reflection of his American experience, a revolution emphasized principles, organization, and functions of every governmental entity. Indeed this emphasis was, in Jefferson's eyes, virtually an axiom for all the other revolutions he saw occurring in the world.

He never tired of believing that America could set an example that would ultimately provide a way to avoid civil wars. Thus in 1787, before he could know its results, he remarked upon hearing of the Constitutional Convention, "Happy for us, that when we find our constitutions defective and insufficient to secure the happiness of our people, we can assemble with all the coolness of philosophers and set it to rights, while every other nation on earth must have recourse to arms to restore their constitutions."[34]

Contrast Jefferson's axiom regarding initiating armed struggle with the military to avoid violence. Virtually all modern revolutions throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—those led by Lenin, Mao, Castro, and Ho Chi Minh and even those surrounding the "Arab Spring"—have uniformly resulted in not decentralizing the power of the state or maximizing the liberty of the individual. They have produced states dominated by military regimes, unending civil wars, and the denial of human rights, civil liberties, the Rights of Man, and the rule of law—in short, everything Jefferson believed a revolution should avoid. This axiom alone, of avoiding the initiation of violence, should enable the reader to appreciate the sophistication of Jefferson's idea of revolution.

His sense of optimism overflowing, Jefferson wrote to David Humphreys, "The operations which have taken place in America lately, fill me with pleasure. In the first place they realize the confidence I had

that whenever our affairs get obviously wrong, the good sense of the people will interpose and set them to rights. The example of changing a constitution by assembling the wise men of the state, instead of assembling armies, will be worth as much to the world as the former examples we have given them."[35]

The transfer of constitutional power from one form of government to another, peaceably, with the will of the majority presiding, was for Jefferson the only successful idea of revolution.

This was systemic change—the true characteristic of revolution—achieved peacefully. Any other transfer of power that failed to produce an expansion of liberty, that remained attached to principles of monarchy or aristocracy, both forms of despotism, was not revolution at all. It was counterrevolution.

Because of this continuous possibility, the principles of government became just as important for revolution as the form. The fact was, as Jefferson had recognized earlier, those successive generations that "instinctively" demanded greater freedom were the core of the second city. As they continued to expand their idea of freedom, gradually and through written constitutional guarantees, the growth of the revolution, based on the principles of a new value system, was assured.

The Rights of Man in the Constitution

Jefferson saw that it did nothing for mankind to advocate revolution and then discover that the reasons for turning to revolution had been lost in the struggle. This is why he expressed concern over the failure of the "wise men" in Philadelphia to incorporate the Rights of Man into the Constitution itself. Declaring his willingness to accept the majority view, he nevertheless stated those rights which, if abused collectively in the minds of the people, formed the right to revolution.

Commenting on the new constitution, he wrote,

> I am one of those who think it a defect that the important rights, not placed in security by the frame of the constitution itself, were not explicitly secured by a supplementary declaration. There are rights which it is useless to surrender to the government, and which yet, governments have always been fond to invade. These are the rights

> of thinking, and publishing our thoughts by speaking or writing: the right of free commerce: the right of personal freedom. There are instruments for administering the government, so peculiarly trust-worthy, that we should never leave the legislature at liberty to change them. The new constitution has secured these in the executive and legislative departments; but not in the judiciary. It should have established trials by the people themselves, that is to say by jury. There are instruments so dangerous to the rights of the nation, and which place them so totally at the mercy of their governors, that those governors, whether legislative or executive, should be restrained from keeping such instruments on foot but in well defined cases. Such an instrument is a standing army. We are now allowed to say such a declaration of rights, as a supplement to the constitution where that is silent, is wanting to secure us in these points.[36]

While Jefferson's optimism regarding the successful conclusion of the American Revolution remained strong, his imagination ranged over the possibilities of using reason and the "coolness of philosophers" to ensure that revolution in a single society would be permanent as well as bloodless.

By now he was not content to simply see the "chequers" shifted on the board. Recognizing that tensions in society that cause revolutions often result from oppressive regimes that over time have lost all touch with current problems or the needs of a new generation, Jefferson sought to provide a rationale that would prevent those tensions from accumulating.

