

FACTIONS, POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS, AND PARTIES: CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

The term "party" was frequently used in American political discourse throughout the eighteenth century. But it did not connote organized associational activity whose purpose was to influence the behavior of the electorate. Rather, it described a loose system of personal and family loyalties generally, but not always, founded on some set of underlying economic or religious interests. More than anything else, "party" referred to the alignment of loyalties of among legislators rather than among the electorate. They were factions, not parties.

Despite the fact the nominally democratic practices of most of the colonies, political parties in the modern sense would have served no purpose. Because the franchise was so restricted (barely a third of adult white males could vote in the mid-eighteenth century), public opinion no real bearing on elections or political activity. Further, social traditions of deference, inherited from the Old World and reinforced by New World patterns of land distribution and ecclesiastical authority, were so strong as to preclude open competition for political office or challenges to incumbents.

Finally, the structure of colonial governments worked against the possibility of party organization. In most colonies, top officials -- governors and lieutenant governors were appointed by the Crown. And the governors appointed their "councils" or "assistants," who often acted as the upper house of the legislature. Thus elections primarily involved citizens voting on the local level for representatives to the colonial assemblies. Both the diversity of local interests and the difficulties of communication precluded organizing these contests on any broad basis. Even in colonies like Connecticut, which had retained full privileges of self-government, the electoral system did not lend itself to

competition. Candidates for the Council put themselves forward bi-annually. The candidate who received the most votes became governor; the second most, lieutenant governor; and so on until the seats on the Council were filled. In this system, candidates might run for office, but they did not run against one another. Elections were an exercise in the affirmation of authority, not of challenges to it.

These traditions only began to erode with the Great Awakening and the economic expansion of the mid-eighteenth century. They were further weakened by the Revolution, in which the populace was mobilized as a political force (albeit under the guiding hand of the wealthy, learned and respectable). The reorganization of state governments after independence -- which in some but not all cases democratized the electoral process --, certainly set the stage for the emergence of parties. But even in the late, organized electoral challenges remained virtually unknown.

The years between the end of the Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution were a period of intense political ferment. The Revolution, with its reiteration of the need for the consent of the governed, had immensely broadened the base of political life. Farmers, artisans, seamen, and others whose place in public life had heretofore been negligible, became intensely interested in learning the fundamentals of democracy. The democratic spirit, fired earlier by the Great Awakening, spread to the religious domain, as men and women began to abandon unquestioning submission to the authority of religious establishments and the clergy. The ferment was fueled by economic crises. The war had devastated the states' economies and left their governments burdened with debts. The national government, hobbled by the inadequate framework provided under the Articles of Confederation, was generally unable to act decisively on important matters or to meet its financial obligations.

Among "persons of the better sort," the Society of Cincinnati, an association composed of former officers of the Continental army, pushed state and national governments to make good their pledges to those who had served and agitated for the creation of a central state capable of maintaining law and order. The Society was widely denounced for its aristocratic and monarchist leanings -- charges that were not entirely unfounded. But it was the fact of its existence, not the substance of its agenda, that the Society's critics found most troubling. They feared the power of such "self-created" associations to corrupt and destroy the democratic process.

The popular response to this troubled time was more diverse, ranging from armed rebellions against state governments like that organized by veterans under the leadership of Daniel Shays in western Massachusetts, to the establishment of a host of "democratic" societies and associations. Many of these were modeled on Franklin's Junto, but with much more explicit focus on political education.

The battle over ratification of the Constitution came close to producing political parties in the modern sense. Each side, the nationalists or federalists (who favored ratification) and the anti-federalists (who opposed it), used the full power of the press, of pamphleteering, of public meetings, and of political clubs, to influence the decisions of their state conventions on the question. Certainly horse-trading among political leaders played an important role, as when Jefferson was persuaded to support the Constitution with the promise that the new Congress would add to it amendments guaranteeing certain fundamental rights. But when all was said and done, a true party system had not emerged. The election of the executive under the federal constitution, mirroring the system of many states, had candidates running at-large for high office, with the candidate who received the highest vote becoming president and the next

highest becoming vice-president (this was changed with the XIIth Amendment to the Constitution, which was adopted in 1804).

It is to Thomas Jefferson and, ironically, James Madison (author of Federalist #10) that the modern party system owes its existence. Jefferson spent three frustrating years as Secretary of State in Washington's cabinet, watching the commercial interests of the coastal cities, led by Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton, subvert what he believed to be the achievements of the Revolution. Madison, Jefferson's chief ally in Congress, fought the same battles. Although both disapproved of political parties, as they understood the term, they increasingly felt that Federalist strong-arming left them little choice but to organize support for their views, both in Congress and in the electorate. As Jefferson wrote to General LaFayette in June of 1792, "a sect has shown itself among us, who declare they espoused our new constitution, not as a good and sufficient thing itself, but only as a step to an English constitution. . . . Too many of these stock jobbers and king-jobbers have come into our legislature, or rather too many of our legislature have become stock jobbers and king-jobbers" (TJ to L, 6/16/1792, in Ford, ed., Jefferson's Writings).

Though publicly expressing relief at quitting "the hated occupation of politics," Jefferson retired to Monticello in 1793. He and James Madison privately set about organizing a national opposition based on the subsidy of newspapers favoring their views, committees of correspondence between like-minded leaders, and a determination to mobilize voters in support of particular candidates. These efforts built on, and in many cases absorbed, the "democratic societies" of the 1780s. The model of the reconstituted political associations was the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, organized in Philadelphia in 1792. Its constitution and a circular letter outlining its purposes were widely circulated, both in pamphlet form and in the press. Within

months, similar bodies were being organized throughout the country. (By the end of 1794, there were 35 such organizations operating in every state of the union). At this stage, these associations -- which more resembled modern advocacy organizations than political parties -- operated openly and welcomed members from all walks of life.

Almost from the beginning, the Federalists, led by Hamilton, had assembled the machinery of a political party in order to ensure the passage of some of their more controversial pieces of legislation, such as the act establishing the Bank of the United States. Hamilton wove

a web of correspondents out of his wartime associates, his business connections and friends, and the many individuals whom, as Secretary, he was able to oblige. His personal contacts and personal influence were used to draw together a new political formation, which eventually became less personal. The Federalists also drew on the first American veterans association, the Society of the Cincinnati, a strongly knit organization of Revolutionary War officers and their descendants. . . . Hamilton's original faction reached out into the countryside and developed into a national political structure which could support its capital leadership by undertaking the labors of propaganda, electioneering, and other political tasks. Its key local leaders were men of position and high respectability in their communities: former military officers everywhere, or mercantile magnates in New York; the Congregational divines in Massachusetts and Connecticut, or Episcopalian ministers in the Middle Atlantic region and in the coastal plains of the South; captains of finance in Philadelphia, or great planters in Maryland or South Carolina. From the Federalists' center at the capital to their periphery in the counties and towns, relationships among established notables provided the strong strands of the emerging Federalist structure. Such notables drew in other

participants, and together they soon formed the ranks of the active workers or "cadre" of the emerging party. (Chambers 1963, 40).

The Federalist establishment was also active within the states, where control of their governments provided an armature of party organization. Richard Purcell, characterized the establishment's power during this period in Connecticut thusly:

There were the state officers, the assistants, and a large majority of the Assembly. In every county there was a sheriff with his deputies. All of the state, county, and town judges were potential and generally active workers. Every town had several justices of the peace, school directors, and, in Federalist towns, all the town officers who were ready to carry on the party's work. Every parish had a "standing agent," whose anathemas were said to convince at least ten voting deacons. Militia officers, state's attorneys, lawyers, professors and schoolteachers were in the van of this "conscript army." In all, about a thousand or eleven hundred dependent office-holders were described as the inner ring which could always be depended on for their own and enough more votes within their control to decide an election. This was the Federalist machine. (Purcell, 190).

The office holders were aided by the ministry of the state-supported Congregational Church. The overwhelmingly Federalist clergy, urged its members "to preach up & recommend the Election of religious and undeistical Counsellors," as well as to "hunt down" any "unprincipled Character" who might hold office. Political tests were used to exclude dissenters from college and from the professions. In addition, various kinds of informal coercion were freely used. Debtors with known Democratic sympathies suddenly found their notes being called and credit denied them. Their stores and professional practices were boycotted. They were harassed by politically-motivated

lawsuits. Workers found themselves unemployable. Renters were turned out of their lodgings. Even wealthy and influential dissenters, like the state's Episcopalians, found it impossible to obtain charters of incorporation for colleges, banks, and other institutions.

There were significant differences between the Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties. Because they were the "ins" the structure of government itself provided Federalists with the matrix for control and communication: every elected official who sympathized with the Federalist program and every official appointed by the Federalists was, perforce, a political agent. So too were the ministers of the established churches, who in many states also controlled the schools and colleges. The financial resources of government and the private wealth of supporters of Federalism assured the party control of most of the press, which was dependent for revenue on advertising and on government printing contracts. In consequence, the Federalists did not have to depend to any great degree on voluntary associations.

The Jeffersonians, on the other hand, faced a formidable organizational task. Not only did they have to overcome their own ambivalence about the legitimacy of voluntary associations in general and parties in particular, they also had to proceed without any substantial historical precedent -- except the organizations of the revolutionary era. Not surprisingly, many contemporaries, including the great Washington, viewed such activities as nothing less than an effort to overthrow government itself -- a point that he made much of in his Farewell Address. Before dismissing this as mere rhetorical excess, it is worth recalling that, lacking a precedent for organized political opposition, no one at the time had any reason to believe that a peaceable transfer of power was possible between parties. Moreover, accustomed to almost routine reelection of incumbents, the notion of frequent changes in office-

holders -- according to the will of the electorate -- was entirely beyond anyone's experience. Finally, this drama of political evolution unfolded against the background of violent international political upheaval -- the Terror in France and the upsurge and suppression of democratic movements in England.

The party system unfolded in differently in different places. In some states, like Pennsylvania and New York, where there were sharp differences between political and economic interests that were relatively evenly divided in terms of power, political parties came into being early on and were little more than a continuation of the struggle over ratification of the Constitution. In other places, like Connecticut, where, as Brooks Adams put it, "the wealthy, learned, and respectable united to crush the ignorant and vicious," party organizations did not appear until the eve of the election of 1800, in which Jefferson was elected President. Everywhere, however, the parties tended to be founded on local interests which varied from state to state. Thus, in New England, state support of the Congregational Church came to frame the opposition's efforts. In Pennsylvania and New York, on the other hand, struggles between commercial and agrarian interests held center stage. In the South, the power of the states relative to that of the federal government became central issues.

Jefferson was sufficiently satisfied with the development of the opposition party by 1796 to come out of retirement and run to the presidency against Washington's successor, John Adams. The loosely-coupled coalition of Congressional and state leaders, aided by democratic societies and the handful of newspapers that Jefferson and his friends had been able to subsidize, proved unable to oust the increasingly well-entrenched Federalists. (As runner-up, however, Jefferson was elected vice-president). Looking towards the election of 1800, the Republicans set about to create a disciplined hierarchy which connected the national leadership with state committees, which in turn

set up committees on country and town levels. Their job was to influence public opinion in favor of the opposition, to nominate slates of candidates, and to get out the vote on election day.

The Federalists responded to these measures with a set of overtly oppressive measures. These included including acts making the process of naturalization more difficult (many of Jefferson's supporters were immigrants), punishing politically active aliens with deportation, and giving the government power to levy criminal penalties on critics of federal officials (these were the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts passed in 1796). In addition, Congress voted to increase the size of the regular army in order to give the government power to crush the opposition by force. These measures in many instances forced Jeffersonian political activity underground but did not, apparently, diminish its effectiveness.

Ultimately, the success of the opposition depended on its ability to forge coalitions of sometimes unlikely elements. In Connecticut, for example, the Episcopalians joined with Baptists, Methodists, freethinkers, and other religious dissenters, in their intense dislike of the Congregationalist establishment, but parted company from these groups in supporting the Federalists' pro-British foreign policy and actions encouraging commercial and industrial development. Similarly, in the West, large landowners joined with frontiersmen in seeking to open the Mississippi to American commerce, but differed sharply over other issues, such as the rights of smallholders. Some were attracted to Jeffersonianism by ideological visions inspired by Thomas Paine's Rights of Man and the French Revolution. Other were attracted by the narrowest kinds of economic self interest, like the iron mongers and button makers who believed that the tariff afforded them insufficient protection from foreign competition.

Accommodating these disparate elements was the condition of success. But such coalition building altered the nature of the party as a political force. The essence of this change was perhaps best expressed by Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural address, when he declared, "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." Writing on the eve of Jefferson's inauguration, Hamilton privately expressed a similarly conciliatory spirit. "I admit," he wrote

that his [Jefferson's] politics are tainted with fanaticism; that he is too much in earnest in his democracy; that he has been a mischievous enemy to the principle measures of our past administration; that he is crafty and persevering in his objects; that he is not scrupulous about the means of success, nor very mindful of truth, and that he is a contemptible hypocrite. But it is not true, as is alleged, that he is an enemy to the power of the Executive, or that he is for confounding all the powers in the House of Representatives. . . . Nor is it true that Jefferson is zealot enough to do anything in pursuance of his principles which will contravene his popularity or interest. He is as likely as any man I know to temporize -- to calculate what will be likely to promote his own reputation and advantage; and the probable result of such a temper is the preservation of systems, though originally opposed, which, being once established, could not be overturned without danger to the person who did it. To mind my a true estimate of Mr. Jefferson's character warrants the expectation of a temporizing rather than a violent system. . . . (AH to James A. Bayard, 1/16/1801, in Koch, 586-7).

