

The First and the Second

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The Second and the First,

An Examination into the Formation of the First Official Political Parties Under

John Adams

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Introduction

A simple inquiry into the cannon of early American history would reveal that most of the scholarly work done on the presidency of John Adams has mostly been about two things. The first, are the problems associated with his “characteristic stubbornness” and his tendencies to be politically isolated (Mayville, 2016, pg. 128; Ryerson, 2016, pg. 350). The second, is more preoccupied with his handling of foreign relations, since Adams was seemingly more interested in those issues than the presidents before and after him (DeConde, 1966, pg. 7; Elkin and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 529). But very few have attempted to examine the correlation between the two, or even the consequences the two collectively considered would have domestically. In the following essay, I will attempt to do so. By linking the two, I will try to show that because of these two particularities, he ultimately will— however unintentionally— contribute substantially to the development of political parties and populism.

In regard to his personality, it is often thought that he was much too ambitious and self-righteous to have been an ideal president in the first place. As one of his main political opponents, Alexander Hamilton, framed it, Adams was “infected with some visionary notions, and that he was far less able in the practice, than in the theory of politics” (Quoted in Ellis, 1993, pg. 23). And of the preoccupation of his presidency, especially the many conflicts with France, there is an incredible amount of commentaries that criticize his seeming leniency about the disrespect suffered by his country, and on his poor handling of the domestic problems that arose consequently (Wood, 2009; Elkin and McKittrick, 1993; Hofstadter, 1970, among others).

Moreover, the collective complications that came with these two factors of his presidency are often used, individually, as explanations for why he lost the election of 1800; that his personality and the radical measure he took in the times of crisis, like the Alien and Seditions

Acts, ultimately alienated his supporters (Pasley, 2002, pg. 153; Buel Jr, 1972, pg. 91). Yet, it seems that there is very little work done, in comparison, that examines the direct connection between these two factors, and even less on the impacts they had domestically beyond the election.

Granted, there are some works that seek to address these issues. In one, *Securing the Revolution, Ideology in American Politics 1789-1815*, Richard Buel Jr. traces the changes on the “new politics created by [the successes] of the American Revolution” and how it was upended by the French Revolution almost immediately. In the few sections in which he examines the changes under John Adams, he ultimately falls short of establishing a solid connection. Although he concedes that Adams’ personality was greatly significant in changing the country’s political opinions, he subsequently lessens Adams’ influence by placing a good part of the blame on the American people’s tendency to be reactive to paranoia. In another work, conveniently titled *The Quasi War*, Alexander DeConde surveys the timeline of the Quasi-War and the actions Adams took in maneuvering through it. Although he considers the impacts of the war, both at home and abroad, to be largely the consequences of domestic politics, he ultimately leaves much to be desired by overlooking the potential importance that Adams’ personality may have played. And in the instances in which he acknowledges its influence, it is done ineffectively as he takes Adam’s temperament to remain unchanged. What is more misleading is the fact that he seems to subscribe to the outdated characterization of Adams as stubborn and resistant to change (Wood, 2009, pg. 214). After all, as has been shown in *The Changing Political Thoughts of John Adams* by John Howe, that is not the case— instead, John Adams’ personality was in fact quite flexible and did consistently change to adapt with American society.

Unlike these scholars, I claim that perhaps the most astounding consequences from the mixture of these two factors is that they served as the prerequisite for John Adam's presidency being the one that gave way to the establishment of the nation's first political two-party system—rather than it being of Thomas Jefferson's or even Andrew Jackson's, as often thought. As I will attempt to show later on, there was fundamentally an almost fatalistic aspects of his personality which fueled his presidential actions that, altogether, was inherently at odds with the new and anxious republic. The unfortunate incompatibility of his personality will also become clearer in his dealing with foreign affairs as well. In that, it will be seen that his “characteristic stubbornness” ultimately was far more rigid than what the fragile premonition of war allowed. In other words, I hope to show eventually that once the impacts of these two distinctive characteristics are coupled together, they become a catalyst that incentivize smaller factions to rally together in opposing his inelastic leadership, therefore leading to the development of the nation's first organized parties.

The essay is divided as follows. I will first start by conceding the fact that factional politics was already well underway by the time John Adams was elected in 1797. Yet in doing so, I will also seek to differentiate between factional politics and partisan politics by borrowing heavily from those who already have done so— like Jeffrey Pasley, who argued that factional politics was more sectional, whereas partisan politics was more connected, thanks in part to an increase in accessible media (2002, pg. 7). Secondly, I will then briefly examine John Adams as vice president, in order to better understand the political culture that was present as well as the political thoughts he carried with him when he became President. Consequently, and as the center of this paper, I will carefully trace the timeline of his presidency with particular emphasis on the major events that blended his domestic and foreign policy, such as the XYZ controversy

and the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Finally, I will attempt to frame the official establishment of the Democratic-Republican party leading up to the election of 1800 to be a direct consequence of Adam's presidency, by showing that they were only able to advance so much due to how much Adams lost.

1. Political Factions and Political Parties

It is not possible to examine the contributions of John Adams' presidency towards partisan politics without first acknowledging the underlying factors that precede it. Simply put, the political divide was, in no way, a new phenomenon in American politics when Adams was elected. Perhaps the most transparent example of this can be seen in the Constitution, as it was eventually a "[miraculous] compromise [of] many diverse ideas and interest" (Fumurescu, 2019, pg. 207). In fact, it may even be said that the identity of the American people was first and foremost one of division (Abott, 1991, pg. 1). A brief survey into Early American history reveals as much.

As early as the 1840's, this unique combination of "social conditions" of Americans was already a subject of fascination, as seen in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Right away, he opens his analysis in the very first page by examining the circumstances under which America was established:

When the people of Europe landed in the New World, their national characteristics were already completely formed... The Immigrants who came at different periods to occupy the territory now covered by the American Union differed from each other in many respects; their aim was not the same, and they governed themselves on different principles...

Later, he would go on to claim that it was substantially because of these mixed identities, of being a people who were not connected by much else but a mutual language and a mutual suffering of poverty and misfortune, that Americans would eventually give each other an unprecedented amount of freedom (31). As he would later go on to explain, these inexhaustible freedoms, derived from such “social conditions” are why America’s popular sovereignty was successful while others were not. Seen another way, Tocqueville would undoubtedly agree that America— and all its success— is wholly a product of divided identities. After all, he openly acknowledges that the American people are of a group who thought themselves to be inherently equal and were of “men who are naturally divided on religious opinions and on political theory” (pp. 14, 42).

A century later, a successive body of work would add onto the foundations he laid. On the one hand, there would be people like Arthur Schlesinger (1919), Joyce Appleby (1976), and Sanford Kessler (1992), who would continue his findings by showing the disunity of the American people to be largely consequences of geo-political differences, that Tocqueville claimed to naturally prevent a “territorial aristocracy” (14). On the other, are people like Phillip Abbott (1991), Stephen Feldman (1997), and Alin Fumurescu (2019) who instead choose to emphasize the people’s shared puritans background and how much weight each colony placed on their religious belief.

Therefore, as seen in the plethora of work done, by the time John Adams was promoted to the presidency, division was already a staple in American politics. However, those divisions can, at best, only be considered *factional* politics, and not wholly *partisan* politics.

This is not to say that there were not already some aspects of partisan politics at play when Adams ascended to the presidency. There undoubtedly were, as shown under the

conditions in which Adams was elected. It was a two-party ticket that was heavily contested, and he only won by a thin margin of 3 electoral votes, among others. However, as has been argued by many historians like Richard Buel. Jr (1972), John Ferling (2004), Gordon Wood (2009), in the election of 1797, there were simply too many factors missing for it to be properly considered a competition of parties.

For one, at the time Adams ran for election, the idea of “parties” was still taboo. As Gordon Wood saw it, Americans by 1797 still considered parties to be “a disease in body politics, signs of partiality and self-interestedness in opposition to the general goods” (2009, pg.141). Of course, this would completely change by 1800, as the country would then see the electorates openly and passionately uniting themselves under formal partisan identities (Ferling, 2004, pg.151). The incredible presence of political parties in that election is again seen in Jefferson’s first inaugural address just a year later, in which he broke precedence by directly addressing the existing parties— unlike George Washington who had only mentioned parties in the abstract before, or Adams who overlooks it completely (Bailey, 2007, pg. 23; Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 2).

Perhaps more telling of the formal absence of political parties in 1797 is just how little organization there was among people of similar political beliefs. As Jeffrey Pasley points out, the election of 1797 was one without nominations, conventions, speaking tours, or even a national vote (2013, pg. 4). In trying to debate this, many explanations have been offered. John Ferling, for example, attributes it to geo-political causes, that America was much too underdeveloped and therefore “voting often was a low-priority matter” against the farming and rural needs of the American people (2004, pg. 86). For Gordon Wood, it was a little more complicated. He argues that it was because of “personal ambitions, local interest, sectional ties, and personal friendship”

that national party loyalties were often disregarded (2009, pg. 212). Regardless, it can be reasonably concluded that at best, there were only “loose patterns of associations known as factionalism” (Hoadley, 2014, pg.758). It would be during John Adams presidency that this would change.