If we recall his reference to the Constitutional Convention as the second American revolution, we may gain an insight into his changing idea of revolution. Perhaps, he believed, a society dedicated to rational principles could *institutionalize* revolution in a constitutional form.

In a little-known and even less understood essay titled *The Earth Belongs to the Living,* Jefferson was apparently sounding out his most trusted colleague, James Madison, to this possibility. Written at the height of his involvement with the emerging French Revolution, it answers the problems he saw developing there and elsewhere in the world:

> No society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation. They may manage it then, and what proceeds from it, as they please, during

> their usufruct. They are masters too of their own persons, and consequently may govern them as they please. But persons and property make the sum of the objects of government. The constitution and the laws of their predecessors extinguished then, in their natural course, with those whose will gave them being. This could preserve that being till it ceased to be itself, and no longer. Every constitution, then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force and not of right.
>
> It may be said that the succeeding generation exercising in fact the power of repeal, this leaves them as free as if the constitution or law had been expressly limited to 19 years only. In the first place, this objection admits the right, in proposing an equivalent. But the power of repeal is not an equivalent. It might be indeed if every form of government were so perfectly contrived that the will of the majority could always be obtained fairly and without impediment. But this is true of no form. The people cannot assemble themselves; their representation is unequal and vicious. Various checks are opposed to every legislative proposition. Factions get possession of the public councils. Bribery corrupts them. Personal interests lead them astray from the general interests of their constituents; and other impediments arise so as to prove to every practical man that a law of limited duration is much more manageable than one which needs a repeal.
>
> This principle that the earth belongs to the living and not to the dead is of very extensive application and consequences in every country, and most especially in France. It enters into the resolution of the questions Whether the nation may change the descent of lands holden in tail? Whether they may change the appropriation of lands given antiently to the church, to hospitals, colleges, order of chivalry, and otherwise in perpetuity? Whether they may abolish the charges and privileges attached on lands, including the whole catalogue ecclesiastical and feudal? It goes to hereditary offices, authorities and jurisdictions; to perpetual monopolies in commerce, the arts or sciences; with a long train of et ceteras.[37]

The essay turned out, in Jefferson's own words, to be the "dream of a theorist," for he never attempted to have it written into law. In truth, Jefferson's essay was too revolutionary even for his most intimate colleagues—all members of the power structure. Reading it over, they

most likely realized that nothing in the society would remain untouched or unchanged; no one's base of power would or could remain secure.

Jefferson's departure from the one-dimensional vision of change that characterized nearly all of his eighteenth-century contemporaries was too powerful.

How to Recognize a Prerevolutionary Society

Yet the idea had profound revolutionary implications. As Jefferson realized, its principle had very "extensive application" and would serve as an obstacle to despotism around the globe.

The essay went to the heart of every important power relationship in the commonwealth, specifically those that Jefferson, in his own revolutionary experience, had drafted legislation to remedy. But most significant, within Jefferson's essay were leveling principles, institutionalized, that would democratize the idea of revolution.

What Jefferson saw himself doing was anticipating the normal development of a prerevolutionary situation. Those conditions he enumerated at the end of his letter had been present in all despotisms throughout history and were particularly characteristic of the ancient regimes yet in power. Further, they could be summarized as those conditions that existed in America from 1760 to 1775: attempts by the government in power to maintain its authority were gradually undermined; laws became arbitrary; "obligations," once bearable, "became impositions"; traditional loyalties faded and new forms of attachment (outside the existing circle of government) became noticeable—the second city; the idea of community—defined by the establishment—no longer held people's attention to the interests of the nation; factions arose that exploited the frustrated classes in society; representatives no longer were representative but spoke for a privileged few; accepted forms of wealth and income suddenly appeared corrupt; existing concepts of prestige changed; those in positions of power were viewed with hostility and suspicion; and, finally, those with talent, normally integrated into society, began to feel "left out."