These moments of forbearing reflection notwithstanding, the level of conflict between the parties remained high. Hamilton was shot to death three years later by Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States. A decade later, many New England Federalists would agitate for secession from the Union. In states like Connecticut, where the

Federalists still held sway, oppression of Democrats and religious dissenters actually intensified. But the principle of organized opposition based on political associations had been legitimated; never again would the right of Americans to voluntarily associate in pursuit of political ends be seriously questioned.

Out of power, the Federalists revised their views of political associations. Although some turned their energies and their not inconsiderable financial and intellectual resources to formal party activity, this proved, in the long run, to be a fruitless endeavor. In the dawning Age of the Common Man, wealth, learning, and respectability were disabilities unless accompanied by a sincere commitment to equality and a willingness to engage the realities of the electoral marketplace. As they lost their grip on voters, many Federalists turned -- and with far greater success -- to forming religious, educational, and charitable associations. These initiatives were not devoid of political intent, but generally did not seek to directly influence the electoral process.

By 1818, Federalism as a distinct political force expired. To the extent that it survived at all, it was as a conservative faction within the Democratic Party. After a period of one-party rule, known as the "Era of Good Feelings," a two party system reemerged, when the conservative and radical factions (one led by John Quincy Adams, the other by Andrew Jackson) went in their separate directions. In many ways, the emergence of Jacksonianism followed the earlier pattern of Jeffersonianism, with the opposition basing its activities extensively on a subsidized press, on hierarchical party structures, and on political associations (workingmens' or mechanics' societies) whose purpose was to enfranchise -- by providing political education and encouraging political participation -- among the common people. It was this configuration of associational activity that De Tocqueville observed during his visit to the United States in the late 1820s.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI

Cantonment of the American Army, on Hudson's River,

10th May, 1783.

Proposals for establishing a Society, upon the principles therein mentioned, whose Members shall be officers of the American Army, having been communicated to the several regiments of the respective lines, they appointed an officer from each, who, in

conjunction with the general officers, should take the same into consideration at their meeting this day, at which the Honorable MAJOR GENERAL BARON DE STEUBEN, the senior officer present, was pleased to preside.

The proposals being read, fully considered, paragraph by paragraph, and the amendments agreed to, MAJOR GENERAL KNOX, BRIGADIER GENERAL HAND, BRIGADIER GENERAL HUNTINGTON, and CAPTAIN SHAW, were chosen to revise the same, and prepare a copy to be laid before this assembly at their next meeting, to be holden at MAJOR GENERAL BARON DE STEUBEN'S quarters, on Tuesday, the 13th instant.

Tuesday, 13th May, 1783.

The representatives of the American Army being assembled agreeably to adjournment, the plan for establishing a Society, whereof the officers of the American Army are to be Members, is accepted, and is as follows, viz.:

"It having pleased the Supreme Governor of the Universe, in the disposition of human affairs, to cause the separation of the colonies of North American from the domination of Great Britain, and, after a bloody conflict of eight years, to establish them free, independent and sovereign States, connected, by alliances founded on reciprocal advantage, with some of the great princes and powers of the earth.

"To perpetuate, therefore, as well the remembrance of this vast event, as the mutual friendships which have been formed under the pressure of common danger, and, in many instances, cemented by the blood of the parties, the officers of the American Army do hereby, in the most solemn manner, associate, constitute and combine themselves into one SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, to endure as long as they shall endure, or

any of their eldest male posterity, and, in failure thereof, the collateral branches who may be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and Members.

"The officers of the American Army having generally been taken from the citizens of America, possess high veneration for the character of that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus; and being resolved to follow his example, by returning to their citizenship, they think they may with propriety denominate themselves--

THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI

"The following principles shall be immutable and form the basis of the Society of the Cincinnati:

"AN INCESSANT ATTENTION TO PRESERVE INVIOATE THOSE EXALTED RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF HUMAN NATURE, FOR WHICH THAT HAVE FOUGHT AND BLED, AND WITHOUT WHICH THE HIGH RANK OF A RATIONAL BEING IS A CURSE INSTEAD OF A BLESSING.

"AN UNALTERABLE DETERMINATION TO PROMOTE AND CHERISH, BETWEEN THE RESPECTIVE STATES, THAT UNION AND NATIONAL HONOR SO ESSENTIALLY NECESSARY TO THEIR HAPPINESS, AND THE FUTURE DIGNITY OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE.

"TO RENDER PERMANENT THE CORDIAL AFFECTION SUBSISTING AMONG THE OFFICERS. THIS SPIRIT WILL DICTATE BROTHERLY KINDNESS IN ALL THINGS, AND PARTICULARLY, EXTEND TO THE MOST SUBSTANTIAL ACTS OF BENEFICENCE, ACCORDING TO THE ABILITY OF THE SOCIETY, TOWARDS THOSE OFFICERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WHO UNFORTUNATELY MAY BE UNDER THE NECESSITY OF RECEIVING IT.

"The General Society will, for the sake of frequent communications, be divided into State Societies, and these again into such districts as shall be directed by the State Society.

"The Societies of the districts to meet as often as shall be agreed upon by the State Society, those of the State on the fourth day of July annually, or oftener, if they shall find it expedient, and the General Society on the first Monday in May, annually, so long as they shall deem it necessary, and afterwards, at least once in every three years.

"At each meeting, the principles of the Institution will be fully considered, and the best measures to promote them adopted.

"The State Societies will consist of all the members resident in each State respectively; and any member removing from one State to another, is to be considered, in all respects, as belonging to the Society of the State in which he shall actually reside.

"The State Societies to have a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer, to be chosen annually, by a majority of votes, at the State meeting.

"Each State meeting shall write annually, or oftener, if necessary, a circular letter, to the State Societies, noting whatever they may think worthy of observation, respecting the good of the Society, or the general union of the States, and giving information of the officers chosen for the current year; copies of these letters shall be regularly transmitted to the Secretary-General of the Society, who will record them in a book to be assigned for that purpose.

"The State Society will regulate everything respecting itself and the Societies of its districts consistent with the general maxims of the Cincinnati, judge of the qualifications of the members who may be proposed, and expel any member who, by a conduct inconsistent with the gentleman and a man of honor, or by an opposition to the interests of the community in general, or the Society in particular, may render himself unworthy to continue a member.

"In order to form funds which may be respectable, and assist the unfortunate, each officer shall deliver to the Treasurer of the State Society one month's pay, which shall remain for ever to the use of the State Society; the interest only of which, if necessary, to be appropriated to the relief of the unfortunate.

"Donations may be made by persons not of the Society, and by members of the Society, for the express purpose of forming permanent funds for the use of the State Society, and the interests of those donations appropriated in the same manner as that of the month's pay.

"Moneys, at the pleasure of each member, may be subscribed in the Societies of the districts, or the State Societies, for the relief of the unfortunate members, or their widows and orphans, to be appropriated by the State Society only.

"The meeting of the General Society shall consist of its officers and a representation from each State Society, in number not exceeding five, whose expenses shall be borne by their respective State Societies.

"In the general meeting, the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer-Generals, shall be chosen, to serve until the next meeting.

"The circular letters which have been written by the respective State Societies to each other, and their particular laws, shall be read and considered, and all measures concerted which may conduce to the general intendment of the Society.

"It is probably that some persons may make donations to the General Society, for the purpose of establishing funds for the further comfort of the unfortunate, in which case, such donations must be placed in the hands of the Treasurer-General, the interests only of which to be disposed of, if necessary, by the general meeting.

"All the officers of the American army, as well as those who have resigned with honor, after three years service in the capacity of officers, or who have been deranged by the resolution of Congress upon the several reforms of the army, as those who shall have continued to the end of the war, have the right to become parties to this institution; provided that they subscribe one month's pay, and sign their names to the general rules, in their respective State Societies, those who are present with the Army immediately; and others within six months after the Army shall be disbanded, extraordinary cases excepted; the rank, time of service, resolution of Congress by which any have been deranged, and place of residence must be added to each name -- and as a testimony of affection to the memory and the off-spring of such officers as have died in the service, their eldest male branches shall have the same right of becoming members, as the children of the actual members of the Society.

"Those officers who are foreigners, not resident in any of the States, will have their names enrolled by the Secretary-General, and are to be considered as members in the Societies of any of the States in which they may happen to be.

"And as there are, and will at all times be, men in the respective States eminent for their abilities and patriotism, whose views may be directed to the same laudable objects with those of the Cincinnati, it shall be a rule to admit such characters, as Honorary Members of the Society, for their own lives only: Provided always, That the number of Honorary Members, in each State, does not exceed a ratio of one to four of the officers or their descendants.

"Each State Society shall obtain a list of its members, and at the first annual meeting, the State Secretary shall have engrossed, on parchment, two copies of the Institution of the Society, which every member present shall sign, and the Secretary shall endeavor to procure the signature of every absent member; one of those lists to be transmitted to the Secretary-General, to be kept in the archives of the Society, and the other to remain in the hands of the State Secretary. From the State lists, the Secretary-General must make out, at the first general meeting, a complete list of the whole Society, with a copy of which he will furnish each State Society.

"The Society shall have an Order, by which its members shall be known and distinguished, which shall be a medal of gold, of a proper size to receive the emblems, and suspended by a deep blue riband two inches wide, edged with white, descriptive of the union of France and America, viz.:

"The principle figure,
CINCINNATUS:

Three Senators presenting him with a sword and other military ensigns -- on a field
in the background, his wife standing at the door of their Cottage -- near it.

A PLOUGH AND INSTRUMENTS OF HUSBANDRY.

Round the whole,

OMNIA RELINQUIT SERVARE REMPUBLICAM.

On the reverse,

Sun rising -- a city with open gates, and vessels entering the port -- Fame
crowning CINCINNATUS with a wreath, inscribed

VIRTUTIS PRAEMIUM.

Below,

HANDS JOINED, SUPPORTING A HEART,

With the motto,

ESTO PERPETUA.

round the whole,

SOCIETAS CINNATORUM INSTITUTUA.

A.D. 1783."

"A NEW AND STRANGE ORDER OF MEN": ATTACKS ON THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI

It was not long before America was abuzz with news -- and concern -- about the organization formed by the revolutionary military leadership, which included among its members the august General Washington himself. Perhaps the Society would have attracted less notoriety had some of its members not been so outspoken in their contempt for popular government -- a contempt so well known that British agents fully expected the Cincinnati to overthrow Congressional government. "God grant us government, as states, free & independent, or give us a king," wrote Colonel Ebenezer Huntington to his brother in Connecticut, "even tyranny is better than anarchy" (quoted in Myers 1983, 48).

But the real issue was not the members' supposed monarchical sympathies. Rather, the fact remained that the officers and many of their men, who had indeed pledged their "lives, their honor, and their sacred fortunes" to the cause of independence, remained unpaid by a national government without resources and without the will to raise them. Portrayed by some as "the Harpies and Locusts of the Country" for pressing their financial demands on Congress, conventions met in a number of states in the summer of 1783 to urge repudiation of the nation's obligations. The Society was broadly seen as a powerful and illicit political pressure group.

In this setting, the Society -- which had no precedent in America -- appeared especially alarming. Though it shared many of the features of Freemasonry, including mutual charitable assistance, it was not made up of locally-based lodges composed of persons of the middling sort: its focus was national and its members included some of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the country. More alarming, the Society, whose membership drew exclusively from the ranks of commissioned officers (i.e., those with money and political influence) and in which membership was not merely hereditary, but passed along by primogeniture, smacked of the very aristocratic institutions that many Americans thought their revolution had repudiated.

Although the Society would eventually provoke a storm of criticism, one of the first and most comprehensive attacks was penned late in 1783, by Aedanus Burke, a justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Within a year, Burke's pamphlet had been serialized in newspaper throughout the country and had been reprinted in Hartford, New York City, Newport, and Philadelphia. A number of states followed Burke's suggestions with regard to diminishing the Society's influence. In March of 1784, the Massachusetts legislature condemned the Cincinnati for attempting to usurp powers delegated to government and of seeking to be an "Imperium in Imperio." The resulting

outcry led the Society to tone down some of its more alarming by-laws, such as permitting foreign members and donors, and encouraged it to display a less visible public presence.

As its critics feared, the Cincinnati would play a crucial role both in influencing elected officials and in organizing public opinion in support of the Constitution and, with the establishment of the federal government, of measures favored by the Washington administration (in which Society members included the President, the Secretary of Treasury, the Secretary of War). Most importantly, the Cincinnati would provide a paradigm for the opposition's "democratic societies."

With the passage of time, the Society -- which still exists today -- became the model for a host of patriotic fraternal and sororal societies such as the Sons of the American Revolution (1889), the Daughters of the American Revolution (1890), the Colonial Dames of America (18__), and others. Veterans of later wars would follow the Society's lead in organizing politically to pressure government to serve their needs: the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) would be one of the most powerful political forces in America between 1865 and the turn of the century; the American Legion would serve a similar purpose for veterans of the first World War. None of these, however, would limit membership to officers or permit membership to be passed along to descendants. Nor, despite a tendency to support politically conservative causes, would later veterans' organizations boast so ambitious and alarming a political agenda.

CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
SOCIETY OR ORDER

OF
CINCINNATI
LATELY INSTITUTED
By the Major-Generals, Brigadier-Generals, and
other Officers of the AMERICAN ARMY.
PROVING THAT IT CREATES
A RACE OF HEREDITARY PATRICIANS
OR
NOBILITY.
INTERSPERSED WITH REMARKS
On its CONSEQUENCES to the FREEDOM
and HAPPINESS of a REPUBLIC.
Addressed to the PEOPLE of South-
Carolina, and their Representatives.

THE following publication is intended to convey a few observations to my fellow citizens, on a new *Society or Institution* lately established throughout the continent, composed of Major-Generals, Brigadiers, and other Officers of our army. It is instituted by the name of "THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI;" and it has arrived to considerable strength and maturity already. . . .