2. Prologue: The Title Controversy, Jay’s Treaty, and the French

There is some truth in saying that Adams was simply unlucky when he got into office, that he did not inherit just the office, but also many other challenges that placed his tenure at a disadvantage from the beginning. As Stanley Elkin and Eric McKittrick concisely put it, most important of those were the unfamiliar and strange foreign policies projected by both Britain and France amid their European war, and the “bafflingly indeterminate and transitional state of political parties in America” (1993, pg. 530). This much is true and indisputable. Even dating back as far as the revolutionary war, the tension between the two European powers was on full display; and as has been mentioned, the very election of Adams in 1796 is proof of the underlying domestic tensions (Deconde, 1966, p. 7; Pasley, 2013, pg. 9). But as I will try to show here, along with these unfortunate circumstances, Adams was also presented with ample opportunities along the way in which he could have eased those difficulties— though he usually did not. In other words, while we should grant Adams some leniency for the difficult conditions he inherited, we should also be careful not to be too forgiving when talking about how his presidency divided the country.

Firstly, it should be noted that before he was vice president, John Adams was already an expert in Western European politics and foreign relations (Ryerson, 2016, pg. 318). In his career of being indisputably “America’s finest eighteenth-century student of political science,” not only

was he amply-well versed in the theoretical half of the discipline, but he was also someone who had plenty of practical experiences in various diplomatic roles (Thompson, 1998, xiii; Howe, 1969, pg. 3).

In 1776, as a delegate in the very first continental congress, he served on a committee that drafted the “Model Treaty,” an early attempt at guiding future generations through foreign relations; in 1778, during the war, he was sent to France to guarantee assistance for his countrymen and simultaneously establish friendly relations as well; at the end of the war in 1783, he was sent to negotiate the Treaty of Paris with Britain, and to borrow money from the Dutch (Ferling, 1994, pg. 228; Mayville, 2016, pg. 4). In fact, the accomplishments of John Adams during the revolutionary era was so undeniable that even his lifelong enemy, Alexander Hamilton admitted in *Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams*, a letter meant to cripple Adams reputation, that he had also held for him, “a high veneration” in those periods.

Yet, given how well experienced he was in foreign relations, it would only be reasonable to think that he would have been greatly influential as well after the Revolutionary war. However, he was not. Instead, as would happen for much of his career, his “struggle with ambitions and recognition” got in the way (Ferling, 1994, pg. 235).

Immediately after the war, as the country proceeded to stabilize itself and establish some foundations, one of the first problems the new nation sought to address was “to consider and report, what style or title it will be proper to annex to the office of the President and Vice President,” (Hutson, 1968, pg. 31). While although most of the country had originally anticipated— and to various degree, accepted—the possibility of the new office inevitably

having some “good [dosage] of monarchism”; ultimately, neither side was sure as the debate began on April 14, 1789 (Wood, 2009, pg. 54; Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 48).

For some, still somewhat uneasy about the new Constitution, a more casual address was favored. Among these was James Madison. Although he believed in a more empowered executive; as he saw it, a title that was too elitist would only incite the people's fear. Therefore, he proposed only a simple “President of the United States.” (Wood, 2009, pg. 85). But for others, something a bit more dignified was preferred, like “[his] Excellency” or “[his] Elective Highness” (Hutson, 1968, pg. 32). Many those who wanted a more distinguished title were Adams contemporaries who all shared with him a fear of the “popular [energy] unleashed by the revolution [that] might result in tyrannical majorities” (Mayville, 2016, pg. 6). For instance, George Washington was one of the ones who shared the aristocratic views, as he believed that the presidency should, at the very least, be considerably prestigious (Wood, 2009, pg. 77).

However, though members of each side all had some feelings towards the issue, no one was more passionate about it than Adams. After all, it was he who raised the question in the first place, and had done so almost immediately upon being elected (Hutson, 1968, pg. 31). Although the exact degree is uncertain, since there are no official records of the debates, there is one particular observation shared among scholars who have studied the event in regards to Adams’ behavior: that he was extremely meddlesome and intrusive (Hutson, 1968, pg. 34; Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 46; Wood, 2009, pg. 87).

Today, with a better understanding of Adams’ political psychology, due to the contribution of historians like Joseph Ellis or C. Bradley Thompson, we know that Adams was only so passionate because he was afraid for his new country, and he thought that perhaps a delay of answering it would be detrimental for the republic (Miroff, 1986, pg. 199). As

summarized by Luke Mayville recently, “he thought that titles could channel the energies of the most ambitious away from destructive self-interest and toward public-spirited activity” (2016, pg. 133). Put another way, rather than to condemn his efforts; today, some concession must be granted towards the underlying innocence of his vehement conduct. After all, it was a question that was as natural to him as any other, for it was a problem that many of his heroes—like Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Hume— had sought to address also (Thompson, 1995, pg. 390; Ellis, 1993, pg. 46). As Gordon Wood saw it, Adams should instead be thanked for raising the debate, since the question he raised also helped to answer many other ones:

By creating a single strong president, the new federal Constitution had undoubtedly moved America back toward the abandoned English monarchy. But just how far back towards monarchy should Americans go? Just how royal and kingly should America become? How much of the English monarchical model should the new government adopt? (2009, pg. 85).

Unfortunately, his peers at the time were not so kind nor understanding— not even George Washington, who may have had favored “His High Mightiness, the President of the United States and Protector of Their Liberties” himself (Wood, 2009, pg. 84). Instead, by the time the debate was finished, exactly three weeks after it had started, with Madison’s choice winning, John Adams was only left with a bruised reputation and some mocking nicknames— like the famous “His Rotundity”— that left him at odds with many of his allies, (Mayville, 2016, pg.126). Consequently, after the controversy, slightly embarrassed and cautious to not to damage his own reputation as had happened to his vice president, Washington took careful measures to avoid Adams for a while (Wood, 2009, pg.85).

The drastic measure that Washington took to alienate himself from Adams was so great that even as tensions with Britain were increasing substantially, Washington still did not turn to Adams for advice (Ryerson, 2016, pg.318). Therefore, John Adams’ expertise was greatly

underutilized and undermined during the nation's first serious "international crisis," and in the signing of Jay's Treaty in 1794 (Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 110).

Although we will never know just how differently the outcome may have been if Adams had been involved, we ultimately do know the results that occurred *without* him. While though the particular consequences of the treaty are still being debated today, it seems that there are sufficient agreements on at least two general facts: that the treaty gave way to the emergence of an angry public, in which many felt themselves to have been ignored in the new eminently *democratic* republic, and that it worsened tensions with France (Charles, 1955, pg. 612; Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 113). Viewed another way, Adams absence in the drafting of Jay's treaty may be easily considered to have bolstered the exact conditions that would eventually define his presidency (William, 1957, pg. 38; Pasley, 2002, pg. 107).

Perhaps it is his peers that should ultimately be blamed for Adams absence in the weak treaty, which, in addition to angering the public and alienating France, also further complicated the relationship with Great Britain (Charles, 1955, pg. 619). We know today that Adams was arguably one of the very few who properly understood the underlying factors of the treaty, that although "it was preferable to war" it was still not the "complete reorientation" of the nation's policy as they wanted (618). Therefore, the possible differences that Adams may have made can only be speculated. However, it should be noted that Adams is not at all blameless either.

For one, prior to the debate in 1789, Adams was already aware of the divisive nature of his personality. After all, there is very little doubt that Adams was, as Bruce Miroff explicitly puts it, "an inveterate political psychologist" who could have realized that his "assumptions of classical republican politics [would not hold] in America" and was well-learned in "uncovering and dissecting underlying motives" (1986, pg. 187). Had he done so, perhaps he would have

been included in the treaty, since Washington had earlier considered Adams to be one of his principal advisors (Paullin, 1924, pg. 495).

There are also prior instances which inform us of this discomfiting behavior. In the private sphere, he often exchanged letters with his contemporaries and often found himself arguing or trying to defend his ideas—rarely did he ever concede (Wood, 2009, pg. 214). Within the public, and perhaps most telling of this period, there are his publications of *A Defense of the Constitution of the United States of America* in 1787 and *Discourses on Davila* in 1790.

Even though he will inadvertently go on to become a victim of his own “intractable passions” countless of times in his career, his publication of *A Defense* was, surprisingly, not one of those occasions (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 535). Instead, as we know today, it was written innocently to praise the new Constitution—which had been drafted and ratified without him, as he was still an ambassador to England at the time (Mayville, 2016, pg. 319-340). Unfortunately, he also chose to praise the new Constitution by comparing its likeliness to aristocratic and monarchic regimes, and therefore, provoking the fresh anxieties of many in the new republic (Thompson, 1980, pg. 172).

He would eventually return to a hero’s welcome nonetheless, upon which many would advocate for him to, at the very least, be elected to a seat in the first congress; simultaneously, it was also during this time that many were also beginning to harbor suspicion of his monarchical favoritism (Miroff, 1987, pg. 375). But alas, he was elected into the vice presidency. The strength of his enduring popularity and the strong respect he still garnered from his contemporaries can be seen in this first election, as he still won with 34 votes—with no one else having more than 9— despite a series of guileful schemes attempted by Hamilton to stop his election (Ryerson, 2016, pg. 316). A year and some months into his term as Vice-President,

Discourses on Davila would be written. Like *Defense*, today, there are reasons to believe that *Discourses* was also similarly written with innocent intent.

Unlike the presidency, which was a product of mixing intellectual and ideological ideas developed strenuously, the vice presidency was, at the time, a mere safety measure established only to provide a back-up for the Presidential office in case of emergencies (Williams, 1987, pg. 38) In other words, the vice-presidency was mostly a useless office without much imperative when Adams was elected (Thompson, 1980, pg. 171). There are many entries within his own journals that illustrate the prevalent boredom he felt from his office, that it was “too inactive and mechanical.” The anguish he felt from the underwhelming office is so bad that he sometimes took to transcribing Latin into English for fun (Thompson, 1980, pg. 174).