This is the picture of an emerging two-city theory of revolution: a "dialectic of two competing cultural systems warring against each other in the same society."[38] This was a condition that, if allowed to develop over

a long period of time, would inevitably produce a "crisis of community," "political, economic, psychological, sociological, personal, and moral at the same time."[39] The conflict of values could plunge the nation into civil war.

Revolution need not be the culmination of these conflicts, but the loss of liberty and harmony most certainly would be. What was needed at a time like this—and Jefferson had seen this condition in America and in France—was the intelligent search for a new sense of community, a new set of principles or a return to older ones, and a way to reestablish conditions that would become acceptable to those who were disillusioned and felt "left out."

A new constitution for every generation was one way to establish this new sense of community. It was an exercise guaranteed to keep the government responsive to the people while inhibiting the growth of factions that established oligarchies and corrupted the laws. It would, Jefferson pointed out, make government and constitutions respect the rights of the individual and not become the instruments of force. If every generation had to decide what to throw away, as well as what to keep, in a constitution, it would be an educational process that would force it to understand, as well as to protect, its rights. This was consistent with Jefferson's belief that the Rights of Man were at the heart of every revolutionary struggle.

Jacques Ellul has observed that in the eighteenth century the idea of "revolution was a juridical concept that met the demands of reason."[40]

Jefferson's revolutionary essay was an expression of this eighteenth-century Age of Reason belief in reason as the supreme arbiter in society. It was also a recognition of the political nature of revolution. Only reason could avoid the fanaticism, the excesses, and the bloodshed that ultimately defeated the cause of liberty. Accordingly, Jefferson's essay was this juridical concept carried to its logical conclusion: a system of abstract laws designed to ensure that each generation would be able to construct its own system of political relationships. Jefferson's system was not likely, as other revolutions would prove, to perpetuate and increase the power of the state at the expense of the individual.

His theory was designed to do the opposite: to signal a radical departure from the theme of centralization that has characterized all revolutions before or since. His theory would enable each generation to use established laws and institutions to decentralize anew the power of the state every twenty years.

Institutionalizing Permanent, Peaceful, Constitutional Revolution

Further, Jefferson, in his long essay, guaranteed that every twenty years there would be a certain amount of chaos in the transition to the new government. This meant that, instead of increasing its power by placing succeeding generations in awe of its immortal sovereignty and majesty, the state would become a means to an end and not the end in itself. The essence of Jefferson's revolution every twenty years was to humanize the prospects of remodeling society.

It meant that and more: Jefferson's essay was the philosophical expression of a device that, assuming the worst situation developed, any trend toward tyranny would be abolished or altered every second decade; that those who accumulated wealth at the expense of their fellow citizens would see it redistributed; that class rivalry would be eliminated or started anew; and that mobility would be ensured.

Finally, the hope was that liberty and justice would be renewed with each generation. Because of its thoroughness, its near-complete alteration of the relations of established society, it was a system that would channel all of society's discontents and integrate them in a radical yet nonviolent solution.

Jefferson's logic culminated in what would be the greatest benefit of all. Because each generation would have complete control over its own life span, plus the ability to enact laws regulating its own behavior, it would have no need to resort to violence or civil war to change the government's form or principles.

Liberty and the Rights of Man embedded in the constitution would therefore never be endangered. In sum, *The Earth Belongs to the Living* was intended by Jefferson to be a theoretical statement of the possibility of institutionalizing permanent, peaceful, and constitutional revolution.

What we have been describing thus far is an idea of revolution propounded by a few eighteenth-century men. But not every part of that description has been limited to the pure idea of revolution. The dominance of politics, in an architectonic sense, has asserted itself in every phase of revolution we have discussed.

Classical Politics and Revolution

The nature of revolution in eighteenth-century America was, above all, political. Neither Jefferson nor Adams nor anyone else who discussed the topic ever divorced it from its classical political framework. Constitutions, ideologies, wars, committees, factions, and congresses are political ideas and forms that were known before Aristotle. They were in Adams's and Jefferson's time viewed as part of one's natural political constitution. This framework, then, was rooted in human nature and was as old as man himself.