The more I reflect on this institution, and the political consequences it will involve, the more I am filled with astonishment, that self created as it is, and coming upon us in so bold and questionable an appearance, so deeply planned, and closely executed, yet that it should have been so little attended to, that it is not even the subject of private conversation. Could I for a moment view this Order with indifference, it would be impossible not to smile, to behold the populace of America, in their town committees

and town meetings, so keenly bent on petty mischiefs, in full chase and cry after a few insignificant tories, and running on regardless of an establishment, which ere long must strip the posterity of the middling and lower classes of every influence or authority, and leave them nothing but insignificance, contempt, and the wretched privilege of murmuring when it is too late. So thoughtless are the multitude!

My design at present is to shew, first, What this Order or Society seems to be; in the next place, To demonstrate what it really is, and will turn out to be; and lastly, To prove there is an absolute necessity of extirpating it altogether.

From the outside appearance of the *Association*, or instrument of writing which combines this Order, and which has been sent thro' several states by circular letters, it is nothing more than an "Association, Constitution, and Combination of the Generals, and other Officers of the Army, who have served three years, . . . into a Society of Friends, to perpetuate the memory of the Revolution, and their own mutual friendship; to endure as long as they shall endure, *or any of their eldest male posterity*: and in failure thereof, *the collateral branches who may be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and members*: To attend incessantly to preserve inviolate the exalted rights and liberties of human nature; for which they fought and bled. To promote and cherish between the respective states, Union and National Honor: To render permanent, cordial affection, and the spirit of brotherly love among the officers: To extend acts of beneficence towards those officers and their families who may unfortunately be under necessity of receiving it." They advance each a month's pay, and open a door for donations from others not of the society, and for the charitable purpose of raising a fund, as well as for the *political* one, of engaging the leading men of each state in the interests of the Order, they have the following rule: "And as there will at all times be men, in the respective states, eminent for their abilities and patriotism, whose views may be directed to the

same laudable objects with those of the Cincinnati; it shall be a rule to admit such characters as honorary members. . . ."

The quotations I have made are the words of the *General Association*: so that it seems to be the offspring of patriotism, friendship, and humanity. And that many of the officers who have not closely viewed the subject, favour it from those principles, I have no doubt. But as several of them are equal in knowledge and abilities to any men in America, it is hardly possible but that some of them must see into the nature and consequences of the institution. For, to come to the second part of my argument, it is in reality, and will turn out to be, *an hereditary peerage*; a nobility to them and their *male issue*, and in default thereof, to the *collateral branches*: what the lawyers would call -- A title of peerage of Cincinnati to them and their heirs male, remainder to their heirs general.

The sixth article of our confederation says, "Nor shall the United States in Congress assembled, not any of them grant any title of nobility." But the order of Cincinnati usurp a nobility without gift or grant, in defiance of Congress and the states, as I shall shew presently. And though the order cannot, at present be sanctioned by legal authority, yet that makes nothing against the consequences which will ensue. Though the Order is self-created, and an infringement of a general law of the Union; yet if the courage of the officers does not fail them; if they but keep up with the firmness and perseverance against opposition, for this will be but trifling, so unthinking are the people; if they have but patience, subtlety, and address to cloke their design under a pious name of raising a charitable fund; so as to make it go down only for a few years; even if they are obliged from policy to lay aside the *badge and blue ribbon*: My life for it, they will have leisure to laugh at, and master their opponents. And the next generation will drink as deep of noble blood, and a hereditary peerage be as firmly settled in each

potent family, and rivetted in our government, as any order of nobility is in the monarchies of Europe. This order is planted in a fiery, hot ambition, and thirst for power; and its branches will end in tyranny. The Cincinnati will soon be corrupted, and the spirit of the people depressed; for in less than a century it will occasion such an inequality in the condition of our inhabitants, that the country will be composed of only two ranks of men; the patricians or nobles, and the rabble. This is the natural result of an establishment, whose departure is so sudden from our open professions of republicanism, that it must give a thinking mind most melancholy forebodings. This creating of a nobility, and breaking through our constitution, just as we were setting out in the world, is making that liberty which the Almighty has given us, a means for feeding our pride; and turning the blessings of Providence into a curse upon us.

Had the order been created by Congress or our own legislature, even in violation of the confederation and of our laws, I should not think it a matter of such moment: dukes, earls, or peers of the Cincinnati, sanctified by an act of Assembly or of Congress, would be understood by all of us. Their pretensions and exclusive privileges, the mode of their trial for life and death, &c. ascertained. But the self-created Cincinnati, like a proud imperious man, would set no bounds to its claims. Jealous that it held not anything on its own ambitious terms, as they had cut and carved titles for themselves and their posterity, they would be still grasping for every thing, and rising from one usurpation to another, as they succeeded.

Let us examine the ostensible reasons for instituting the Cincinnati. First, "to perpetuate the remembrance of the revolution." But will not the historian more effectually transmit to posterity; the memory of the revolution, and the illustrious actions achieved in bringing it about? And as to "preserving inviolate the exalted rights of human nature; these rights will in my opinion be much better preserved inviolate by

having no *distinct order* of patricians or nobility among us: which, however thought necessary to support the throne of a prince, or form a barrier between him and his people, is a bane and a curse to a republic; for unless you destroy the one, you cannot have the other.

Again. They will "attend incessantly to preserve inviolate the exalted rights of human nature." Are there then, most illustrious Cincinnati, two sorts of rights belonging to human nature? Is there one kind, subordinate, and on a level with the humble condition of Plebeians? and others *more exalted*, which the citizens are incapable of preserving inviolate, without the *incessant watching* of a dignified order of patricians? They must mean this or nothing. The people of America, it seems, are not fit to be trusted with their own *national power*, or their own affairs, unless the Order takes the superintendence and direction of them. Can contradiction be more strong and glaring? In one moment they institute an order, and raise a *distinction*, which looks down, as from an high mountain, on all beneath them: They have laid in ruins that fine, plain, level state of civil equality over which the sight of the beholder passed with pleasure; which God laid out for our use and happiness, and which our Laws and the nature of Republican government promised us: They have violated all; yet in the same breath, by way of a mask thrown over their doings, they spread before us the fine words last quoted. But this disguise is too thin: for in the name of Heaven, can any many in his senses believe that the remaining rights of the people which are yet left untouched, will not be ended and violated, by men, who disdaining the condition of private citizens, as below them, left it, and mounted up to the elevated and exclusive dignity of hereditary title?

. . . I know it will be denied, that the Order is, what I do boldly assert it to be, an *hereditary peerage*. Some of its members assume the cloak of political modesty, and

under it talk, that they are no more dangerous than a city-corporation of "shop-keepers, taylors, or other mechanics; or like the Free Masons and other clubs who wear badges or medals.: Here we see how ambition can assume all shapes and colours; and humble itself to the very dust to accomplish its purpose! This moment take upon the superintendence of empire, the *honour, union and happiness of nations*, and the *exalted rights of human nature*; and the very next, prostrate themselves to the level of men, with whom to be compared on any other occasion, the Order would deem an insult. I say, that a body of military commanders, distinguished from the rest of society under and institution founded on the illustrious actions of so singular a revolution as that of America: invested with the exclusive privilege of wearing a badge of their order, honorable to themselves, as it is ignominious to the people; elevated above others, and in parity among themselves: These, I say, are peers of the realm, *pares regni*, and nothing more or less. And that this order being entailed on the *male issue*, and in default thereof, on the *collateral lines*, makes it *hereditary*. And whether it be instituted by the legislature, who alone have the legal power to do it, or be usurped by the officers, it makes no difference in its consequences. . . .

But in support of the order it will be alleged, that the states cannot pay the army, the officers will be contented with this *bauble*, and they will not abuse it. "Tis like throwing a tub to a whale," say they. Should the states commit such a national iniquity, as not to pay their army, they merit eternal infamy, and to be *peer-ridden* into the bargain. And as to the officers resting satisfied with the *blue ribbon*, it is the nature of man never to be contented with any thing, nor secure of what he has, unless he be perpetually adding. And as this order would still be apprehensive of losing the exclusive honour and influence they had, they would eternally be caballing and working for more, to the disquiet of the government. And admitting the present members would not abuse it; is any one certain, that their children will make no ill use of it? The officers can transmit to

their posterity, their fortunes, their reputation, and the peerage of Cincinnati: but can they leave to them, as a legacy, that virtue which lately led them to encounter the hardships of a perilous war? Or when the present generation is off the stage, will the sons of our self-created patricians, who will not experience the adversity their fathers bore in defending their liberties; will they, finding themselves raised above their neighbours, agree to descend, and live on a footing of equality with them? Or will they not rather, relying on the rank and power of an aristocratic nobility, disdain private men, nor standing in fear of public laws, engross the offices, powers and influence of the republic, which should belong to the body of the people? Or in case any ambitious leader, or a few, should threaten the liberties of the commons, or Congress on a future day, invested with a revenue, a fleet and army, attempt a point of consequence, will they not support the one or the other, as it will be most likely to support their order? In such a dispute, their weight would turn the scale; for the number of the peers of the order, reckoning honorary members (which their good policy would lead them to choose out of the first rate men) cannot be far short of ten thousand; and as they will be the principal men in America, to suppose that each can, by his influence, procure two or three followers, who will adhere to his interest and service, is a reasonable calculation. Here is a body of 20 or 30,000 men immediately; and every generation will be adding to that number. . . .

[At this point, Burke provides a detailed description of how South Carolina's establishment, consisting of about 1,500 powerful plantation-owning families, took control of the legislature during the war and used it to illegally deprive the majority of any voice in government by a grossly inequitable system of apportionment and raising property qualifications for voting and holding office. He uses this example of an earlier usurpation of government in his own state to

suggest what might happen elsewhere through organizations like the Cincinnati].

. . .the public opinion and power of the government, is on the side of the aristocracy; at the same time that the spirit of the people is thoroughly broken. In other countries governments, like the human body, have had their growth, perfection and decay: but ours, like an untimely birth, suffered an abortion before it was in maturity to come into the world.

These remarks may appear trivial to some of my readers: but they are worthy, in my opinion, the attention of the philosopher and historian. They serve to shew, that the freedom of a country may be overturned by causes imperceptible to the multitude: and that when popular assemblies are carried away by violent passions, and strike at persons instead of things, they are then closely working for the aggrandisement of others; and while they avenge particular injuries on petty enemies, only lay a snare for that liberty which should be held most dear to them and their posterity.

To hear some thoughtless people boast of our democracy, when it does not exist, is pleasant: for our government, I have shewn, is an aristocracy; and it will be in a few years as fierce and oppressive as that of Poland or Venice, if the Order of Cincinnati be suffered to take root and spread in it, for it will complete what the Jacksonborough policy [the actions of the ultra-conservative South Carolina constitutional convention] has left undone. These fresh slips of nobility will spring up, overshadow and prevent the growth and flourishing of our youth; and soon cover under one dark shade of vile insignificance and subserviency, the descendants of the middle and lower order of the virtuous few, and protection-men: and after perishing every fair plant throughout the state, they will shoot forth branches, wide-spreading on every side: and finally yield

such bitter fruit, as will work a fatal poison to the little political happiness and health there is left us.

. . .The Cincinnati creates two distinct orders amongst us. 1st, A race of hereditary Nobles; founded on the military, together with the powerful families, and first rate, leading men in the state, whose view it will ever be, *to rule*: and 2d. The people of plebeians, whose only view is not to be oppressed; but whose certain fate it will be to suffer oppression under the institution: I have shewed that it is a deeply laid contrivance to beget, and perpetuate family grandeur in an aristocratic Nobility, to terminate at last in monarchical tyranny. And I now pass on to point out the constitutional means of opposing it. . . .

To crush this Order, then, without embroiling the state, there is but one way. Let the legislature immediately enter into spirited resolutions against it: let them tell the Order, and the world, that however pious or patriotic the pretence, yet any political combination of military commanders, is, in a republican government, extremely hazardous, and highly censurable. But that in instituting exclusive honours and privileges of an Hereditary Order, is a daring usurpation on the sovereignty of the republic: a dangerous insult to the rights and liberties of the people, and a fatal stab to that principle of equality, which forms the basis of our government; to establish which the people fought and bled as well as the Cincinnati; though the latter are now taking every measure to rob them of the credit, and the fruits of it. If this would not do, and the Order will go on; yet such a resolve would have a good effect. It would, like Ithuriel's spear in Milton, touch the Order; and however plausible the external appearance, under which it now sits transformed, the resolution would oblige it, as the fallen angel in paradise, to start up in its own true hideous shape and likeness; and then we should know how to grapple with it. And afterwards, though I am willing to

consider our officers as the plank, which bore us through the storm safe to land, yet I am one that would not let it be the means of drowning us in a calm, within the harbour. The examples of the wisest, and most renowned republics of which history furnishes any account, and the opinion of the ablest political writers, will support me in a doctrine, which I could discuss on the present occasion, if I were certain that our citizens, for whose information I am writing, were good stuff for republicans.

With regard to myself, I will be candid to own, that although I am morally certain the institution will entail upon us the evils I have mentioned: yet I have not the most distant idea, that it will come to a dissolution. The first class, or leading gentry in the state, and who will always hold the government, will find their interest in supporting a distinction that will gratify their ambition, by removing them far above their fellow citizens. The middling order of our gentry, and substantial land holders, may see its tendency, but they can take no step to oppose it; having little to do with the government. And the lower class, with the city populace, will never reason on it, till they feel the smart, and then they will have neither the power nor capacity for a reformation. Besides, the society will have more adherents from another quarter than they are aware of. The seeds of internal division, and a variety of humours are thick sown in this country. The legislature bearing hard on many families and individuals: public and private partiality and injustice: malcontents biassed in favour of monarchy: all this will raise a party, who out of hatred to the government of the people, will range themselves under the banners of any man or faction, to promote its interest, and be avenged.