This is not to say that Adams was inactive during his time. True to his inherent beliefs, Adams intensely executed his role as the head of the Senate with careful attention—he actively oversaw the chamber and casted a record twenty-nine tie-breaking votes, as enumerated to him by the Constitution. Initially, he also took it upon himself to rebuke the members when he saw them to be in the wrong, but he was quick to rescind that behavior upon realizing that it was not his place (Ryerson, 2016, pg. 345). Meanwhile in his spare time, he also took to publishing *Discourses*, a peculiar series of letters written in defense of his preferred style of “mixed government”—one in which an almost monarchic executive was necessary to “curb its citizen’s ambitions” (Elkins and McKittrick 1993, pg. 534; Ryerson, 2016, pg. 336).

Within *Discourses* also, was an explicit defense for the need of symbolic titles, in which he states, “The wisdom and virtue of all nations have endeavored to regulate the passion for respect and distinction, and to reduce it to some order in society, by titles marking the gradation of magistracy” (Mayville, 2016, pg.128). As with *Defense*, the publications of *Discourses* were

also met with sweeping negative responses. As it was printed in *Gazettes of the United States*, one of the more popular newspapers of the new republic, *Discourses* had a wide audience. At the very least, it was read by Thomas Jefferson and his followers, most of whom were already beginning to favor a more democratic form of government, thus adding more leverage for outcry (Pasley, 2002, pg. 59; Abbott, 1991, pg. 9). There is also something to be said in how soon the publication of *Discourses* was done, as it came immediately following Adams' defeat in his title campaign. For Luke Mayville, *Discourses* was simply a testament of Adams "characteristic stubbornness," and for Bruce Miroff, it was another instance of Adams' "self-indulgence in his self-gratification." (Miroff, 1986, pg. 128; Mayville, 2016, pg. 128).

Together, these three events paints an adequate picture of Adams' vice presidency— that it was consistently disrupted by his inability to "balance" his ideological ambitions and beliefs with the actual increasingly democratic realities of the time (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, p. 534; Ferling, 1994, pg. 235; Wood, 2009, pg. 3). In other words, although there are others to be blamed for the conditions that Adams would later inherit as President, much of the faults should be accredited to himself as well. As Andy Trees would summarize of his presidency, "he was [also] fighting against the popular currents of the time with theories too complex and abstruse to popularize sufficiently" (2001, pg. 412).

As we will see later, not much will change. Despite all the opposition he faced as the head of the senate, in both the public and the private spheres, and for all his keen understanding of the inherent need of compromise in politics, it will ultimately appear that Adams was simply just flawed inherently (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 530; Fumurescu, 2019, pg. 117) . In short, it is from similar conditions in his vice presidency that John Adams will ultimately become immensely influential in the development of partisan politics.

3. The Election of 1796 and Thomas Jefferson

To properly understand the state of things in the earlier days of his presidency, we must examine more closely the last few months preceding it, namely the period from the ratification of the Treaty to the very last day of the election. This is an important period because it was during this time that the country saw, finally, “the inner core of national leadership actuated by [men] of their ideological assessments of republican government from the beginning” (Buel Jr, 1972, pg. 51). In other words, it was during this period that the great experiment was first able to be observed and manipulated as each person saw fit (Charles, 1955, pg. 582).

As has been mentioned previously, one of the more important consequences of Jay’s Treaty is that it “hastened the formation of the first political parties by deepening and clarifying allegiance on both sides” (Estes, 2000, pg. 393). Evidence of this is seen in the aftermath of the Treaty, as it gave way to the emergence of 53 new journals, most of which were used to funnel specific political opinion into the public (Pasley, 2002, pg. 107). Although it would be a few more years until those divisions would grow into becoming parties, there is no denying that the foundations were concretely established with the passing of the Treaty.

One way of grouping the strange organizations that emerged after the treaties is to consider them as “proto-parties,” which, according to James Roger Sharp, are loose coalitions of allies with similar identities (1993, pg. 138). Perhaps the biggest differences between these and the actual parties that would eventually emerge is that these “proto-parties” lacked almost entirely the recognition and the formal organizations that would come to define the later ones (Hoadley, 2014, pg. 778). Regardless, the overall cohesiveness of these “proto-parties” is still

worth noting, as they were ultimately able to galvanize to spark “[sic] an unexpectedly popular presidential politics” (Pasley, 2013, pg.15).

On the one hand, were the Republicans. This was a group who had adapted Thomas Paine’s dislike of the “old aristocracy” into defining their anti-monarchism stance (Mayville, 2016, pg. 63). To borrow from the definition of Gordon Wood, they were “ordinary Americans” who “rejected the monarchism of Great Britain” and were “developing a keen sense of their own worth” (2009, pg. 3). In a more elaborate sense, this group can also be viewed as a rebranding of the anti-Federalists coalition who had lost during the Constitution debate, as many of them carried similar beliefs and identities: pro-French, egalitarian, and as many historians have noted, Southern (Charles, 1955, pg. 586). Because of their distinct identity, many historians have also come to conclude that perhaps they were more aggravated by the Treaty than their counterparts, given the distinctively pro-British characteristics of the treaty, and the fact that it was passed—mostly— by the staunchly aristocratic Northern Federalists (Sharp, 1993, pg. 139).

The intensity of the backlash felt by the Republicans is perhaps best seen in their nomination of their fellow southerner, Thomas Jefferson, for the presidential election. In their desperations, many immediately took to viewing Jefferson to be the preferred savior of the Union, as the antithesis to extreme “bourgeoisie” Federalists who were clearly “opponents of Republicanism” who would again drive the country back into the arms of the English (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 85; Pasley, 2002, pg. 165). This is intriguing as Jefferson was neither a “common man,” as many of the Republicans were, nor did he share much of the same ferocious loathing of the Federalists either (Deconde, 1957, pg. 645; Sharp, 1993, pg. 143).

Hailing from a mildly-wealthy Virginian family in which “upwards mobility was accentuated,” he would eventually go to lead an incredible career (Ferling, 2000, pg. 16). First

becoming the Father of the Independence movement for his work on the Declaration, he went on to serve in both the executive and the legislature of Virginia's government in the new confederation, before becoming the first Secretary of State. All the while in between he would also serve in many foreign diplomatic positions. In other words, like Washington or Adams, Jefferson ultimately led a career that made him one of the giants of the of the new republic—even among the founders who, as Jeffrey Paisley points out, were already an elite group:

Twenty-nine of the fifty-five Framers were college graduates in a time when almost no one went to college and the same number (though not the same people) had legal training. Almost all the Framers were wealthy attorneys, investors, merchants, or planters, or some combination of those, and twenty-five were slaveholders. Thirty of the fifty-five Framers were people the Confederation government owed money to. Forty-Two had served in the old Congress, and a great many had been high-ranking state officials or military officers (2013, pg. 16).

Therefore, it is certainly odd that so many in 1796 would come to view him as being anything less than what Jefferson would later consider himself: a natural aristocrat (Mayville, 2016, pg. 129). Although there are many reasons for this misunderstanding among his followers, perhaps one of the more convincing ones is that, unlike Adams, Jefferson was incredible at hiding his true beliefs beneath his heroic stature, which was often coupled with extraordinary argumentative as well as pacifying skills (Bailey, 2007, pg. 103). As Luke Mayville saw it, Adam's elitism was "transparent," whereas Jefferson' was adept at "[fashioning] himself as a plain public servant and a man of the people with no taste of frivolous dignities" (2016, pg. 125).

In other words, while it was easy for the opponents of the Federalists to view Jefferson to be the antithesis of Adams or even Washington, whose reputation was diminished substantially with the passing of Jays Treaty, they may have just been wrong. A closer examination into Jefferson's underlying identity and motives reveals this fallacy.

Although they may have differed in how they executed what they intrinsically thought was best for the American people, fundamentally, it may be said that Adams and Jefferson were quite similar. At the very least, Adams and Jefferson were both subscribers to the idea of a “natural aristocracy” being beneficial for “the common good of the society” (Hunt Jr. and Ross, 2019, pg. 310). Of course, as Gordon Wood and Luke Mayville, among others, point out, there was a substantial difference between the two views. Jefferson’s idea was a bit more optimistic, as he felt that a good aristocrat could be found in any man who was nurtured properly; whereas Adams was a bit more cautious and was often worried about the susceptibility of an individual towards corruption and self-interestedness (Wood, 2017, pg. 16; Mayville, 2016, pg. 133). However, it should be noted that Jefferson’s optimism is often exaggerated, for there is ample evidence of the more “negative” side of his political ideologies as well. One example of such is seen in an earlier letter between him and Representative William Stephen Smith that shows his acceptance of the inevitability of corruption, and his devised “natural” solution for the problem:

What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? let them take arms. the remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon & pacify them. what signify a few lives lost in a century or two? the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. it is it’s natural manure (Jefferson, 1787).

But perhaps even more telling of the staunch similarities between Adams and Jefferson’s negative ideological slant is that they were both influenced by similar thinkers, as shown by Louis B Wright (1943) in the case of Jefferson, and John Howe (1966) in Adam’s. Among the many influences the two shared, perhaps the most interesting of the group is Niccolo Machiavelli. Recent scholarship differs in their interpretation of how influential the Florentine thinker was to the founders, but overall it seems that there is at least some acceptance of a baseline of influence. As Paul Rahe saw it, “Machiavelli exercised a species of intellectual

hegemony over republican thought in the eighteenth century exceed by none but John Locke” whether primarily or “second-hand,” and that even in Locke, similar assumptions and traces can be found as well (1995, pg. 451). The important thing about Jefferson being influenced by Machiavelli is that, because of the nature of Machiavellian ideas, it insinuates the impossibility of Jefferson ever becoming a man who was “unambiguously hostile to human bondage,” as many among the republicans wanted him to be (Pasley, 2013, pg. 228). We will see this impossibility more clearly later during Adams Presidency.