While many of these concepts relate to forms as well as ideas, they have a dialectical relationship that makes it impossible to discuss one meaningfully without the others. It is important then, in rounding out the idea of revolution, to consider these forms in some detail and establish their connection with the politics that will be reviewed in the remaining chapters.

We have seen both Adams and Jefferson associate their revolutionary experience in the 1770s with revolutions that occurred for the rest of their lives. Their concern for opinion, elections, constitutional forms, declarations of rights, the power of the press, and so forth—all were carryovers from their experience. As they well knew, these specific forms of organization had given form and energy to the American Revolution.

Jefferson, in his search for a new mode of revolution, was attempting to maintain a similar energy level that he had experienced in 1776 but not so much that it would commit revolution to violence.

The Cycle of Revolutions

This distinction is important because it reveals Jefferson's imagination at work, spinning out a theory that would enable him to realize his goal of permanent world revolution.

He knew already that governments are not free once and then for all time. He realized, perhaps more fully than anyone in his century, that the nature of man made it inevitable that a government would sooner or later founder in corruption. When this occurred, the two-city thesis of revolution asserted itself. Principles needed to be reestablished, constitutions reaffirmed, and liberty renewed in an ongoing natural process. It was this transition in the cycle of revolutions, the division of society into two warring camps, that fascinated Jefferson and spurred him on in pursuit of a nonviolent theory of revolution.

The cycle of revolution had occurred at least three times within Jefferson's lifetime. The Revolution of 1800 was, in more ways than not, a repetition of the Revolution of 1776, and, by Jefferson's own description, another was the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

The one major difference was a shift from form to principle almost exclusively; another lay in the peaceful transition made by the Revolution of 1800. Yet this peaceful transition did not occur by accident.

The Forms and Principles of Revolution

We have seen how Jefferson always placed the framework of revolution in a struggle between the principles of despotism and those of freedom—between monarchy or aristocracy and the democratizing efforts of the people. This formulation of principles had looked back to Jefferson's original revolutionary experience (the classic example of an imperial power opposed to granting freedom to a colonial people). As the concern for principle arose, Jefferson again looked to his own experience and realized that he must rely on the trusted "old-fashioned" or classical forms of organization.

Of the organizational principles used to combat despotism all over the world, quite a number had been invented in America and had become, after the 1770s, the bag and baggage of revolutionaries everywhere.

The formation of conspiratorial caucuses "to concentrate leadership abilities," the organization of clubs, committees of correspondence, the post, circular letters, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, speeches, elections, legislative resolves, and constitutional resolutions—all were used to advance the cause of revolution.

The culmination of these political forms *after* the election of congresses was the establishment of courts of law and provisional governments.

These organizational forms and principles all took place within, but were opposed to, the existing system of government. They were literally "the state within the state," "the city within a city," the result of a group of organized factions cooperating to achieve similar revolutionary ends. Together they created a democratic ideology and a fashioned unity. They won the minds and the hearts of the people and laid the foundations for a new government.

It is in this framework that we must view Jefferson's approach to politics and revolution in the coming decade. Knowing his deep concern for republican principles and the revolutionary Spirit of 1776, plus his absence of nearly six years, we might place his idea of revolution into a perspective that has not been made explicit before.

That perspective, moreover, is consistent with the classical definition of revolution: a cyclical return to the time when the rights and the liberties of the people were untainted by corruption, when the ideals and the principles of the American Revolution were accepted by all, and when the American Revolution was—in a word—glorious.

In 1789 Jefferson, enthused with the optimism of the emerging French Revolution, contemplated his return to America. He wrote to a friend, "I hope to receive permission to visit America this summer, and to possess myself anew, by conversation with my countrymen, of *their spirit and their ideas.* I know only the Americans of the year 1784. They tell me this is to be much a stranger to those of 1789. This renewal of acquaintance is no indifferent matter to one acting at such a distance."[41]

As he would soon find out, the distance between ideas was great, if not greater than the width of the ocean he would cross. And it would take time, almost a decade in fact, before he could report that the Spirit of 1776 was "not dead. It…[had] only been slumbering."[42]

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