These things I know too well, to entertain the vain hope of any individual succeeding in apposition. But although I foresee the consequences, yet I think it a point of duty to give this public testimony of my dislike to the Order. I trust its members will pardon

me, if I shall ever hold it ignominious, that those gallant citizens, who with as much valour and perseverance, though not without the same eclat, as the continental officers, stepped forth and assisted in subduing the Lion, should submit to be degraded by creatures of their own rank and condition.

CASSIUS

Charleston, October 10, 1783.

THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA, PHILADELPHIA

Although not the first of the democratic societies, the Pennsylvania organization was certainly the most influential. It sought, through the extensive publication of its

constitution and dissemination of its circular letter, to make itself the model for comparable organizations throughout the United States. It boasted among its early members such notable as Benjamin Franklin Bache (Franklin's grandson), the millionaire merchant Stephen Girard, and the astronomer David Rittenhouse.

The Society resembled the Cincinnati in many respects, including its commitment to public policy issues, its federal structure, and its institutionalization of interorganizational communication through committees of correspondence. But there were important formal differences. These included its emphasis on state organizations as the center of authority (in contrast to the Cincinnati's nationally-based "general Society") and the openness of membership (in contrast to the Cincinnati's exclusive and hereditary criteria). In addition, unlike the Cincinnati, the Democratic Society made no pretense of offering charitable assistance to its members -- an important step away from the mutual assistance traditions of Freemasonry.

Principles, Articles, and Regulations, Agreed upon, Drawn, and Adopted,

May 30, 1793

THE RIGHTS OF MAN, the genuine objects of Society, and the legitimate principles of Government, have been clearly developed by the successive Revolutions of America and France. Those events have withdrawn the veil which concealed the dignity and the happiness of the human race, and have taught us, no longer dazzled with adventitious splendor, or awed by antiquated usurpation, to erect the Temple of LIBERTY on the ruins of *Palaces* and *Thrones*.

AT this propitious period, when the nature of Freedom and Equality is thus practically displayed, and when their value, (best understood by those, who have paid the price of acquiring them) is universally acknowledged, the patriotic mind will naturally be solicitous, by every proper precaution, to preserve and perpetuate the Blessings which Providence hath bestowed upon our Country: For, in reviewing the history of Nations, we find occasion to lament, that the vigilance of the People has been too easily absorbed in victory; and that the prize which has been achieved by the wisdom and valor of one generation, has too often been lost by the ignorance and supineness of another.

WITH a view, therefore, to cultivate the just knowledge of rational Liberty, to facilitate the enjoyment and exercise of our civil Rights, and to transmit, unimpaired, to posterity, the glorious inheritance of a *free Republican Government*, the DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY of Pennsylvania is constituted and established. Unfettered by *religious* or *national* distinctions, unbiassed by party and unmoved by ambition, this Institution embraces the interest and invites the support of every virtuous citizen. The public good is indeed its sole object, and we think that the best means are pursued for obtaining it, when we recognize the following, as the fundamental principles of our association.

I. THAT the people have the inherent and exclusive right and power of making and altering forms of Government; and that for regulating and protecting our social interests, a REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT is the most natural and beneficial form, which the wisdom of Man has devised.

II. THAT the Republican Constitutions of the UNITED STATES and of the STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, being framed and established by the People, it is our duty as good

citizens, to support them. And in order effectually to do so, it is likewise the duty of every Freeman to regard with attention, and to discuss without fear, the conduct of the public Servants, in every department of Government.

III. THAT in considering the Administration of public affairs, men and measures should be estimated according to their intrinsic merits; and therefore, regardless of party spirit or political connection, it is the duty of every Citizen, by making the general welfare the rule of his conduct, to aid and approve those men and measures, which have an influence in promoting the prosperity of the Commonwealth.

IV. THAT in the choice of persons to fill the offices of government, it is essential to the existence of a free Republic, that every citizen should act according to his own judgement, and, therefore, any attempt to corrupt or delude the people in exercising the rights of suffrage, either by promising the favor of one Candidate or traducing the character of another, is an offence equally injurious to moral rectitude and civil Liberty.

V. THAT the *People of Pennsylvania* form but one indivisible community, whose political rights and interests, whose national honor and prosperity, must in degree and duration be forever the same; and, therefore, it is the duty of every freeman, and shall be the endeavor of the Democratic Society to remove the prejudices, to conciliate the affections, to enlighten the understanding, and to promote the happiness of all our fellow-citizens.

Having united these principles, we adopt the following Rules and Regulations for transacting the business of the Institution.

ARTICLE I. The Society shall be co-extensive with the State, but for the conveniency of the Members, there shall be a separate meeting in the City of Philadelphia, and one in each County, which shall chuse to adopt this Constitution. A Member admitted in the City, or in any County, shall of course be a Member of the Society at large; and may attend any of the Meetings wherever held.

ARTICLE II. A Meeting of the Society shall be held in the City of Philadelphia, on the first Thursday in every month, and in the respective Counties as often and at such times as they shall by their own Rules determine. . . .

ARTICLE III. The election of new Members and of the Officers of the Society shall be by ballot and by a majority of the votes of the Members present at each respective meeting. But no new member shall be voted for at the same meeting at which he is proposed. . . . Every Member on his admission shall subscribe to this Constitution and pay the sum of half a dollar to the Treasurer for the use of the Society.

ARTICLE IV. The Officers of the meeting in the City of Philadelphia shall consist of a *President, two Vice-Presidents, two Secretaries, one Treasurer and a Corresponding Committee* of five Members; and the meeting of the respective Counties shall chuse a *President* and such other *Officers* as they shall think proper. . . .

ARTICLES V. It shall be the duty of the Corresponding Committee, to correspond with the various meetings of the Society, and with all other Societies, that may be established on similar principles in any other of the United States, and to lay all communications which they shall make and receive, together with such other business as they shall from time to time deem proper, before the Society at a meeting held within their respective Counties. . . .

CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE COUNTIES, JULY 4, 1793

Fellow Citizen:

We have the pleasure to communicate to you a copy of the constitution of the Democratic Society, in hopes, that after a candid consideration of its principles, and objects, you may be induced to promote its adoption in the county of which you are an inhabitant.

Every mind, capable of reflection, must perceive, that the present crisis in the politics of nations is peculiarly interesting to America. The European Confederacy, transcendent in power, and unparalleled in iniquity, menaces the very existence of freedom. Already its baneful operation may be traced in the tyrannical destruction of the Constitution of Poland; and should the glorious efforts of France be eventually defeated, we have reason to presume, that, for the consummation of monarchical ambition, and the security of its establishments, this country, the only remaining repository of liberty, will not long be permitted to enjoy in peace, the honors of an independent, and the happiness of a republican government.

Nor are the dangers arising from a foreign source the only causes at this time, of apprehension and solicitude. The seeds of luxury appear to have taken root in our domestic soil; and the jealous eye of patriotism already regards the spirit of freedom and equality, as eclipsed by the pride of wealth and the arrogance of power.

This general view of our situation has led to the institution of the "Democratic Society." A constant circulation of useful information, and a liberal communication of

republican sentiments, were thought to be the best antidotes to any political poison, with which the vital principles of civil liberty might be attacked; for by such means, a fraternal confidence will be studiously marked; and a standard will be erected, to which, in danger and distress, the friends of liberty may successfully resort.

To attain these objects, then, and to cultivate on all occasions the love of peace, order, and harmony; and attachment to the constitution and a respect to the laws of our country will be the aim of "The Democratic Society." Party and personal considerations are excluded from a system of this nature; for in the language of the articles under which we are united, men and measures will only be estimated according to their intrinsic merits, and their influence in promoting the prosperity of the state.

From you, citizen, we hope to derive essential aid, in extending the Society and maintaining its general principles. We request therefore an early attention to the subject, and solicit a constant correspondence.

We are with esteem, your
Fellow Citizens.

Philadelphia, 4, July, 1793

RECOLLECTIONS OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN RURAL CONNECTICUT

Assessing the impact of the democratic societies is difficult not only because many of them were organized outside of cities and towns with newspapers, but also because in states where the Federalist regime was especially repressive, they necessarily operated in secrecy.

Fascinating accounts of one of these rural societies came to light in 1819, in the course of a libel trial involving Joshua Stow, a democratic leader and officeholder of Middletown, Connecticut. Stow's Federalist enemies had accused him of being an "infidel" -- an accusation as serious as being called a communist would be in the 1950s. When Stow sued for libel, his enemies brought forward as evidence his involvement in an "Infidel Club or ESOTHIAN SOCIETY" three decades earlier.

Contrary to the charges of Federalists in their efforts to suppress democratic societies during the 1790s, the testimony offered by both Stow's friends and his enemies indicate that the Durham group was not organized at the instigation of agents of the French revolution. Though it certainly drew on some of the same ideas that inspired the French revolutionaries, including the writings of Paine and Voltaire, the Esothian Society -- and doubtless many other groups like it -- preceded the overthrow of the French monarchy. Most intriguing is the suggestion that the early democratic societies drew on the substantive and organizational heritage of the Great Awakening, with groups of this kind formed originally out of religious motives, but, because of the intellectual and political climate of the period, as well as by the logic of the evangelical impulse, being led towards more secular concerns.

Many members of the Esothian Society became leading religious dissenters and proponents of Jeffersonianism. Besides Stow himself, who was eventually awarded the postmastership of Middletown and the office of federal excise tax collector for his services to the party, was a proponent of Universalism. In 1817, he introduced the resolution in the state's constitutional convention which disestablished the Congregational church. (He did so with the ringing declaration that "government had no more right to provide by law for the support of worship of the Supreme Being, than for support of the worship of the Devil"). Thomas Lyman, who is said to have travelled

to Virginia to pay personal homage Jefferson, was a founder of Durham's Methodist community and an outspoken opponent of Connecticut's ecclesiastical establishment. Manoah Camp, one of the founders of Durham's extensive shoemaking industry, was also an early Methodist.

The testimony suggests the ways in which, as political associations began to form, they provided intellectual bases for linking personal grievances, local quarrels and resentments (such as the struggle over Connecticut's ecclesiastical establishment and, more narrowly, the doctrinal persuasion of the pastor of the Middlefield church) to global conceptual frameworks about the nature of society and government.

REPORT
OF THE CASE OF
JOSHUA STOW *vs.* SHERMAN CONVERSE,
FOR A LIBEL. . .

Samuel C. Camp. There was a Society formed in Durham about thirty years since, by the youngerly and middle aged men, which excited considerable anxiety among the people. There were but few members when I was invited to join them. It was considered as a private meeting -- its object was instruction, reading, and discussing subjects. Mr. Stow was a member. The questions discussed were sometimes political, though most generally religious. A chapter in the Bible was usually read. I remember that this questions was there discussed: Is there a Being or Spirit as the Devil? Mr. Stow asked me in the meeting if I believed it: I told him I did and that he must too, if he believed in the Scriptures. He said he did not believe it, for said he, in a very dark night I went alone into the woods, and prayed that if there was such a being as the Devil, he might appear to me -- he did not appear. therefore, he said, he did not believe there was such a spirit. If there was such an one he wished to see him. There was before the Society dissolved, a Library established, called the Esothian Library. Soon after this, I with a number of others withdrew. Among the Books contained in the Library were Voltaire's works, Petit Pierre, and some other Infidel works. I have often heard Mr. Stow express his disbelief in the Scriptures and not according with my own. Besides, he did utter Infidel sentiments in the discussions in the Society.

Ques. by Defendant's Counsel: Did Ethan Allen's Bible belong to the Library?

Ans. No.

Ques. by same. Was Mr. Stow a member of the Society as long as it continued?

Ans. Mr. Stow did not belong to the Society at its commencement. . . . The Society finally became such that those who believed in the Christian Religion, withdrew themselves. There was great talk about it at the time. The *professed* object was a good one. . . . After I withdrew they met at Spelman's [Tavern], I suppose to read Paine, and such works. . . .

Manoah Camp. This Society was formed as much as twenty-nine years ago, and continued between four and five years. We used frequently to discuss religious questions and sometimes political ones, to accustom us to express our ideas and induce us to read. . . . The object of the Society was to make us bold, and learn to read -- to be friends to each other, and friends to the world --to watch the sick, &c. In our discussions I don't know as we calculated to side according to principle, but to strengthen the mind. Mr. Stow's father was a rigid man -- a New Light Presbyterian. Mr. Stow formerly had religious exercises and was affected, and with others wandered about the streets exhorting, &c. I spoke to Mr. Stow about the story of the Devil. I told him what I had heard -- he did not deny it. One night (I told him I understood) he could not rest, because the Lord would not hear him, because he did not pray loud enough -- he was ashamed to pray aloud in the house, and he got up in his linen and went to Black Pond on the mountain, and prayed to the Almighty till he was exhausted. He thought the Lord did not hear him, and if he could not raise one Spirit, he would try another; and then after resting, he turned round and prayed to the Devil, to see if he could rouse

him. I told him all this and he smiled, as if it was somehow some. I did not consider Mr. Stow an Infidel. . . .

Thomas Lyman. I was a member of the Esothian Society which was formed in the year 1788, it was chiefly composed of young men, whose object was to obtain information. The members contributed one Dollar each, and bought books, and the Society had the benefit of them. The Society existed about a year when I joined them. They met at my nephew's, (Noah Talcott's). They asked me to join.

I did, and attended. Their inquiries were rational. They devoted their attention to grammar, geography, and the first rudiments of literature. They had a president and Vice-President, and met once a week -- chose sides, and discussed questions, and things went on very harmoniously, say three or four years. The meetings were pleasant and instructive. I got rid of many prejudices myself, and imbibed instruction. There was no eating or drinking, but harmony, affection, and brotherly love increased among them. The Society continued until many of the members removed away. There was nothing irreligious among them, and nothing like Infidelity. They read the Bible frequently and conversed about religious and political subjects. We sided on questions by lots and sometimes not; but volunteered, and occasionally exchanged sides.