In shorter terms, the strength of partisan passions in 1796 can be seen in many overwhelming efforts in projecting a new identity onto Jefferson, one that was quite contrary to actuality. However, this is not to say Jefferson was not at all the figure they had hoped for him to be— he was, to some degree— but rather as of 1796, he was not yet that person (Bailey, 2007, pg. 13). In fact, at the very start of 1796, the Jefferson that existed was still one that was enjoying the fruits of an early retirement, and one that did not care to be president (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 546). In short, as summarized by Stephen G Kurtz, “The party of Jefferson was not led by Jefferson in its first national campaign” (1957, pg. 95).

As we will see, the period between 1796 and 1800 will see Jefferson’s political ideals undergoing a drastic transformation, as it would become more active and radicalized (Wood, 2009, pg. 268). For as Jeremy Bailey points out, “Jefferson was too good a politician, and too enthralled with experimentation, to be rigid in his views” (Bailey, 2007, pg. 259)

Of course, the Republicans were not the only proto-parties to be provoked by the passing of Jay’s Treaty. The treaty also intensified the passions of the opposing faction, the Federalists, (Sharp, 1993, pg. 149). For them, much of the worry came in the form of a growing fear of the

populace that was derived from many events that preceded the treaty— most of all the French Revolution.

By 1796, news of the “Reign of Terror,” arguably the worst part of the French Revolution, was widely familiar within the new country. While many praised the Revolution for, as Jefferson succinctly summarized it, overturning the “confederacy of princes against human liberty,” there were also many who came to see the Revolution as a reminder of the dangers of unchecked democratic passions (Pasley, 2013, pg. 67). For example, Alexander Hamilton, one of the eventual heads of the Federalists party, considered the Revolution as an “excesses and extravagances” indulgences of the populace in their revolutionary ideals, which he thought would ultimately be paid for by their own liberties (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 46)

Furthermore, it must be noted that many saw the Revolution not only as *a* warning of popular passion, but rather, as the most important one as well (Charles, 1955, pg. 613). This was because the French Revolution was preceded by a string of other rebellions that had incited similar fears as well. Most recently was the ongoing Haitian revolution; since it was spearheaded by slaves, many worried that it would also incite similar waves of slave revolts throughout the southern states against the federal government (Berkin, 2017, pg. 194). But prior to that, was a series of smaller rebellions as well: Bacon’s (1670’s), Shay’s (1780s’) and perhaps most importantly, the one of Pennsylvanians and Virginians farmers known as the Whiskey Rebellions (1790’s).

Although scholars disagree on the exact causes of the rebellion, it seems that there is, overall, a concurrence in considering Jay’s Treaty to be a large factor (Charles, 1995; Pasley, 2002; Berkin, 2017). Because they were mostly farmers, many were upended by the mercantile slant of the treaty. Thus, many felt that Jay’s Treaty was an infringement of governmental

authority, particularly by the north (DeConde, 1957, pg. 646). As such, many among the south considered the rebellion to be just, that it was their right to rise against an unfair or potentially tyrannical government (Berkin, 2017, pg. 8). And perhaps they were right, as Richard Buel Jr. summarily noted, “[the treaty] served notice that the executive was set on a different course... and decisively undercut further opposition initiatives in foreign policy.” (1972, pg. 60). But for the Federalist, the means of revolting against ones’ own government, regardless of their reasons, was simply seditious— never mind the fact that they themselves had been a product of a larger rebellion beginning in the middle of 1776 (Pasley, 2013, pg. 71).

Therefore, to thwart the very dangerous passions of the populace, who were “[sic] frenchified tools” who would “murder all good men... and destroy all the wisdom and virtue of the country,” many of the Federalists in turn opted for a more aristocratic candidate to follow Washington’s retirement (Wood, 2017, pg. 281). But although there would be some discord within the Federalists party as to who Washington’s successor should be; ultimately, due to his stature and resume, it would eventually become obvious to many that there would be no better options than Adams. His New England origins that contrasted the Republican south was certainly useful as well (Sharp, 1993, pg. 142). For it was well known that Adams shared their distaste of the decrying populace as well, as he had deemed the dissenters as a “mobocracy” (Isenberg and Burnstein, 2019, pg. 165) As such, the election of 1776 was set: Vice-President John Adams and the Federalists against Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans.

4. The Very Beginning

When Adams was elected into office, the surface of the new country was, for the most part, the same as it had been for decades. As Ralph Adams Brown adequately summarized:

The total population was under five million, two-thirds of whom lived within a hundred miles of the seacoast. Half the people beyond the distance lived in log cabins, the others in houses made of thin wooden planks. Much of the land was wilderness. Roads were poor and existed only along the coast or between important villages or cities... Europe was at war. (1975, pg. 23).

However, at the same time, few things were more apparent than the imminence of change. In fact, it may even be said that the election was proof of such change, since none of the founders would have predicted the weighty influences that would come to be exerted by the populace—least of all Jefferson himself, who had earlier imagined a kind of indirect representative democracy (Bailey, 2007, pg. 15). But what was even more undeniable, was the country's turn towards partisan politics, in which partisan ideals and efforts became coherently organized and executed in aggregated, national entities rather than type of localized practice that had defined the revolutionary era (Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 86).

For some, the election of Adams was proof of a still-present unity within the new country, that perhaps “the violence of party” had been destroyed by having Adams and Jefferson on the same ticket (Sharp, 1993, pg. 162). However, most were not so optimistic. If there was indeed a war of parties, then only the first battle had been fought— and for the next four years, the war would rage on as each side sought to advance their own agendas and extinguish their opponents (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 8).

As far as the Republicans were concerned, the election results did not necessarily equate to a complete loss. The reasons for this, simply put, is that compared to the alternative, Adams, even with his polarizing beliefs, was the lesser of two evils (Pasley, 2013, pg. 409). And although the “alternatives evil” here can be understood to be a multitude of characters, there was one in particular that many Republicans feared and loathed more than anyone else: Alexander Hamilton.

Although they were both Federalists hailing from humble beginnings who advocated for the utility of distinctive titles and both shared a dislike for slavery, the overall differences between Hamilton and Adams political views could not be any greater (Mayville, 2016, pg. 135). Perhaps this is best seen in their differing views of republicanism. As I have briefly mentioned before, even though it was often misunderstood for being overly elitist and monarchic, Adams' ideal version of republicanism fundamentally still defers to the general populace (Mayville, 2016, pg. 87). This was not so for Hamilton. Instead, in Hamilton's view, the *democrate* was not to be trusted and should therefore defer to a "Unitarian" executive. As he saw it, so long as the executive was capable of suffering the "blame and credits" of the populace and was restrained ultimately, it was a fine executive— no matter how powerful it was (Bailey, 2008, pg. 457).

Further, unlike their misunderstanding with Adams, which was mostly speculative, the Republicans fear of Hamilton was not unfounded (Aldrich and Grant, 1993, pg. 296). His fear of a "republican excess" is seen in many instances leading up to the election, but perhaps most notable in his greatly controversial proposal for the nation's first banking system and in his response to the unpopular reception of Jay's Treaty.

Though certainly not the only one nor the most important, after the war, the question of a centralized banking system was undoubtedly the first to divide the very fresh country (Buel Jr. 1972. Pg. 8). Following the Revolution, governments at various levels all incurred substantial amount of debts, and due to the newness of the country, almost none could feasibly repay them. Under the first administration, Washington then delegated the problem to Hamilton, who was his subordinate during the battles and had been made the Secretary of Treasury. In a very basic sense, Hamilton's proposal was simple: create a Federal bank and pay off the states debts at face value entirely, which would then prove the strength of the new government. The way he

proposed for the government to pay off those debts was by having the national government sell more bonds, from which individuals would be able to cash in later for a substantial return.

However, the proposal was greatly unpopular. In fact, it may even be reasonably argued to be the main factor for the birth of the Republican party, as it greatly alienated those from the rural agrarian south (Ketcham, 2016, pg. 64). For the early “republicans,” the problem was that the selling and buying of bonds benefited the capitalist north disproportionately. They believed that because of their mercantile economy, the north was much more used to running on capital and were therefore in a better place to exploit those bonds for their own benefits (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 11).

But beyond the economic side of it, the first bank was also interpreted to be largely a political question. On one side, were the likes of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson who, although differed monumentally in the larger ideas, believed that a federal banking system was unconstitutional. Jefferson pointed to the 10th amendment and claimed that the problem of debt should be best left to a state-by-state basis (Bailey, 2007, pg. 83). Meanwhile, Madison, himself a nationalist, believed that the new bank would distribute an unequal amount of strains onto its constituents, and was therefore, oppressive and unconstitutional (Ketcham, 2016, pg. 64).

Obviously, on the other side were Hamilton and his few supporters, who argued in response that the bank was a necessary exertion of the Constitutions “necessary and proper” clause to “secure the revolutionary achievements by making an influential creditor class dependent on the government” (Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 11; Bailey, 2007, pg. 82). As we know today, Hamilton was ultimately able to overcome the immense unpopularity of the charter with a long and drastic lobbying effort. As such, by establishing a national bank in a time when there were almost no banks at all, Hamilton’s standing as “one of the great statements of modern Western

history” was then made undeniable (Wood, 2017, pg. 246). This new reputation of his will eventually come to trouble Adams a great deal later on.