Ques. by Defendant's Counsel. How long were you a member?

Ans. I continued two years or more, and owned a part of the library. I left Mr. Stow a member. He bought into the library. I don;t remember as Mr. Stow was one of the committee of the library. I was, and am now, one of that committee. The library was kept in various places. . . . Among the books was Voltaire's Philosophy, which I purchased; his Universal History; his History of Charles the 12th, and his Philosophical Dictionary. Paine's Age of Reason is now there. . . . There were but few Deistical books.

The library dwindled away, because members got tired of it. There was no division that interrupted the harmony of the Society. None of them turned preachers or *lawyers*. . . .

This piece, published Feb. 22, 1790, was here read by the Plaintiff's Counsel, and is as follows:--

A Liberty Pole!

Mr. Dunning -- In a country like ours, where the people choose their own rulers, and consequently have the right to advise them, and even to change them, by electing if they please -- I say in such country, it is not strange that men of candour should view with astonishment an ensign of sedition under the specious name of a liberty pole.

The pole is erected not far from the town where I live, stands as a testimony of the surprising influence which a sly insidious man may have over the simple. The man who was the chief instigator in setting up this pole, is certainly a person of more than common intrigue, and therefore, those persons who assisted him, any, in some measure, be excused. He removed the doubts of some by telling them it could do no hurt, but might do some good, &c. If this cunning leader had nothing in view but to influence the national councils, it would certainly appear like a foolish thing, and quite unworthy of his subtle character, for it requires no great sagacity to see that a petition presented in Congress, in a respectful manner, would be more conformable to the

principles of our constitution, and consequently more likely to have effect on the national government. . . .

This known Infidel, with a smooth tongue, goes round to those people who were friends to religion, but were dissatisfied with the direct tax, and persuades them to assist in raising a liberty pole, thus turning their political prejudices to the aid of Infidelity and discord. And so complete was his influence, that he got the pole erected within a stone's throw of the Meeting-house, without having his designs mistrusted by those who assisted. Thus he gained what he wished for, or at least, a promising prospect; for if the federalists cut down the pole, it would be considered by those who erected it, as a violation of civil rights, and would produce the discord which the leader wanted. On the contrary, if the pole was suffered to stand, he knew it would be disagreeable to the federalists, and standing so near the Meeting-house, would at least interrupt their devotions on the Sabbath; besides, if the pole were suffered to stand, it would give him support in his assertions, that a majority of the parish were in favor of the measure, &c.

I believe the wooden image has not as yet had the full effect which was designed, for there has no quarrel yet ensued on that account, and I hope there never will. It ought, however, to be a caution to honest people, not to be led too much by a speculator.

TOM TWO EYES"

THE FEDERALIST ATTACK ON THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

The Federalists and their opponents had been trading shots for years over the propriety of political associations. But the debate reached a new pitch when President Washington, doubtless with Hamilton's encouragement, attacked them in his State of the Union Address in the fall of 1794. The pretext of the attack was the Societies' supposed role in encouraging the "Whiskey Rebellion," in which Pennsylvania frontiersmen mounted armed resistance to federal excise tax collections. The opposition, quite accurately as it turned out, regarded Washington's statements as an effort to smear the opposition. In fact, the local democratic societies had had nothing to do with the rebellion and it had been roundly attacked by societies throughout the nation. But the real issue, as the ensuing congressional debate indicates, was whether or not political associations had any right to exist in a republic. The more extreme Federalists argued that the appropriate forums for expressing political opinions were governmental (in town meetings) or individually, between constituent and

representative. The Jeffersonians defended the right of association as essential to guarding against the abuse of power by government.

Washington's speech and the Congressional debate that followed were key events in defining the nature of voluntary associations ("self-created societies") and their relation to government. Most significantly, the Federalist attack on "self-created societies" forced the Jeffersonians to defend voluntary associations, which -- in the case of the Cincinnati -- they had previously vehemently criticized. The result was that, by the mid-1790s, both parties agreed on the essential legitimacy of voluntary associations, although both remained profoundly uncomfortable with the idea. Notably, the Federalist actions against the opposition in the late 1790s did not include efforts to suppress political associations, but only sought to punish the seditious actions of individuals.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, SIXTH ANNUAL ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

United States, November 19, 1794

Fellow citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives: When we call to mind the gracious indulgence of Heaven, by which the American People became a nation; when we survey the general prosperity of our country, and look forward to the riches, power, and happiness, to which it seems destined; with the deepest regret do I announce to you, that during your recess, some of the citizens of the United States have been found capable of an insurrection. It is due, however, to the character of our government, and to its stability, which cannot be shaken by the enemies of order, feeling to unfold the course of this event.

During the session of the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety, it was expedient to exercise the legislative power, granted by the constitution of the United States, "to lay and collect excises." In a majority of the States, scarcely an objection was heard to this mode of taxation. In some, indeed, alarms were at first conceived, until they were banished by reasons and patriotism. In the four western counties of Pennsylvania, a prejudice, fostered and embittered by the artifice of men, who labored for an ascendancy over the will of others, by the guidance of their passions, produced symptoms of riot and violence. It is well known, that Congress did not hesitate to examine the complaints which were presented, and to relieve them, as far as justice dictated, or general convenience would permit. But the impression, which this moderation made on the discontented, did not correspond, with what it deserved. The arts of delusion were no longer confined to the efforts of the designing individuals.

The very forbearance to press prosecutions was misinterpreted into a fear of urging the execution of the laws; and associations of men began to denounce threats against the officers employed. From a belief, that by a more formal concert, their operation might be defeated, certain self-created societies assume the tone of condemnation. Hence, while the greater part of Pennsylvania itself were conforming themselves to the acts of excise, a few counties were resolved to frustrate them. It was now perceived, that every expectation from the tenderness which had been hitherto pursued, was unavailing, and that further delay could only create an opinion of impotency or irresolution in the government. Legal process was, therefore, delivered to the marshal, against the rioters and the delinquent distillers. . . .

On the one hand, the judiciary was pronounced to be stripped of its capacity to enforce the laws; crimes, which reached the very existence of social order, were perpetrated without controul, the friends of government were insulted, abused, and

overawed into silence, or an apparent acquiescence; and the yield to this treasonable fury of so small a portion of the United States, would be to violate the fundamental principle of our constitution, which enjoins that the will of the majority shall prevail. On the other, to array citizen against citizen, to publish the dishonor of such excesses, to encounter the expense, and other embarrassments of so distant an expedition, were steps too delicate, too closely interwoven with any affecting considerations, to be lightly adopted. . . .

While there is cause to lament, that occurrences of this nature should have disgraced the name, or interrupted the tranquillity of any part of our community, or should have diverted to a new application, any portion of the public resources, there are not wanting real and substantial consolations for the misfortune. It has demonstrated, that our prosperity rests on solid foundations; by furnishing an additional proof, that my fellow citizens understand the true principles of government and liberty: that they feel their inseparable union: that notwithstanding all the devices which have been used to sway them from their interest and duty, they are now as ready to maintain the authority of the laws against licentious invasions, as they were to defend their rights against usurpation. It has been a spectacle, displaying the highest advantage, the value of Republican Government, to behold the most and least wealthy of our citizens standing in the same ranks as private soldiers; preeminently distinguished by being the army of the constitution; undeterred by a march of three hundred miles over rugged maintains, by the approach of an inclement season, or by any other discouragement. . . .

To every description, indeed, of citizens let praise be given. But let them persevere in their affectionate vigilance over that precious depository of American happiness, the constitution of the United States. Let them cherish it too, for the sake of those, who

from every clime are daily seeking a dwelling in our land. And when in the calm moments of reflection, they shall have retraced the origin and progress of the insurrection, let them determine, whether it has not been fomented by combinations of men, who, careless of consequences, and disregarding the unerring truth, that those who rouse, cannot always appease a civil convulsion, have disseminated, from an ignorance or perversion of facts, suspicions, jealousies, and accusations of the whole government. . . .

MONDAY, November 24.

Answer to the President's Speech

. . .Mr. FITZSIMONS then rose and said, that it would seem somewhat incongruous for the House to present an Address to the PRESIDENT which omitted all notice of so very important an article in his Speech as that referring to the self-created societies. Mr.

F. then read an amendment, which gave rise to a very interesting debate. The amendment was in these words:

"As part of this subject, we cannot withhold our reprobation of the self-created societies, which have risen up in some parts of the Union, misrepresenting the conduct of the Government, and disturbing the operation of the laws, and which, by deceiving and inflaming the ignorant and weak, may naturally be supposed to have stimulated and urged the insurrection.

These are "institutions, not strictly unlawful, yet not less fatal to good order and true liberty; and reprehensible in the degree that our system of government approaches to perfect political freedom."

MR. GILES stated at large his sentiments as to this expression in the Speech of the PRESIDENT about self-created societies. The tone of that passage in the Speech had made a great deal of noise without doors, and it was likely to produce a considerable agitation within doors. . . .

MR. GILES next entered into an economium of some length on the public services and personal character of the PRESIDENT. He vindicated himself from any want of respect or esteem towards him. He then entered into an examination of the propriety of the expression employed by the PRESIDENT, with regard to self-created societies. Mr. G. said, that there was not an individual in American, who might not come under the charge of being a member of some one or another self-created society. Associations of this kind, religious, political, philosophical, were to be found in every quarter of the Continent. The Baptists and Methodists, for example, might be termed self-created societies. The people called Friends, were of the same kind. Every pulpit in the United States might be included in this vote of censure, since, from every one of them, upon

occasion, instructions had been delivered, not only for the eternal welfare. but likewise for the temporal happiness of the people. There had been other societies in Pennsylvania for several purposes. The venerable Franklin had been at the head of one, entitled a society for political information. They had criminated the conduct of the Governor of the State and of the Governors of other States, yet they were not prosecuted or disturbed. There was, if he mistook not, once a society in this State, for the purpose of opposing or subverting the existing constitution. They were also unmolested. If the House are to censure the Democratic societies, they might do the same by the Cincinnati Society. It is out of the way of the Legislature to attempt checking or restraining public opinion. If the self-created societies act contrary to law, they are unprotected, and let the law pursue them, That a man is a member of one of these societies will not protect him from an accusation for treason, if the charge is well-founded. If the charge is not well founded, if the societies, in their proceedings, keep within the verge of the law, Mr. G. would be glad to learn what was to be the sequel? If the House undertake to censure particular classes of men, who can tell where they will stop? Perhaps it may be advisable to commence moral philosophers, and compose a new system of ethics for the citizens of America. In that case, there would be many other subjects for censure, as well as the self-created societies. Land-jobbing, for example, has been in various instances brought to such a pass that it might be defined swindling on a broad scale. Paper money, also, would be a subject of very tolerable fertility for the censure of a moralist. Mr. G. proceeded to enumerate other particulars on this head, and again insisted on the sufficiency of the existing laws for the punishment of every existing abuse. He observed, that gentlemen were sent to this House, not for the purpose of passing indiscriminate votes of censure, but to legislate only. By adopting the amendment of Mr. FITZSIMONS, the House would only produce recrimination on the part of the societies, and raise them into much more importance than they possibly could have acquired if they had not been distinguished by a vote of

censure from that House. Gentlemen were interfering with a delicate right, and they would be much wiser to let the Democratic societies alone. Did the House imagine that their censure, like the wand of a magician, would lay a spell on these people? It would be quite the contrary, and the recrimination of the societies would develop the propriety of having meddled with them at all. One thing ought never to be forgotten, that if these people acted wrong, the law was open to punish them; and if they did not, they would care very little for a vote of that House. Why all this particular deviation from the common line of business to pass random votes of censure? The American mind was too enlightened to bear the interposition of this House, to assist either in their contemplations or conclusions on this subject. Members are not sent here to deal out applauses or censures in this way. Mr. G. rejected all aiming at a restraint on the opinions of private persons. As to the societies themselves, Mr. G. personally had nothing to do with them, nor was he acquainted with any of the persons concerned in their original organization.

Mr. LYMAN hoped that the member from Pennsylvania would, upon reflection, withdraw his amendment. Mr. L. considered it to be as improper to pass a vote of censure, as it would be to pass a vote of approbation. He did not want to give the printers an opportunity of publishing debates that had better be suppressed. Besides, where will this business of censorship end? It would be much better not to meddle with the Democratic societies at all. Some of them were perfectly sensible that they had gone too far. . . .

Mr. W. SMITH then rose, and entered at large into the subject. He said, that if the committee withheld an expression of their sentiments in regard to the societies pointed out by the PRESIDENT, their silence would be an avowed desertion of the Executive. He had no scruple to declare that the conduct of these people had tended to blow up the insurrection. Adverting to Mr. GILES, he thought the assertion of that gentleman

too broad, when he spoke of not meddling with the opinions of other than political societies.

He considered the dissemination of improper sentiments as a suitable subject for the public reprobation of the House. Suppose an agricultural society were to establish itself, and under that title to disseminate opinions subversive of good order; the difference of a name would not make Mr. S. think them exempted from becoming objects of justice. Would any man say that the sole object of self-created societies had been the publication of political doctrines? The whole of their proceedings has been a chain of censures on the conduct of the Government. If we do not support the PRESIDENT, the silence of the House will be interpreted into an implied disapprobation of that part of his Speech. He will be left in a dilemma. It will be said that he had committed himself.

Mr. S. declared that he was a friend to the freedom of the press; but would anyone compare a regular town-meeting where deliberations were cool and unruffled, to these societies, to the nocturnal meetings of individuals, after they have dined, where they shut their doors, pass votes in secret, and admit no members into their societies, but those of their own choosing? Mr. S., by way of illustration, observed, that this House had never done so much business after dinner. In objection to this amendment it had been stated, that the self-created societies would acquire importance from a vote of censure passed on them. They were, for his part, welcome to the whole importance that such a vote could give them. He complained, in strong terms, of the calumnies and slanders which they had propagated against the Government. Every gentleman who thought that these clubs had done mischief, was by this amendment called upon to avow his opinion. This was the whole. Mr. S. begged the House to take notice, and he repeated his words once or twice, that he did not mean to go into the constitution of these societies, or to say that they were illegal. The question before the House was

whether these societies were illegal or not, but whether they have been mischievous in their consequences.

Mr. MCDOWELL was of the opinion that the term self-created societies, was too indefinite. He professed highest respect for the character of the PRESIDENT; but he did not think that the proposed vote of censure would be any eligible proof of it. The House of Representatives were assembled not to volunteer in passing votes of reprobation on societies, or individuals, but to legislate. He wished that gentlemen, instead of losing their time on such frivolous and inflammatory amendments, would proceed to the proper business of the House. The gentleman from South Carolina seemed to be well acquainted with Democratic societies. It was very true that they had published resolutions reprobating the assumption business and the system of funding; but the rest of the people, as well as the Democratic societies, had very generally censured the assumption and the funding transactions. He thought that some laws had been passed which answered to no good purpose, nor indeed any purpose, but that of irritating the public. The present amendment he considered destructive not only to the intercourse of domestic society, but that it involved a prospect of throwing restraint upon the conduct of gentlemen in the House of Representatives. With the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. GILES,) he was satisfied that the amendment, if adopted, would have no weight whatever with the citizens of the United States; as they were too enlightened to accept of opinions from their Representatives.

Mr. TRACY had imagined that no man would have the hardihood to come forward in that House and vindicate these societies. . . He said that he would, for his own part, be disposed to let these societies alone, and leave them to the chastisement of their own consciences. If they were to say, "Gentlemen, you, as tyrants, make laws, and slaves obey them," I would answer, said Mr. T., "It is very rash. Think again before you say

this again. We believe that, from inadvertency, some things have escaped from democratic societies, which they had not well weighed, and which had a bad effect on weak and ignorant people in the western counties of Pennsylvania. You have seen the bad effects of your temerity. Take care before you publish any such think again." Mr. T. said, this is all the length which we mean to go, can any body object to this? The Democratic societies form but a very small portion of the people of America. Where is the harm in saying that one-hundredth, or, I believe I might say, not more than one-thousandth part of the citizens of the United States have been mistaken, and that they have been imprudent in printing certain indiscreet resolutions? Mr. T. declared that if the PRESIDENT had not spoke of the matter, he should have been willing to let it alone, because whenever a subject of that kind was touched, there were certain gentlemen in that House who shook their backs, like a sore-backed horse, and cried out, The Liberties of the people! Mr. T. only wished that the House, if their opinion of these societies corresponded with that of the PRESIDENT, should declare that they had such an opinion. This was quite different from trying to legislate on the subject. Has not the Legislature done so before? Is there any impropriety in paying this mark of respect to a man to whom all America owes such indelible obligations? He thought that this declaration from the House of Representatives would tend to discourage Democratic societies, by uniting all men of sense against them. Mr. T. said, that perhaps the member who spoke last might be connected with some of these societies, of which he entertained so favorable an opinion.

Mr. MCDOWELL said, that he wanted the House to avoid quarrels, and to mind their proper business of legislation. He declared that he was not a member of any such society. He did not know that he had ever been in the company of any persons who was a member of any of them. He was even, he declared upon his honor, ignorant of whether there were, or ever had been, any such societies in North Carolina. He

adverted to the simile of the sore-backed horse, and said that he believed his back to have been rubbed harder in the last war, than that of the gentleman. He imagined that these societies had done both good and harm, and again declared, that he could not consent to a vote of indiscriminate reprobation.

Mr. DAYTON was heartily for the amendment. He observed that he wanted no evidence to satisfy him, as to the gentleman not being a member of any of these societies. If he had been connected with them, he would have known their principles better than he seems to do. Mr. D. said that many persons in New Jersey, who had been most violent against the excise law were equally so against the insurgents and though their opinion of the law itself was unaltered, which they made no scruple of openly declaring, yet they did not, on that account, hesitate to march against the insurgents. They did not suppose that one obnoxious statute was any reason for overturning the Federal Constitution. The murmurers against the excise law in New Jersey had been converted into universal silence, because no man would venture to express his discontent, at the hazard of being suspected of being a fiend to the insurgents. That the Democratic societies had produced the most mischievous results in the western counties there could be no question. Letters had been received from officers in the army, who were the most respectable characters, and who, from authentic information, had affirmed the fact. It had been stated that these people would recriminate upon the House, and it had been hinted that their recriminations might affect the PRESIDENT. *That man*, said Mr. D., is above their censure. . . .

Mr. NICHOLAS.-- When we see an attempt in this House to reprobate whole societies, on account of the conduct of individuals, it may be truly suspected that some of the members of this House have sore backs. The PRESIDENT has been appraised of the absurdity of making this a Legislative business. . . . Were they called upon to give

an opinion? Where would be the pretence for any thing of this sort? The House have made acts. The Democratic societies reprobate them, and then the House reprobate the Democratic societies. When you first cut a man's throat, and thereafter call him a rascal, do you suppose that your accusation will affect the man's reputation? The House, by passing this vote of censure, would make themselves a party, and lose a title to unsuspected confidence. Mr. N. declared, that, for his own part, he never had any concern with these societies, nor ever to his knowledge had spent an hour with any person who was a member of them. He rather, if any thing, despised them. He had always thought them the very worst advocates for the cause which they espoused; but he had come two hundred miles to legislate, and not to reprobate private societies. He was not paid by his constituents for doing business of that sort. The PRESIDENT knew the business of the House better than to call for any such votes of censure. It was wrong to condemn societies for particular acts. That there never should be a Democratic society in America, said Mr. N., I would give my most hearty consent; but I cannot agree to persecution for the sake of opinions. With respect either to the propriety or the power of suppressing them, Mr. N. was in both cases equally of opinion that it was much better to let them alone. They must stand or fall by the general sentiments of the people of America. Is it possible that these societies can exist, for any length of time, when they are of no real use to the country? No. But this amendment will make the people at large imagine that they are of consequence.

Mr. DAYTON said, that these societies had produced the Western insurrection, and, therefore, the committee were just as well entitled to institute an enquiry in this case, as formerly regarding the failure of the expedition of General St. Clair.

The committee now rose, and reported progress, and had leave to sit again.

TUESDAY, November 25.

. . .the House again went into Committee of the Whole on the Address of the PRESIDENT and on the amendment of Mr. FITZSIMONS, Mr. COBB in the chair.

Mr. Murray said, that he did not altogether like the wording of the amendment now before the House. . . . He said, that he had not been personally attacked by any of the tribunals in questions, and no further injured by their machinations than as he was a citizen of the free Republic in whose prosperity he felt the closest possible union, and in whose calamities he of course felt great sympathy. Among the various sources of the late calamity, the PRESIDENT had traced and designated certain self-created societies, who had arrogated the management of public opinions and affairs, and whom he had declared to have been, in his opinion, instrumental in fomenting the late insurrection. Mr. M. confessed that he had feared, last winter, lest the disorganizing spirit which had gone abroad in the shape of resolutions from these societies, would have produced the effect ascribed to them by the PRESIDENT. The conduct of the Democratic clubs, or those of them with which he had the most acquaintance, appeared to him to have been instrumental to an event which threatened destruction to legitimate government. If we believe this to be the case, Mr. M. knew no motive, duty, or policy, which ought to restrain us from saying that we believe it, and from lamenting it. Our declaration will rather hold out a caution to the thoughtless, than inflict legal penalties upon their follies. It will present to our fellow citizens a memorable example of one source of error and political misfortune, by showing them the danger, which has already cost above twelve hundred thousand dollars. He could not see any evil that was to result from an expression of the opinion of the House, by the proposed amendment. It had not the quality of law; for, if a law were proposed for the abolition of these societies, he would oppose it. This amendment to the Address would operate as an advice. It curtails not the right of a free press, which Mr. M. held to be the luminary of the public mind. It would tend to excite a judicious and salutary inquiry among many respecting the just

and true limits within which a virtuous and enlightened well-wisher to our country would think it safe to exercise this right. Of the inutility and danger of such societies in this country, he had little doubt. The scene of their birthplace was well adapted to the wholesome display of their powers. In France, where a despotism, impregnable to public opinion, had reigned -- where no channel opened a sympathy by representation with the great body of the nation -- those societies were admirably adapted to break down and subvert the old bulwark of habitual authority. But in America the case was widely different. Look at the immense body of public functionaries, who in this country are elected immediately by the people, or by their electors, in a constitutional mode, and say whether they are not adequate as functionaries to the public purposes of the country. Including every description of Legislators, Councils, Governors, Courts, Jurors, and Sheriffs, there are above twelve thousand. Of these, more than eleven hundred are actual Legislators, besides the hundred in this House, and those above stairs. These all act in the States, counties, townships, and hundreds, in separate but relative circles, so as to preclude a partial attention to any one scene, to the exclusion of another. The whole country is full of well-constituted organs of the people's will. Many of these Legislatures are in session twice a year, and all of them annually. We might be confused by their immense number, were they not so admirably dispersed over the Continent, and do they not move under the guidance of the laws, with the harmony of the spheres. It would not be easy to organize the nation into a more multifarious shape. . . .

Mr. CHRISTIE then rose. He was sorry to differ from his worthy colleague (Mr. MURRAY) on the question before the committee; and he was doubly sorry to hear that gentleman labor so strenuously to saddle a public odium on some of the best citizens of the State which he represented. Mr. C. should not have risen on the present occasion, although he thought it an important one, had it not been to endeavor to rescue from

public censure a society of gentlemen, who were described in the present amendment before the committee, as objects of public opprobrium. Mr. C. alluded to the Republican Society of the town of Baltimore. If the present amendment took place, that society would be involved in general and undeserved censure. He would, therefore, inform the House of what description of men the Republican Society of Baltimore consisted; and then the committee would be the best judges whether they ought to be rewarded in the manner in which the amendment proposes. They are a society of gentlemen associated together for the purpose of diffusing political knowledge throughout the State of Maryland, and to instruct their Representatives in Congress, and the Legislature of the State, in any point that they think necessary, and not for the purpose of sowing dissention among the citizens of America, or of cultivating dislike to the Union, or to the laws. This society consists of men whose characters are superior to any censure that might be thrown against them, by the mover of the amendment. But when Congress are about to cast an odium on a particular society, the members of which have every respect for that body, and have always inculcated obedience to the laws of the United States, Mr. C. left it to the committee to determine whether, if they were themselves in the place of the Baltimore Society, they would not feel their sensibility materially wounded? Was this not returning good for evil? He again reminded the committee that the Republican Society of Baltimore was composed of a band of patriots, not the fair-weather patriots of the present day, but the patriots of seventy-five, the men who were not afraid to rally around the American standard, when that station was almost concluded to be a forlorn hope. They were men who, with their persons and properties, had assisted to drive from the soil of America the present lawless disturbers of the world. Are these the men, asked Mr. C., who ought to have all this mass of Congressional odium cast upon them? I trust not, sir. I trust, that if particular gentlemen are illiberal enough to censure them, yet that this House will never agree to such iniquitous measures. What was the conduct of this society when the first news of

the late insurrection reached them? Did they not refuse to correspond with any society that aided, or in any manner abetted, the insurrection? They did more. They offered their personal services to go and crush this commotion in the bud. Mr. C. subjoined that he would venture to say, and at the same time he spoke within bounds, that nine-tenths of this society actually took up their muskets and marched into the field for the above laudable purpose, and that numbers of them still continue there, and are the friends of peace and order, and not the disorganizers that the present amendment would make them. Mr. C. appealed to the candor of the committee to say, whether the Baltimore self-created Republican Society were the description of men whom the PRESIDENT, in his Speech, meant to describe. He was sure it was not. Therefore, why involve in this indiscriminate censure men who have s=deserved so well of their country? men who, instead of having odium cast upon them, merit every praise which the Federal Government can bestow. For these, and some other reasons, Mr. C. declared that he should vote against the amendment, and he trusted that he should vote in the majority.

Mr. MURRAY rose to explain. He did not mean this society. It was the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh societies. Mr. M. was acquainted with this society, and had the greatest respect for the,. As for the members of the other societies, he was for gibbeting their principles only.

Mr. RUTHERFORD.-- This alarm is owing to an overgrown moneyed system, with which the people are not entirely satisfied. But the moneyholders need not be afraid. The people will pay the public debt. Then why disturb the tranquility of the people? The PRESIDENT, in his Speech, points only at combinations over the mountains. As to the character of the PRESIDENT himself, to praise him was like holding up a rush candle to let us see the sun. I have known that man, said Mr. R., for these forty years. I have had the honor of serving under him in the last war, and of frequently executing his wise and

noble orders. The member declared that this amendment could answer no purpose but that of disturbing the public peace. He himself represented as respectable a district as any in Virginia, and he had as good opportunities as any gentleman in that House to know the temper of Americans. They were firmly attached to the present Government, and the holders of paper need not be so much afraid of Democratic societies, for the people, to preserve the tranquillity, were determined to discharge the public debt, no matter how it was contracted, and, therefore, it would be much better not to harass the public mind with amendments like that on the table. . . .

Mr. VENABLE said, that there was a paper on that table (he referred to the letter from Mr. HAMILTON to the PRESIDENT) which showed that the combinations in the western counties began their existence at the very same time with the Excise law itself. It was, therefore, entirely improper to ascribe them to Democratic societies. Should Government, said Mr. V., come forward and show their imbecility by censuring what we cannot punish? The people have a right to think and a right to speak. I am not afraid to speak my sentiments. I am not afraid of being called a disorganizer. I am as much as any gentleman in this committee, a friend to regular government.