But beyond just a strong central government, Hamilton also advocated for an equally, if not more, powerful “unitary” executive who could override the populace (Bowman, 1956, pg. 41). Like his beliefs of a strong federal government, Hamilton also considered a condensed executive to be ideal. As Stephen Rosen framed it, Hamilton largely subscribed to a realistic view of the executive, in which the executive is free to do whatever it must to respond properly to its “circumstances,” regardless of the cost of principles or accountability (1981, pg. 185). As such, even though many considered Washington’s ratification of Jay’s treaty to be a violation of his powers, for an undutiful enlargements, Hamilton simply did not care (Pasley, 2013, pg. 114). Instead, he saw the treaty to be a necessary step for the conservation of the new nation’s maritime trade, and therefore, the unhappy public was to be ignored regardless of their fervor.

In fact, the unbelievable length to which Hamilton ignored the populace has led to some historians decrying Hamilton’s version of republicanism to be “unswervingly” selfish, and to compare it to being like a “King George III-type Oligarchy” (Bowman, 1956, pg. 19). Therefore, given his “monarchist” emphasis on the ultimate good, it is certainly understandable why many within the new nations ultimately preferred Adams to Hamilton (pg. 41). For as Jeffrey Pasley has pointed out, many considered Adams only an aristocrat in theory; and as we have seen thus far, Hamilton was a clearer embodiment of aristocratic ideals (2013, pg. 409).

Besides the fact that he was a preferable choice when compared to Hamilton, there was another reason why the Republicans considered the election of Adams to be a partial win as well. Given his “rabid” insistences for independence and distinction, and his— as seen in his inauguration address— ardent devotion to his “duties,” many within the Republican ranks

believed that Adams would be easy to manipulate (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 530; Pasley, 2013, pg. 410). However, the Republicans were not the only ones to see opportunities in Adams inauguration either— many within his own party also saw. Whereas the Republicans would eventually be led by a newly-enthusiastic Jefferson to disempower Adams; from within, Adams betrayal was immediate and was led by none other than Alexander Hamilton (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 213).

Although nowadays we see presidential cabinets being overhauled with the election of each consecutive president as a governmental norm, in the late 1790's, this was not the case. As many scholars have pointed out, the very beginning of that tradition may be feasibly viewed to have only started with the election of Jefferson (Cunningham, 1978; Bailey, 2007; Calabresi and Yoo, 2008). As such, for the first two presidents, the cabinets were largely a perfunctory and experimental piece. For Washington, it was another tool for dealing with the insurmountable amount of issues that were arising in the new republic. Whereas for Adams, the cabinet was merely a commemorative object used to uphold the respectability of the executive. As he saw it, the cabinet had been established and imbued with the legacy of the ever-immortal George Washington, and so he felt that any changes to it would mean upending the credibility of his predecessor (Brown, 1975, pg. 27).

Further, because of his unique idea of the executive, he was also very reluctant to make use of the cabinet as well. For, as Richard Alan Ryerson has noted, one of the cornerstones of Adams' executive was his emphasis on political isolation— Adams strictly believed in a self-efficient and independent executive who would not be constrained by anyone else (2016, pg. 350). Therefore, for much of his presidency, Adams did not bother to control his cabinet very much. Unfortunately, the members of the cabinets he inherited were nowhere as trusting or

honorable. Rather, many came to see Adams reputed hesitance as a sign of weakness and a given opportunity worth exploiting. But where the Republicans were slow in their efforts to disempower Adams; from within, Adams betrayal was immediate and headed by a coalition composed of his secretaries of state, war, and treasury— all of whom were devoted to Hamilton (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 213). As we will see later on, one of the larger causes of his failures lay in his inability to restrain his very own cabinet.

5. Adams takes office

As I have mentioned before, there was no more important matter to the Adams administration than the escalating problem with France. Of course, there was the impasse that was building domestically as his enemies sought to undermine him— but even his foes agreed that foreign impressment was a more pressing issue (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 159). On a larger scale, the state of the international climate could be summarized as such: the two largest powers of the world were at war, and each side was adamant about forcefully tying the United States to their cause. That much was simple; however, what was not so simple were the many factors at home that paralyzed Adams's ability to create an adequate response.

Despite the fact that almost an entire year had passed since the Treaty had become effective, going into March 1797 as he officially began his term, it seemed as if the same issues that had marked the final days of his vice presidency would continue to bother him even more. To some extent, that analysis was correct: the French were still angry at the offense they felt they had been dealt, and the fierce backlash from the treaty was still ongoing among the populace— especially among the Republican press (Pasley, 2002, pg. 109). However, on a larger, more subliminal scale, change was imminent.

As briefly mentioned before, what mostly set the rallying efforts of the “proto-parties” at the onset of 1796 and 1797 apart from those of actual “parties” in 1800 was the lack of coherent organization, as well as the intensity of those partisan passions (Buel Jr. 1972; Wood, 2009; Pasley, 2013; Hoadley, 2014; Petersen, 2017). In 1796, although there were definitely some efforts by both sides in trying to invoke support towards their preferred candidates, overall, there was simply not enough incentives on either side to mobilize properly as they will later on (Pasley, 2003, pg. 172). As many scholars have similarly pointed out, no matter how much either side wanted to, many were simply paralyzed by an inherent ideological constraint— the debilitating fear of political parties— to do anything too drastic (Wood, 2009, pg. 189). The same constraint applied to both Jefferson and Adams too, despite their giant statures (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 3). Furthermore, besides the problem of needing to recalibrate their fears with the increasing need of parties, there was yet another problem that further hindered the formation of parties in 1796.

In the eight years that passed since Washington took office, rather than to see an increase in nationalism as a country, many Americans grew to be more individualistic instead (Pasley, 2002, pg. 7). As Gordon Wood put it:

Americans became so thoroughly democratic that much of the period’s [1789-1815] political activity, beginning with the Constitution, was devoted to finding means and devices to tame [popular] democracy. Most important perhaps, ordinary Americans developed a keen sense of their own worth- that they were anybody's equal (2009, pg. 9).

As such, given the fact that one of the larger requirements for the formation of parties is the necessity of hierarchical functions, in which one must surrender ones’ credence to another supposedly better than him, the conflict of interest must inevitably be considered when contrasting the prerequisites of parties with the prevalence of individualism (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 88). Regrettably, Adams’ action and his belief of a strong executive who “would do it all

himself” will push the populace into overcoming those constraints— seemingly at the very start of his presidency (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 539).

On the issue of the French, just nine days after his inauguration, Adams met with the French envoy, Pierre Adet, to formally extend an olive branch as the new head of state. And although we cannot be entirely sure of the results— given how ambiguous the French’s responses were— there is evidence to say that Adams was minimally successful at the time, at least in convincing Adet alone (Brown, 1975, pg. 38). What makes this particular action so remarkable is that, at the time, Adams was keenly aware of the huge role Adet had played in the near failure of his election.

Originally part of a yearlong effort by the French to halt Jays Treaty, Adet is perhaps better known for his illicit electoral efforts in 1796 than anything else. Following the failure of his lobbying efforts to stop the treaty, Adet was recalled by the French directory to return to France. However, whether from an intrinsic patriotic spirit to help his country prevail or from selfish reasons to further his career with a victory, Adet also took it upon himself afterwards to lobby openly through the Republican press to appeal to the French-favored voters for the election of Jefferson (Berkin, 2017, pg. 155). For his efforts, Adet was ultimately successful in gifting Pennsylvania to Jefferson; but as Jeffrey Pasley had noted, in doing so, Adet also pushed Jefferson away from the “freer-swinging votes” by raising new questions of “emotional and political independence” within the country when it was still struggling to answer the earlier ones (2013, pg. 370-374).

If scholars like Richard Hofstadter (1970) or Gordon Wood (2009) are correct in their criticism of Adams for being soft in his dealings with foreign powers, this would certainly be the first point to validate their critique. Were there a substantial gain to be had from his pro-French

opponents at home, Adams leniency on Adet and the French for their unsanctioned interference would certainly be understandable. However, this was not the case as of 1797. Granted, his coalition was still under fire by the Republicans as of 1797; but circumstances among his opposition were not so bad as to warrant such a grotesque gesture of appeasement (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 213). In other words, in terms of public relations, there was little reason for Adams to pardon such infringing action, much less to embolden it by portraying his office as being desperate for some presupposed “peace” for the sakes of upholding “the dignity of his new office” (Brown, 1975, pg. 38).

This naïve outreach to the French is made even more puzzling once we consider the climate that was still lingering from a previous mistake Adams had made. During his inauguration, besides boasting of his accomplishments and appealing to the “posterity” that was submerging the country, Adams had also made an indirect appeal to the Republican factions “to unite the country behind him to meet a foreign danger” (DeConde, 1966, pg. 14). Regardless of how innocent of an attempt it was, his outreach ultimately alienated many within the Federalists faction for being such a pacific move towards the “separatists”.

Nor did Adams have very much to fear internationally either— threats of war were not seeking out the new nation yet (Berkin, 2017, pg. 155). By 1797, although press coverage on the matter differed substantially based on partisanship, both the French and the British were already seizing American ships; and had done so for a long time (DeConde, 1966, pg. 199). It was a style of aggression that suited the European powers well, as it was relatively without risk— given America’s inability to fight back— while proving effective at threatening America’s neutrality (Charles, 1955, pg. 619). As such, Adams could have opted for a more comprehensive gesture in which both, rather than one, side would be pleased. Further, if French aggression had not

escalated in the year passed since the Treaty, then it should have been unlikely for Adams to fear otherwise in the first few weeks of his presidency. Of course, we may say that it was a preemptive effort by Adams; but as Ralph Adam Brown noted, even before he was president, Adams was repeatedly reassured by the senate— however tactfully— that “France posed no threat to the United States,” and even if there were a threat, Adams still possessed a wide array of more aggressive options in handling the situation (1975, pg. 38).