Mr. Dexter believed that such societies were, in themselves, wrong, but he was still not for making laws against them. He had, however, numerous objections to their conduct. One of these was that they erected themselves into a model for the rest of their fellow-citizens to copy. The great principle of Republicanism was, that the minority should submit to the will of the majority. But these people have elevated themselves into tyrants. Such societies are proper in a country where government is despotic, but it is improper that such societies should exist in a free country like the United States, and hence, Mr. D. was a friend to the amendment proposed by Mr. FITZSIMONS. . . .

Mr. NICHOLAS. . . . This whole question turns upon a matter of fact, which ought to be proved, viz: Have the Democratic societies been one of the principle causes of the Western insurrection? This is a matter of fact, or otherwise, and it depends upon direct evidence. But how do the gentlemen handle this questions? They digress into abstract propositions, a thing never heard of before, where a matter of fact was to be proved. I say, where direct proof is wanted, we see gentlemen standing on the floor for half an hour together, without attempting to advance a single fact in support of their assertions; yet this is the only admissible kind of evidence that the societies are from their nature unfriendly to the Federal Government.

Mr. N. then adverted to a remark which had been made, that libels were daily prosecuted in this country, from which it was inferred that calumnious attacks on Government were the just objects of reprehension. Mr. N. said, that the comparison was not fair, because in a case of libel, the parties accused have a proper opportunity to defend themselves. Have these people here (the Democratic societies) any such opportunity? It has been alleged, as a crime against them, that they have never once published any approbation of any measure of Government. Mr. N. argued that this arose from the very nature of their institution, which was to watch the errors of the Legislature and Executive, and point out to the public what they considered to be mistakes. Faults were the only kinds of facts which they were in quest of. Here Mr. N. drew a material distinction. If these societies had censured every proceeding of Government, there would have been the greatest reason for taking some measures. But what was the case? As to an immense number of the proceedings of the Executive and Legislature, they had taken no notice whatever.

Mr. SEDGWICK thought that the PRESIDENT would have been defective in his duty, had he not omitted to mention what he religiously believed to be true, viz: that the Democratic societies had in a great measure originated the late disturbances. . . . The present amendment (of Mr. FITZSIMONS) would have a tendency to plunge these societies into contempt, and to sink them still farther into abhorrence and detestation. He pronounced them to be illicit combinations. One gentleman (Mr. NICHOLAS) tells you, that he despises them most heartily. Another (Mr. LYMAN) says that they begin to repent. Will the American people perversely propose to shoulder and bolster up these despised and repenting societies, which are now tumbling into dust and contempt? Their conduct differed as far from fair and honorable investigation, as Christ and Belial. They were men prowling in the dark. God is my judge, said Mr. S., that I would not wish to check a fair discussion.

One gentleman (Mr. MCDOWELL) had told the committee, that the Assumption and Funding transactions were a cause of public discontent. It has been the trick of these people to make this assertion. They have said that the Funding System is a mass of favoritism, for the purpose of erecting an oppressive aristocracy and a paper nobility. There is not a man among them, who is able to write, and who does not know that these assertions are false. . . . It was not supposed that every one of these measures of the new Government could please every body. Among the rest, excise was objected to in both Houses of Congress; but at last the good sense of the people acquiesced. At this crisis, a foreign agent (*Genet*) landed at Charleston. On his way to this city, he was attended by the hosannas of all the disaffected. He did the utmost mischief that was in his power; and in consequence of his efforts, Democratic societies sprung up. . . .

Mr. HILLHOUSE approved of the amendment proposed by Mr. FITZSIMONS. Constituents made no scruple to tell Representatives of their faults, and he saw no

reason why Representatives might not tell constituents of theirs? The resolutions of the Democratic societies printed in the newspapers, had spirited up the people in the Western counties to resistance. They had weakly fancied that the American nation would not stand by their constitution and their PRESIDENT. But for the publication of these resolutions, there would have been no insurrection. This was a piece of information which the people of the United States had a right to know. It was the duty of the House to let them know it. The PRESIDENT had done his duty. Mr. H. did not consider the amendment . . . as an indiscriminate measure levelled at these societies; he thought it only a suitable answer to a part of the PRESIDENT'S Speech.

Mr. PARKER concluded this long debate by the following remarks. He did not think that Democratic societies were so far to blame as had been imagined. He suspected that the PRESIDENT himself, for whose character and services he felt as much respect and gratitude as any man in America, had been misinformed on this point. It would be absurd to say, that the Western disturbances originated from the publications of the Democratic societies, if it could be proved to the satisfaction of the committee, that such disturbances had begun long before any of the associations alluded to had a being. To prove this position, Mr. P. desired that the Clerk might read a passage from the letter on that affair, written by Mr. Hamilton, and which had already been published in all the newspapers. The Clerk accordingly read a part of the letter, from which Mr. P. inferred that his inference was incontestable, and he then stated the absurdity of making the Democratic publications the origin of a discontent, which existed before them. He was satisfied that the PRESIDENT did not wish this thing echoed; and that he would entirely disapprove of the proposed persecution. Mr. P. said, that he had the honor of being an honorary member of a Democratic Society. Personally he knew nothing of the gentlemen, but he understood that they were respectable characters; and that they were friends to good order and the Federal Government, there could be no question,

for when the Embargo was laid last spring, and some vessels had been attempting to get off, these vigilant citizens armed and embodied themselves, and prevented the execution of the design. With all his respect for the PRESIDENT, he was not to give up his opinions for the sake of any man. He was convinced that this violent declaration and irritation in the House would do a great deal of mischief, and would have an effect exactly the reverse of what was designed by the amendment as it first stood. A gentleman (Mr. DEXTER) had spoken of town meetings, as the proper vehicles for the communication of political ideas, and had drawn a comparison between these and Democratic societies. Mr. P. requested that it might be noticed, that in the Southern States there neither were nor could be such things as town meetings, because the population was too thin and too widely scattered. They were therefore to make the best of it which they could, and meet and deliberate, no matter where, whenever they found a convenient opportunity. Mr. P. expressed, in strong terms the aversion of his constituents would feel to this species of censorship. He concluded with these words: "They love your Government much, but they love their independence more."

The question was then called for striking out the word "self-created" from the new amendment of Mr. FITZSIMONS. For the amendment of Mr. GILES, ayes 47, noes 45. This amendment was therefore adopted.

Mr. GILES then proposed an amendment, after the words "combination of men," by adding, "in the four Western counties of Pennsylvania."

Mr. HARTLEY said, that the gentlemen should have added, "and a county in Virginia." This amendment of Mr. GILES was rejected.

The committee now rose, and reported the amendments to the House.

WEDNESDAY, November 26.

. . .the main question being put, that the House do agree to the said clause, amended to read as followeth:

"In tracing the origin and progress of the insurrection, we can entertain no doubt that certain self-created societies and combinations of men in the four Western counties of Pennsylvania, and parts adjacent, careless of consequences, and disregarding the truth, by disseminating suspicions, jealousies, and accusations of the Government, have had all the agency you ascribe them, in fomenting this daring outrage against social order and the authority of the laws:"

It passed in the negative, nineteen members only rising in the affirmative.

FRIDAY, November 28.

Answer to the Address.

The Answer, as amended, was then read throughout the Clerk's table as follows:

SIR: The House of Representatives, calling to mind the blessing enjoyed by the people of the United States, and especially the happiness of living under constitutions and laws which rest on their authority alone, could not learn, with other emotions than those you have expressed, that any part of our fellow-citizens should have shown themselves capable of an insurrection. And we learn, with the greatest concern, that any misrepresentations whatever, of the Government and its proceedings, either by individuals or combinations of men, should have been made, and so far credited as to foment the flagrant outrage which has been committed on the laws. We feel, with you, the deepest regret at so painful an occurrence in the annals of our country. As men regardful of the

tender interests of humanity, we look with grief at scenes which might have stained our land with civil blood. As lovers of public order, we lament that it has suffered so flagrant a violation: as zealous friends of Republican Government, we deplore every occasion which, in the hands of its enemies, may be turned into a calumny against it.

This aspect of the crisis, however, is happily not the only one which it presents. There is another, which yields all the consolations which you have drawn from it. It has demonstrated to the candid world, as well as to the American people themselves, that the great body of them, every where, are equally attached to the luminous and vital principle of our constitution, which enjoins that the will of the majority shall prevail; that they understand the indissoluble union between true liberty and regular government; that they fell their duties no less than they are watchful over their rights; that they will be as ready, at all times, to crush licentiousness, as they have been to defeat usurpation: in a word, that they are capable of carrying into execution that noble plan of self-government which they have chosen as the guarantee of their own happiness, and the asylum for that of all, from every clime, who may wish to united their destiny with ours. . . .

We shall, on this, as on all occasions, be disposed to adopted any measure which may advance the safety and prosperity of our country. In nothing can we more cordially unite with you, than in imploring the Supreme Ruler of Nations to multiply His blessings on these United States; to guard against every machination and anger; and to make it the best source of public happiness, by verifying its character of being the best safeguard of human rights.

JAMES MADISON TO JAMES MONROE REGARDING FEDERALIST EFFORTS TO
DISCREDIT THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES (1794)

Philadelphia, December 4, 1794

. . . You will learn from the Newspapers and official communications the unfortunate scene in the Western parts of Penn which unfolded itself during the recess. . . . The event was in several respects a critical one for the cause of liberty, and the real authors of it, if not in the service, were in the most effectual manner, doing the business of

Despotism. YOU well know the general tendency of insurrections to increase the momentum of power. You will recollect the particular effect of what happened some years ago in Massachusetts. Precisely the same calamity was to be dreaded on a larger scale in this Case. There were eno' as you may well suppose, ready to give the same turn to the crisis, and to propagate the same impressions from it. It happened most auspiciously however that with a spirit truly Republican, the people everywhere and of every description condemned the resistance of the will of the Majority, and obeyed with alacrity the call to vindicate the authority of the laws. You will see, in the answer of the House of Rep^s to the P^s speech, that the most was made of this circumstance, as an antidote to the poisonous influence to which Republicanism was exposed. If the insurrection had not been crushed in this manner it was I have no doubt that a formidable attempt would have been made to establish the principle that a standing army was necessary for *enforcing the laws*. When I first came to this City about the middle of October, this was the fashionable language. Nor am I sure that the attempt would not have been made if the P. could have been embarked in it, and particularly if the temper of N. England had not been dreaded on this point. I hope we are over that danger for the present. You will readily understand the business detailed in the Newspapers, relating to the denunciation of the "self-created Societies." The introduction of it by the President was perhaps the greatest error of his political life. For his sake, as well as for a variety of obvious reasons, I wish it might be passed over in silence by the H. of Rep^s. The answer was penned with that view and so reported. This moderate course would not satisfy those who hoped to draw a party advantage out of the P^s popularity. The game was, to connect the democratic Societies with the odium of the insurrection -- to connect the Republicans in Cong^s with those Societies -- to put the P. ostensibly at the head of the other party, in opposition to both, and by these means prolong the illusions in the North, & try a new experiment in the South. To favor the project, the answer of the Senate was accelerated & so framed as to draw the P. into the

most pointed reply on the subject of the Societies. At the same time the answer of the H. of R. was procrastinated till the example of the Senate, & the commitment of the P. could have their full operation. You will see how nicely the House was divided, and how the matter went off. As yet, the discussion has not been revived by the newspaper combatants. If it should and equal talents be opposed, the result cannot fail to wound the P's popularity more than anything that has yet happened. It must be seen that no two principles can be either more indefensible in reason, or more dangerous in practice -- than that -- 1. arbitrary denunciations may punish what the law permits, & what the Legislature has no right by law, to prohibit -- and that 2. the Gov^t. may stifle all censure whatever on its misdoings, for if it be the Judge it will never allow any censures to be just, and if it can suppress censures flowing from one lawful source it may those flowing from any other -- from the press and from individuals, as well as from Societies, &c. . . .

THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES RESPOND TO THE NATIONAL DEBATE

The Federalists' efforts to formally censure the Democratic societies as fomenters of the Whiskey Rebellion and, more broadly, as enemies of public order, were successfully resisted in Congress. But the suspicions aroused by Washington's speech and by the unremitting attacks of the Federalist press led some of the societies to defend their

patriotism. Thus the debate over the legitimacy of associations was carried into public forums.

Address to "Fellow Freemen," January 26, 1795

At a meeting of the DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY of the City of New York, held at citizen Hunter's Wednesday evening, Jan. 14, 1795, the following ADDRESS was unanimously agreed to and ordered to be printed:

The DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY of the city of NEW-YORK, to their brethren,
the citizens of the UNITED STATES.

FELLOW FREEMEN,

The alarm has been given! a signal has been made! confidence hath fled, and the sweets of security that have given place to apprehensions of danger! At the seat of government a voice, loud, and imposing, has been heard, and already had reached the distant corners of the union! We have been charged with the commission of crimes the most aggravated, & some of the public functionaries have become our accusers. We have been stigmated with harbouring designs destructive to the peace, and subversive of the constitution of our country; and some of the representatives of the people have listened to the accusation! To a call so imperious and powerful, silence would be a crime; inattention would assume the aspect of a total dereliction of character, and a criminal abandonment of principles. . . .

Ardent and sincere in our attachment to the cause of liberty, *your cause as well as our own*, we have exercised a right, the most invaluable to freemen, and dangerous to TYRANTS ONLY. No sooner had the existence of our institution been announced to the

world, than certain characters, unfriendly to the principles of equal liberty, commenced an outrageous warfare of slander & abuse against us. Accusations the most groundless, and calumnies the most base and dishonourable, were upon each other. . . .

Still relying upon the purity of our motives and the justice of our cause, impressed with the most forcible conviction of the indulgent candor, and determined patriotism of our countrymen, we contented ourselves with submitting to public view a fair and accurate statement of the nature of our institution, and the principles by which we had been uniformly governed. Observing the strictest obedience, and regard to the laws and political institutions of our country, we remained satisfied with the consciousness of having deserved your friendly countenance and approbation.