As a result, despite it being a rather ingenious attempt at seeking peace with France, we may ultimately conclude that it was an inefficient move with few payouts. For one, the pardoning of the Republicans “imported” approach to victory was a clear indication of the drastic change in leadership within the new country party (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 129). No longer was it headed by the stern Washington who had earlier mobilized an army to put down the Whiskey Rebellion for the sakes of preserving national unity; but rather, the new man at the helm was Adams, who was then shown to be drastically more lenient towards those who threatened the integrity of the new nation (Brown, 1975, pg. 38; Berkin, 2017, pg. 75). It seems rather strange for a man who was so proud of the strength and independence of the new nation that he had so painstakingly helped to establish to allow for such a degree of infringement (Schlesinger, 1919, pg. 65). As we see some two-hundred years later, foreign interference remains an object to be taken seriously, and for many in office, treasonous.

Although the repercussion of this display of weakness remains open to interpretation, we may— at the very least— assume that it not only encouraged his dissenters to disregard their new president more, but also that it fueled disparity within his own party as well. After all, one of the better characteristics of Washington was his ability in suppressing his dissenters through his leadership skills, which in turn led to the slowing of political parties (DeConde, 1957, pg.

644). Put another way, the leniency imparted by Adams towards the French may be viewed as ample proof of his fundamental lacking of Washington's leadership skills— namely the kind aggressive command that was so needed then. As we will see later on, this shortcoming will ultimately lead to his inability to halt the fracturing and development of political parties as Washington had. But immediately, we may arguably say that Adams' leniency provided an opportunity at mobilizing too easy for either side to pass up.

Unfortunately, these were not the only problems to arise during the beginning of Adams' presidency either. In his efforts to begin his tenure anew and unhindered by the things that had plagued the latter days of Washington's final term, besides attempting to repair the relationship with the French, he also sought to unite the divide that had been made apparent by the election by courting reconciliation with Jefferson (Pasley, 2013, pg. 410; Brown, 1975, pg. 36). If the Hamilton-led defectors were not already embolden by his leniency towards the French, this guaranteed it (Brown, 1975, pg. 40).

On the one hand, the gestures were merely formalities. From two men who mutually respected each other and had been allies since the earlier days of the revolution, the exchanges of goodwill, or "détente" as Stephen G Kurtz described it, was meant to reinforce the good feeling that had emerged from their bi-partisan election (1957, pg. 215). Jefferson was the first to do so. Upon learning of Adams' win, he began a series of "deference and praise" towards Adams in the press, "trying to make overtures about rekindling their old associations" (Pasley, 2013, pg. 407). In one instance, Jefferson had even gone as far as to soothe the conflict by deeming Adams to be his senior in "life... congress...the diplomatic line" and in their "late civil government" (Wood, 2017, pg. 287). Adams returned the goodwill in kind, sometimes in drastically longer and larger gestures (Pasley, 2013, pg. 411).

However, unlike Jefferson who was rewarded for “reinforcing” his constituents “dreams of nonpartisan government,” Adams would come to suffer the repercussion of his outreach in the form of yet another political wound (Wood, 2017, pg. 287). Simply put, Adams’ attempt in unifying the political front was seen by many of his internal defectors, named the “high-Federalist,” as another opportunity for undermining his leadership. For the Hamilton-led dissenters, Adams’ unwillingness to vilify “the Republicans as trucklers to the French” was deciding proof of his supine shortcoming as an adequate leader, and therefore, just cause for unkind scheming (Ferling, 2004, pg. 102-107).

Thus, although Adams’ earliest actions in his presidency may be noble and innocent attempts in “[giving] his people breathing space” by appeasing both foreign powers and Jefferson— they were, ultimately and fundamentally, not (Brown, 1975, pg. 210). Instead, perhaps they may best be characterized as moments of miscalculations and depictions of how unprepared he was for the office he inherited, which then incentivized the development of parties as we will see. As Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick adequately summed it up: Adams was “strong in ideas, and weak in practical political experience” (1993, pg.535). Furthermore, from what we have seen, there is ultimately little room left for imparting the blame of the developments onto anyone else but Adams. If it was not apparent yet, it would be very quickly— if nothing else, the immediate days of Adams presidency can be viewed to be a kind of foreshadowing, hinting at complications in the near future.

6. Escalation and the Peace Envoy

For the first two months of his official presidency, Adams maintained his insistence on continuing Washington’s policies to uphold a smooth succession— most notably seen in the

retention of the Hamiltonians around him and his feigning neutrality towards the European powers. However, after two months, the ever-changing climate soon proved to be impossible to ignore.

Domestically, he saw the nation becoming more ardent on each side. The press that had carried the election the year before soon evolved into an entirely new beast altogether. In comparison, just the sheer numbers of “political advocates and party activist” dwarfed the last iteration (Wood, 2009, pg. 251). Whereas they had been headed by a few larger publications—like the Republicans’ *Aurora General Advertiser* or the Federalist’s aptly named *Federalists*—whose work often trickled into smaller newspapers and were used as the foundations of smaller publications throughout the new country; by mid 1797, large parts of the country soon became covered by new, independent publishers, each equally credible (Pasley, 2002, pg. 167). As such, news of impressment by the European powers towards the new nation were becoming more widespread, consequently igniting new passions among the previously indifference of the large population (Berkin, 2017, pg. 107).

At the center of the emerging storm was Adams. On the surface, he was somewhat successful in maintaining the image of a strong executive; but in private, fear and anxiety were beginning to make itself felt (Brown, 1975, pg. 24). At the forefront of these discomforts was a sense of loneliness, seen in the series of letters exchanged between him and his wife at the onset of his term. Just as well, the financial tolls required from moving into the White House were becoming quite burdensome too (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 268). Due to his humble beginning and his insistence on chasing after “personal advantages, difficulty, or even a strong prospect of failure” that saw him refusing the economic advantages that politics sometimes provided, unlike Hamilton, Adams was never quite as well equipped for the financial needs of the office as the

wealthy George Washington (Elkin and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 533). As such, the troubles immediately began to weigh quite heavily on him, to such an extent that it led Adams to remark to his wife on the first of April, just a month after his inauguration, “I expect to be obliged to resign in Six months before I can’t live” due to the problems of his loneliness and the problems of the “article of expenses.”

But what was even more troublesome to Adams, due to his staunch desire for national unity, was the underlying conflict between Jefferson’s “favor of France” and Hamilton’s “bias [to] Britain” that he was forced to mitigate (Ellis, 1993, pg. 22). However, to consider Adams as the middleman between the two would be wrong; rather, despite popular beliefs and their incredible rivalry, between Adams and Hamilton, there were ultimately a great deal more similarities than there were differences (DeConde, 1966; Elkins and McKittrick, 1993; Berkin, 2017;). Had they collaborated more closely, they could have easily rallied together to defeat the strengthening Republicans (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 545). Unfortunately, as we have seen, Adams’ strict adherence to his political ideals often prevented any “easy” methods of conduct and this time was no different (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 533). So rather than to follow his distinctively unilateral— and pro-British— executive ideas, he opted for an immolating compromise that once again displays his ongoing inability to properly “balance” the practical necessity of an encompassing leader with his idealized “independent” executive (Miroff, 1987, pg. 373; Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 534). In shorter terms, in the events that will follow this compromise, we will see yet another reason for why Adams was ultimately incapable of overriding and integrating his opponents into his own party to prevent the establishment of political parties— unlike Jefferson (Bailey, 2007, pg. 67).

Thus, on May 16, 1797, Adams began mobilizing to preserve unity. To Adams, there were many options in dealing with the French. Ralph Adams Brown outlined a few:

He could summon Congress and call for an immediate declaration of war. He could ask Congress to authorize the arming of American merchantmen and, thus protected, attempt to carry on commercial and maritime business as usual. He could impose economic sanctions and stop all trade with France, or even with both France and Britain. He could seek an alliance with Britain and thus use the British navy as a shield for American commerce (1975, pg. 39).

It is also worth noting that all of these issues were quite feasible and executable too, as he had been reassured by congress of their “zealous cooperation in any measures he might decide were necessary” (Berkin, 2017, pg. 162). Despite his supposedly strict subscription to the ideas of an “independent” executive, which we will see more clearly defined later, Adams first choice was to put congress into session immediately to discuss the options— therefore allowing a multitude of voices to influence his judgement. Although urged by many within his own party to directly call for war, upon considering the “defiant defenses” of the Republicans, Adams ultimately opted for a 3-man commission to France to negotiate peace (Berkin, 2017, pg. 163). Simultaneously, and still careful to also please his own groups, he also requested funding towards establishing a new navy as a precautionary counter measure.

This inability to reconcile his ideas to any one unilateral strategy may be a better example of Adams’ “flexibility”; however, it may also be considered as another example of Adams’ weakness in decision making (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 530). We see this more explicitly once we consider the actions of Adams thus far.

In the early aftermath of Jay's Treaty, we saw John Adams decrying the need for reconciliation by writing off his opponents merely as byproducts of the “mobocracy”; in his inauguration speech, we see him reaching out to the “mobocracy” with two distinctively different approaches (Brown, 1975, pg. 4; Isenberg and Burstein, 2019, pg. 164). Now, just three months

later, in his efforts of dealing with France, we see yet another approach. However, it is worth noting that this third one is drastically different from the previous two, as it may arguably be a consolidation of the two. This is so because it combines the ideological energy of the first one, as it acknowledges and neglects the “mobocracy” disapproval in preparing for the imperatives of war; while accounting for the second by showing the learned necessity for compromise. As great as it may be, as it somewhat furthers John Howe’s argument on the “changing political thoughts of John Adams” by showing his ability to rein in his aggressive independent wants to compromise with the “democratic populace,” it is also bad as it demonstrates lack of strategy in Adams presidential conduct (Ellis, 1993, pg. 85).