Such was the history of our association, and proceedings, and similar was the conduct of the other patriotic institutions, when an alarming opposition to one of the laws of the union, took place in the west of Pennsylvania. At the commencement of the present sessions of Congress, the president of the United States, in his address to the public representatives, in some measure, attributed that insurrection to certain "*self-created societies*," whom he asserted to have assumed the "*tone of condemnation*." The senate, in their answer to that address publicly pronounced their acquiescence in the opinion. . . .

Is our being "*self-created*" reckoned among the charges of the proscription? By *whom* then ought we to be constituted? If appointed by *delegation* we would become representatives of the people, if *elected* we should become organ of the general will. But are not all private associations established upon the foundation of their own authority sanctioned by the first principles of social life, and guaranteed by the spirit of the laws? Was it thought *necessary* to obtain a *special act* of the legislative power for the *exclusive*

creation of the SOCIETY of CINCINNATUS of which our first executive magistrate, is, or was the presiding officer, or *is that society* "SELF CREATED?"

Is it for *assembling* that we are accused? what law FORBIDS it? for *deliberating*, for *thinking*, for *exercising the faculties of the mind*. What statute has DEPRIVED us of the RIGHT? For the *publication of our sentiments*, where is the constitution that is *prohibitory*? if our opinions are founded in political error, if they are calculated to mislead, counteract their evil tendency by the *force of argument*. Truth may be suppressed by violence, but it will ever triumph amidst freedom of enquiry. Is it for *animadverting* upon the *conduct of government*, or for presuming to *disapprove of any of the measures* of the administration, that we are censured? The government is *responsible* to its sovereign the people for the faithful exercise of its entrusted powers, and *any part of the people* have the right to express their opinions on the government.

But what possible danger has the government of this country, to apprehend from the existence of popular societies? They have no interest but in common with their fellow citizens, they are equally concerned in the preservation of law, and the establishment of civil order, for upon that the safety of their lives, and the security of their fortunes depend. They have pledged themselves as faithful citizens, while they use their utmost endeavours to preserve public liberty, to maintain inviolate the principles of the constitution, and their personal interest is a surety responsible for their sincerity. They are not even suspected of being the *advocates of a standing army* in time of peace; they have never used their endeavours to *cherish a funding system*, to negotiate *unnecessary* loans or to preserve a *public debt for ever*; for they derive not the smallest benefit from the influence which that system of measures, never fails to occasion. They indeed hold their assemblages in the evening, the *private employments, and avocations of their members, prevent them from assembling* in the day; they indeed *close the doors*; of the

rooms which they frequent, because they are not obligated to hold their meetings in the public streets, and because *they have always claimed the valuable privilege of CHUSING THEIR COMPANY*. They cannot surely be suspected of *plots* against the liberty, combination against the laws, or conspiracies against the constitution of their country. They are *too numerous* for the purposes of *conspiracy*, their numbers would become the means of inevitable detection.

It has frequently been asserted, it has even been maintained with in the walls of the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, That the existence of *popular assemblages*, must inevitably terminate in the violation of law & destruction of government. And why! because they PROMOTE ENQUIRY? because they produce INVESTIGATION? A good government and in danger from *associations of the people!* a constitution, the *conservation and security of the public interest*, and yet endangered by the very persons *whose welfare it so essentially promotes* This is a contradiction too gross to be believed, a paradox too absurd to be credited. It was FREE INVESTIGATION that procured our emancipation from the detestable yoke of British thralldom; it was FREE INVESTIGATION that established their liberty which now forms the enviable blessing and the boasted birth right of the American citizens. It was FREE INVESTIGATION that procured the adoption of the constitution of the United States, and it is FREE INVESTIGATION that must ever form *the only sure support* of that constitution, and constitute the only permanent basis for the preservation of the liberties of the people. . . .

The same reason that renders it indispensable for the sovereign, to delegate suitable organs for the manifestation of the general will, renders equally impossible in its collective capacity the exercise of its revisionary powers. *The RESPONSIBILITY of PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES presupposes a RIGHT OF INVESTIGATION INTO THEIR PROCEEDINGS.* -- It is a right appurtenant to *individuals*, otherwise it would be incapable of exercise. It is a right appurtenant to *every collection of individuals* -- because

every association *must comprehend all the privileges, and properties* of the members of whom it is composed, and because it is a RIGHT, *not susceptible of RESTRAINT in the mode of its enjoyment. . . .*

And *ye* PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES, the RESPONSIBLE SERVANTS and not the *masters of the people*, what can *ye* have to fear, from assemblages of your fellow citizens? Have *ye* already formed the *rash attempt*, to violate the public constitution -- and to ENSLAVE YOUR COUNTRY? for then, *and not till then*, can *ye* have grounds of apprehension from the exercise of popular societies. An attempt to enslave a people *yet enlightened*, would too evidently terminate, in the destruction of the conspirators, and cannot be presumed -- the insidious artifices of corruption may possess a momentary influence, but will shrink from the all-discriminating eye of a PUBLIC, *free, enlightened, omnipotent*. The throne of the monarch shall be prostrated to the earth -- the oppressions of tyranny shall have an end -- constitutions are susceptible of amendment --and laws are subject to alteration -- *But the LIBERTIES, the RIGHTS of the PEOPLE are IMMUTABLE, IMPRESCRIPTIBLE, and ETERNAL.*

By order of the society,

DAVID GELSTON, *President*

The Printers of the several newspapers in the United States are requested to publish the foregoing Address.

THE FEDERALIST COUNTERATTACK

The debate following Washington's 1794 attack on political associations did not settle the issue, though it did move both sides towards a clearer understanding of their respective positions. The President took up the issue again in the fall of 1796. His

"Farewell Address," though best remembered for its comments on foreign policy -- in particular, for its urging America to "avoid entangling alliances -- was primarily devoted to expanding his criticism of the rising political opposition.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, "FAREWELL ADDRESS"

United States, September 19, 1796

FRIENDS, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS: The period for a new election of a Citizen, to Administer the Executive government of the United States, being not far distant, and the time actually arrived, when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person, who is to be cloathed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those, out of whom a choice is to be made. . . .

. . . But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments; which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all important to the permanency of your felicity as a People. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion.

Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts, no recommendation of mine is necessary to fortify or confirm the attachment.

The Unity of Government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main Pillar in the Edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquillity at home; your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very Liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee, that from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment, that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual and immoveable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the Palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned, and indignantly flowing upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of AMERICA, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any other appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same Religion, Manners, Habits, and political Principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together. The independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint councils, and joint efforts; of common dangers, sufferings and successes. . . .

In contemplating the causes wch. may disturb our Union, it occurs as a matter of serious concern, that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by Geographical discriminations: *Northern* and *Southern*; *Atlantic* and *Western*; whence designing men may endeavour to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of Party to acquire influence, within particular districts, is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other Districts. You cannot shield yourself too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations. They tend to render Alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection. The Inhabitants of our Western country have lately had a useful lesson on this head. . . .

To the efficacy and permanency of Your Union, a Government for the whole is indispensable. . . . Respect for its authority, compliance with its Laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true Liberty. The basis of our political systems 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, controul 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 ill concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common councils and modified by mutual interests. However combinations or Associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they 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 domination. . . .

I have already intimated to you the danger of Parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on Geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party, generally.

This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human Mind. It exists under different shapes in all Governments, more or less stifled, controuled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form it is seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy.

The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge natural to party dissention, which in different ages and countries has perpetuated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an Individual: and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty.

Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind (which nevertheless ought not to be entirely out of sight) the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of Party are sufficient to make it the interest and the duty of a wise People to discourage and restrain it.

It serves always to distract the Public Councils and enfeeble the Public administration. It agitates the Community with ill founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which find a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. . . .

There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the Administration of the Government and serve to keep alive the spirit of Liberty. This within certain limits is probably true, and in Governments of a Monarchical cast Patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favour, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in Governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And there will be constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be, by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched; it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent it bursting into a flame, lest instead of warming it should consume. . . .

In his last State of the Union message, two months later, Washington offered a vision of public institutions that stood in striking contrast to his condemnation of private associations. In reviewing the importance of agriculture to the national welfare, he

urged the creation of "Institutions for promoting it, . . . , supported by the public purse." In outlining the contribution of "the Arts and Sciences . . . to National Prosperity," he urged of a "National Institution -- a university --," whose primary purpose would "the education of our Youth in the science of Government." This was nothing less than a conception of government doing its work not through state agencies, but through public corporations. Deeply rooted in the southern institutional tradition, these views, ironically, were more in line with Jefferson's -- his political nemesis -- than with the New England Federalists who, even in the 1790s, were moving rapidly in the direction of civil privatism.

THE LEGITIMATION OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The election of 1796, following Washington's retirement, was the first in which there were candidates for the presidency who represented significantly different points of view about government and its policies. It was a close contest between Jefferson and incumbent Federalist Vice-President John Adams.

For the first time, caucuses of Republican leaders met to nominate candidates and to draw up "slates" or "tickets" of candidates for offices at all levels of government. The

effort led to Jefferson's falling short of election to the presidency by only three votes in the Electoral College.

During his term as Vice-President of the United States, Jefferson spent the next four years turning the loosely-coupled network of Congressmen, state and local political leaders, democratic societies, and friendly newspapers into a tightly disciplined political machine. He was especially concerned about the need to extend Republican organization into areas like New England where Federalist measures had effectively prevented its growth. As he wrote to New Yorker Aaron Burr in 1797,

If a prospect could be once opened upon us of the penetration of truth into the eastern States; if the people there, who are unquestionably republicans, could discover that they have been duped into the support of measures calculated to sap the very foundations of republicanism, we might still hope for salvation. . . . But will that region ever awake to the true state of things? (TJ to Aaron Burr, June 17, 1797, quoted in Cunningham 1957, 118)

The actions of the party supporters, described in the Newark (New Jersey) Centinal of Freedom in October of 1800, give a general idea of the nature and extent of the Jeffersonians' organizational effort: a committee of three persons was to be established in each township in the state, with committees of the same number in each county; township committees were "to act in concert within their respective counties in nominating candidates for the state legislature and in appointing a county committee 'to consult and correspond with similar committees' in the different counties of the state in order to nominate candidates for Congress" (Cunningham 1957, 155). In addition to nominating candidates, these groups cooperated in publishing political addresses, circulating handbills and pamphlets, writing letters to newspapers, and in holding party meetings and "festivals."

Despite Federalist efforts to portray Jefferson and the Republicans as extreme radicals whose election would bring about mob rule, the opposition's efforts were conspicuously successful in the election of 1800 -- helped along by a split in the Federalist party. Jefferson and Aaron Burr, both Democratic Republicans, received the highest number of electoral votes, with Federalists John Adams and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney running a distant third and fourth respectively. With the Electoral College vote evenly divided between the two Democrats, the race was decided by the House of Representatives, in which a number of Federalists, acting on Hamilton's secret advice, threw their support to Jefferson.

Jefferson's first inaugural address expressed his awareness, both as a statesman and as a practical politician, of the extent to which he owed his victory -- and his prospects for effective leadership -- to citizens and their elected representatives who represented a broad spectrum of opinions on a wide variety of topics. At the same time, he took the opportunity to affirm --and, in effect to answer Washington -- on the legitimacy of political associations in the public life of the new nation.

THOMAS JEFFERSON, FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

March 4, 1801

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS: Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow citizens which is here assembled, to express my grateful thanks for the favor with which they have been pleased to look towards me, and to declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. . . . Utterly indeed, should I despair, did not the presence of many whom I here see remind me, that in the other high authorities provided by our constitution, I shall find resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal, on which to rely under all difficulties. To you, then, gentlemen, who are charged with the sovereign functions of legislation, and to those associated with you, I look with encouragement for that guidance and support which may enable us to steer with safety the vessel in which we are all embarked amid the conflicting elements of a troubled world.

During the contest of opinion through which we have passed, the animation of discussion and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and to write what they think; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the constitution, all will, of course, arrange themselves under the will of law, and united in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful,

must be reasonable; that the majority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate which would be oppression, 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. And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. During the throes and convulsions of the ancient world, during the agonizing spasms of infuriated men, 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; that this 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 would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments to the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left to combat it. I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong; that this government is not strong enough. But would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm, on the theoretic and visionary fear that this government, the world's best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth. I believe it is the only one where every man, at the call of the laws, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern. Sometimes it is said that a man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or

have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him> Let history answer this question.

Let us, then, with courage and confidence pursue our own federal and republican principles, our attachment to our union and representative government. Kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe; too high-minded to endure the degradations of the other; possessing a chosen country, with room enough for our descendants to the hundredth and thousandth generation; entertaining a due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties, to the acquisitions of our industry, to honor and confidence from our fellow citizens, resulting not from birth but from our actions and their sense of them; enlightened by benign religion, professed, indeed, and practiced in various forms, yet all of them including honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude, and the love of man; acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter; with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow citizens -- a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

About to enter, fellow citizens, on the exercise of duties which comprehend everything dear and valuable to you, it is proper that you should understand what I deem the essential principles of our government, and consequently those which ought to shape its administration. . . . Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all

nations --entangling alliances with none; the support of the State governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies; the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad; a jealous care of the right of election by the people -- a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of the revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided; absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority -- the vital principle of republics, from which there is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism; a well-disciplined militia -- our best reliance in peace and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them; the supremacy of the civil over the military authority; economy in the public expense, that labor may be lightly burdened; the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith; encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaid; the diffusion of information and the arraignment of all abuses at the bar of public reason; freedom of religion; freedom of the press; freedom of person under the protection of the *habeas corpus*; and trial by juries impartially selected -- 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 the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith -- the text of civil instruction -- the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety. .

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