Had he been more decisive, there are reasons to believe that he could have been substantially more productive. On one hand, and albeit a severely more risky option, he could have rallied his own party into a whole by aligning with the Hamiltonians' call for war, and thus “could have convinced anyone” of the Federalists cause (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 545). After all, as Jeffrey Pasley noted, by 1797, the Republicans and their press were “relatively inconsequential: unstable, widely scattered, vastly outnumbered, and in many cases, unsure of its mission” compared to the Federalists (2002, pg. 117). Just as well, on the other hand, he could have shown clearer understanding and empathy towards the Republican cause by delaying any war measures, and therefore quelling their fierce passions (1972, pg. 280). But alas, he did not. Rather, he continued to maintain that odd tendency to be stagnated in making any unilateral decisions towards a purported goal— a stark contrast from the fierce and strong executives he was famous for admiring, such as “his principal teacher in political affairs,” Machiavelli (Thompson, 1995, pg. 400). Of course, there is merit in considering the rather “delicate” circumstances that inevitably forced the compromise, but as we will see later on, much of Adams

conduct was generally not governed by the “imperatives.” Rather, as have been noted by many historians, they are usually derived from an innate desire to “travel the road not taken” and a self-righteousness meant to solidify his posterity (Ellis, 1993, pg. 58; Thompson, 1998, XIV). As Alexander DeConde framed it, “Adams dreaded war far less than disgrace” (1966, pg. 18).

In his choice of pursuing “his middle path of preparing for war [while] pursuing peace” Adams was rebuffed immediately by the two factions (Berkin, 2017, pg. 163). Among the High-Federalists, the leniency of a peace mission was horrifying because many feared that it would lead Adams to “become the tool of the Francophiles.” In contrast, the Republican focused on the “war measures” and shunned Adams as “a tool of the British, and a creature of the Hamiltonians” (DeConde, 1966, pg. 26). In other words, despite Adams best intent, he was ultimately unsuccessful in mitigating the differences of the two, and therefore once again demonstrating his deficiency in “the [reconciling] of theoretical requirements of constitutional democracy with the practical realities of political life” needed to quell partisan passions, as Jefferson would later do (Bailey, 2007, pg. 6).

A few months later, Adams would once again be presented with another opportunity to try his hand at diminishing the “baneful spirit of parties” on a much larger scale yet again, in a series of problems beginning with the XYZ controversies. Unfortunately, as we will see, he will ultimately fail on an unprecedented level and truly force official parties to develop.

7. The XYZ Affair.

In the 3-man commission he sent to France to negotiate peace were: Charles Pinckney, a man who had already been refused by the French in a previous diplomatic mission once; John Marshall, a wholly inexperienced politician and an avid English sympathizer; and Elbridge Gerry, Adams close friend but, as Carol Berkin notes, “the most unpopular American political

figure of the Era” due to “remarkable irascibility” (2017, pg.165). Simply put, for such an important mission, Adams' choices were questionable at best. Granted, they were not his initial choice. For a short while, Jefferson and Madison were considered and their candidacy were “reliably reported” to the French (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 287).

Unfortunately, Jefferson, as vice president, eventually denied the appointment on the basis of respectability, as he felt that the second in command should not lower himself to become a mere envoy (Thompson, 1980, pg. 177). And even though he was the French favorite, Madison was not as kind in his refusal; instead, it was solely because “he did not care to preserve the reputation or prestige of the Federalists at home or abroad” (Berkin, 2017, pg. 164). There were others that Adams considered and reached out to as well, usually at the urging of other Republican and Federalists leaders, but all the alternatives refused too, each one citing different reasons. As such, Adams was ultimately forced to send an envoy that lacked the confidence of either side (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 158).

A year later, in 1798, although the exact terms remained confidential, the earliest news of the botched peace talk arrived in the United States. Seemingly in an instant, the prospects of failure and the doubts of either side that had engulfed the country in the winter of 1797-98 was proved true (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 293). At the onset of hearing the news, both the Federalists and the Republicans were quick to weaponize the failure to further their causes (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 137).

For the Republicans, the failure was a chance to further diminish the Federalists and Adams public standing. In very simple terms, the let-down was a consequence resulting from Adams’ bellicose conduct towards the French, which had doomed any prospect of peace from the onset. Firstly, there was his May 1797 speech towards congress, in which Adams had outright threatened to reciprocate the “full force of [the] indignity which had been offered... in

the rejection of [Pickney].” For what many considered to be the French’s “[intent] to suspend the ordinary diplomatic intercourse, and to bring into operations those extraordinary agencies which are common use between nations,” it was much too aggressive of a response (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 145).

Secondly, there was the new navy. We know today that it was one of the few things that Adams genuinely developed out of a pure concern for the dangers bestowed onto “American commerce” and “her citizens” by the French (Brown, 1975, pg. 72). However, for the Republicans, it was an unnecessarily hawkish measure. But unlike the speech, in which dissenters had been careful to mask their disapproval subliminally in their “zealous cooperation,” the Republicans’ dislike of the new navy was obvious from the very beginning. Like most other measures that were advanced in congress by the Federalists, the earlier funding of the navy was greatly resisted by the Republicans and was only passed by a very thin margin (Wood, 2009, 246). So when the initial news of the failure returned, it was yet another opportunity for the Republicans to voice their dislike. In an even more elaborate sense than ever before, the Republicans wrongly accused the President for using the failed mission, which had been doomed from inception, as a cover for passing the defense measures which would lead to what Jefferson considered “a calamity” that could ultimately “ruin” America “commerce and agriculture (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 583). As such, many within the Republican press demanded for Adams resignation (Berkin, 2017, pg. 189). In summary, for the Republicans, as Richard Alan Ryerson summarized it, the failure of the commission was a chance to “pour” their “dissent towards Adams public opinion” out from the shadows and into the very visible public sphere (2016, 344).

In contrast, among the Federalists, the consequences of the failure were much more easily accepted and were, as outlined by Alexander DeConde(1966) and Richard Buel Jr. (1972), much less subjected to paranoia. While some within the Federalists group were upset, and blamed the failure on the Republicans, arguing that it was their reluctance to provide a united front that left them to be disregarded by the French, many more were happy in finding further causes to advance their war agendas (DeConde, 1966, pg. 69) As Ralph Adams Brown summed up, from the news of failure was just cause for the “roaring for war with a new-found vigor” among the Federalists (1975, pg. 49).

Thus, regardless of how each side perceived it, in the earliest days of the controversy, the divide present in the country was finally undeniable. In other words, it seemed that France had successfully broken apart the “most cordial support” from the “Representative of the People” and had stopped the “execution of principles so deliberately and uprightly established”— which were the fundamentals of Adams talking points in his 1797 speech to Congress. In simpler terms, and for the purpose of this analysis, it seemed quite obviously that Adams had lost again. In one perspective, he most certainly did— for he was shown starkly to be unable to rally the people even in the face of such grand humiliation. Yet, on the other hand, as we will come to see, there was victory to be found in the failure.

A few months later, facing an immense amount of pressure by both the press and the legislature to reveal the exact terms of failure, Adams forwarded a modified version of the mission report to congress. Subsequently, many in congress then took it upon themselves to leak the papers. Thus, it was revealed that the failure of the mission had been neither side’s faults, but rather, it showed the French agents, later renamed as X, Y, and Z, had always considered the mission a mere pretense to exploit the new country in demanding a “monetary tribute.”

Months before, in January 1798, when both sides were busy speculating and accusing the opposite of being the causes of failures in the mission, partisan division in Adam's republic was, as Gordon Wood framed it, "divided as it is possible to conceive" (2009, pg. 242). A few months later, after the true causes were revealed, unity became almost promised— even the most passionate Republicans could no longer deny the offense of the French. Alexander DeConde summed up a mere glimpse of the change:

Even in western Pennsylvania, where Republicans were numerous and farmers had been sympathetic to the French revolution, people were swept off their feet by the news from Paris. In New Hampshire when the chaplain in the state legislature was foolish enough to pray for the success of French Armies, and failed to recommend Adams to divine favor, the young preacher was dismissed (1966, pg. 75).
The extent of the change was so great that for a short while, even the invulnerable leadership of Jefferson "felt especially persecuted" as "characters" of the Republican party went "in droves to the war party" (Wood, 2017, pg. 301).

In very simple terms, the overall effect of the XYZ papers being revealed to the public may be viewed as such: in no other times was President Adams— or any other presidents in early American founding— presented with a larger opportunity to defeat his opposition than in the few month following the XYZ papers (Charles, 1955; Miroff, 1987; Ryerson, 2016 ; Berkin, 2017). Of course, nothing is so simple. Rather, as I will seek to extrapolate further, it is in this period that we will see the culmination of Adams' various faults being brought out to an unprecedented level, which will ultimately then bring about an early but concrete ruin to any further hopes of unity within the new republic.

In the unfolding events, it would not have been hard for Adams to become the type of unifying leader he had always wanted to be. On the governmental level, the Federalists overtook both houses of Congress in a series of successive electoral wins that continued for the remainder of the year and into early next (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 588). In the public sphere, the

Republican press ceased their criticism of Adams and the Federalists almost entirely, to such an extent that many came to perceive any continued support of a French alliance to be “almost treasonous” (Pasley, 2002, pg. 97). Unfortunately, rather than to capitalize immediately on the new changes, Adams opted for reveling in his newfound popularity instead (Wood, 2009, pg. 244).

In passing, we know that Adams also moved slowly to erect a new standing army as well; however, there is overall much to be said about Adams indulgences in the new atmosphere, as it seemed to inarguably prove what Bruce Miroff considered to be his fatal characteristic: “vanity” (1986, pg. 130).

As I have shown, Adams was always—to various extents—jealous of his contemporaries. To Adams, it was clear that the legacies of Washington or Jefferson were improving with each passing day; but for all his efforts in trying to protect his new country while balancing the potential dangers of the of the *Oligos* with the “energetic” many, it was also equally clear to him that his legacy would not be rewarded the same way (Bailey, 2007 pg. 2; Mayville, 2016, pg. 28). As such, for most of his career, as Joseph J. Ellis framed it, there was “in his heart... a frantic and uncontrollable craving for personal vindication, a lust for fame that was obsessive” (1993, pg. 61). So, given the scarce opportunities that he was presented with for all his works, his submission to the enticement of fame is understandably deserving. Yet, when we consider Adams' strict subscription to the idea of a sacrificial executive, we cannot help but to conclude that there was overall a very heavy sense of contradiction unfit for an executive in his conduct. After all, how could there be an executive who could be pampered with fame while “moderating” the intensive battle between the few, who he believed were inadvertently doomed by an inherent “ostracism”, and the many, who fostered a greater intensity of a “passion for

distinction” than anyone else was (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 535; Wood, 2009, pg. 212; Mayville, 2016, pg. 35)?

The purpose of delving so deeply into Adams psychology in this analysis is because it provides for us a basis for the remainder of his presidency in weighting the blame. Indeed, regardless of how heavily the blame lies, we may be assured that there were fundamental incentives for Adams’ conduct. Thus, by using this brief analysis as a jumping point, we may characteristically note the turning point in which the advancement of political parties became unstoppable.

For as I have said before, upon the leaking of the papers into the public, Adams administration was provided with a certain kind of all-embracing support very rarely seen in American history. Although reluctantly, even the most spirited Republicans began showering Adams with a barrage of unconditional trust in whatever measure he thought best—including the development of an army in April 1798 (DeConde, 1966, pg. 80). Thus, according to the linear progression of these events, we shall examine these developments first.

In a very simple sense we may say the “demand for naval strength” was of Adams own accord (Brown, 1975, pg. 73). Yet, in simplifying the turn of events in such a way, we significantly overlook the power dynamics that was at play between Adam and the Hamiltonians. Instead, the development should be explained as such: due to Adams inability to counterbalance the two faces of the Federalists group, Adams was ultimately ineffectual in anything but the formation of the new army (Miroff, 1987, pg. 375).

At the least, we can see this in Adams inability of preventing Hamilton from taking the leading role in the military development—something that Adams was adamantly against more than arguably any other factors in regards to the new military (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg.

606). Upon the passing of the Navy bill, one of the first major questions that confronted the Adams administration was the problems of leadership: who would lead this new department? For Hamilton, it was clearly a role best meant for him, for it was he and his supporters who had been the strongest advocates for these warlike measures in the first place (DeConde, 1966, pg. 191). But for Adams, it seemed that anybody else was preferable (Wood, 2017, pg. 314).

For a few brief months after passing of the bill, the President put great efforts to stop the nominations of Hamilton into the role. Unfortunately, as it turns out, Hamilton was ultimately the better politician and so Adams was left powerless in his protest (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 303). In very simple terms, it just seemed that Hamilton's allies were simply more loyal and better prepared than Adams and his in lobbying for Hamilton's promotion. There was also, of course, the fact that Hamilton was backed by the stature of the retired Washington, who had leveraged his own stature for the promotion of Hamilton by threatening Adams with a refusal to serve in the new army unless his conditions were met. This is important because it was well known that the involvement of Washington was necessary to infuse the new military developments with credibility and legitimacy (Brown, 1975, pg. 69).

Further, another testament for Adams' weak hold on his party can be seen in the fact Adams, at the height of his popularity, was ultimately unable to battle against a disgraced Hamilton who was facing adultery charges (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 295). Yet, it was not in this that we saw the worst of Adams falters. Instead, it was what followed. Feeling betrayed by his predecessor for all his "loyal support" and unappreciated by many within his own ranks for his "exceptional virtue and his long and arduous services to his nations," in the aftermath of Hamilton's promotion, during a time when even stronger leadership was desperately needed, Adams began to purposely isolate himself from his fellow national leaders (Ryerson, 2009, pg.

352). If he was not before, Adams was finally forced to confront the fundamental lack of adequate leadership that he had, for so long, denied.

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing between the Republicans and Adams as well. Although they had been somewhat fine with the development of the new navy in the beginning, when it was clear that the outcome was to be something entirely different, and as their impulsive passion ceased, their support towards Adams quickly waned accordingly. As Alexander DeConde noted, “Americans [grew] weary of Federalists war measures...[welcomed] an end to standing armies, an elimination of direct taxes, and a cut in government spending” (1966, pg. 189)

In more precise terms we may say that in the beginning, the purpose of their support had been intended to fund a brash retaliation against the French to defend their national pride, which could be aptly inferred by the national slogan that swept the country: “Million for defense, but not one for tribute” (Berkin, 2017, pg. 193) however, once the navy was established, funded, and manned, it seemed to them that the end product was no such thing (Buel Jr., 1975, pg. 194). Rather, as many historians have noted, the final product was little more than a front to justify the Federalists half-hearted unwillingness to properly declare war (Elkins and McKittrick, 1991). Furthermore, in the Federalists procrastination to genuinely seek redemption for their bruised pride, many within the Republicans returned to paranoia.

Instead of it being a tool against the French, many within the Republican factions began to worry that it all had been a front for the Federalists to stockpile oppressive measures against them (Buel Jr. 1975, pg. 196). In other words, the new army seemed to many to be a culmination of the conditions that had underlined the Whiskey Rebellion earlier— in that any given circumstances was a front for underlying oppressive measures. In this atmosphere of paranoia, Adams was presented with another opportunity to pacify the Republicans. Unfortunately, despite

the fact that he was an “inveterate political psychologist,” Adams was unable to properly decipher the needs of the Republicans (Miroff, 1987, pg. 119). So rather than to try to quell the rising paranoia, Adams adeptly misread the situation and turned instead towards a stronger call for aggression— thus fueling the anxiety even more.

Of course, it would be easy for us to speculate and say that Adams should have subsequently utilized his newfound power faster and better; but given the myriad of variables that were present, we would be hard-pressed to rightfully assert such precarious claims rightfully. Yet, in the evidence that we are presented with, we can conclude that Adams was, at the very least, presented with as much of an opportunity to succeed as he was to fail— despite the unfortunate disadvantages that Adams was seemingly inherently doomed with. Hence from this insensitivity, perhaps there is just cause for Richard Alan Ryerson assessment of Adam’s reputations in the aftermath, “a majority of Americans felt that, at the least, he had handled his duties ineptly and had been insensitive to the needs and feelings of his countrymen” (2016, 346). Unfortunately, the influences of Adams on the development of political parties does not stop at the onset of the “quasi-war.” In the sections that follow, we will see Adams again mishandling the fragile relationship with the public that was so needed from the war.

8. The Aliens and Sedition Acts

When the country was officially engaged in the “Quasi-war,” a series of loosely connected-- though undeclared--maritime conflict between the United States and the French, and when his popularity was beginning to wane, Adams took to tightening security measures at home by signing a collection of four laws that, together, are known as the Aliens and Seditions Acts. Today we know that they were, as he would repeatedly argue in his retirement, “altogether intended against the advocates of the French and peace with France”; but in the midst of his

presidency, they were more aptly received as a reversal of “the revolutionary idea ‘that America was an asylum of liberty for the oppressed of the world’ that had been championed by the Federalists in the beginning (DeConde, 1966, pg. 100; Wood, 2009, pg. 247). Each one is worth noting for they are altogether important in ruining any sort of newfound approval that Adams may have received from the XYZ controversy, and in doing so, sealing his political demise.

In 1798, the majority of the immigrants that were arriving into the new country were yeomen of the British Isles and, to a smaller extent, Germans (Berkin, 2017, pg. 203). More so than the cultural conflicts between these uneducated farmers and the starkly aristocratic New Englanders, what was particularly worrisome about the new immigrants were their economic and political views. Across both spectrum, they were more like the Republicans than they were the Federalists: financially poor, agrarian, and, in their asylum-seeking status, greatly cautious of the British monarchy. And so they were, as Carole Berkin summed it up, monumental in “helping [the Republicans] that had been based in the south make inroads into New England and northeastern cities like Philadelphia " due to their likeness (2017, pg. 203).

Thus, when larger numbers of these “anti-Federalists” began arriving in the midst of an unpopular “war” that was already diminishing their public standing, many Federalists grew anxious and turned to themselves for remedies. From their prevalent footing in congress, the Federalists first attempted to ease their troubles by passing the first of the four acts: the Naturalization acts of June 1798. In a very simple sense, the act allowed the Federalists to essentially stop both the immigrants and their electoral efforts by removing any prospects of citizenships or suffrage by raising the requirements needed for both. However, the Federalists were greatly mistaken in their calculations. Even under a security pretense, many of their opposition were quick to decipher their hidden intentions. Cumulatively, rather than to diminish

their opponents standing, the act galvanized the Republicans as many went to accusing the Federalist's action for being apparently anti-democratic (Charles, 1955, pg. 612).

Despite the rather offensive slant of the Naturalization act, the response from it was arguably the most lax when compared to the other three (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 694). It would be the next two, the "Alien Friends Act" and the "Alien Enemies Act," that would firmly establish the "concert with political disorder reaching intolerable levels" (Ryerson, 2009, pg. 316).

Although one of them, the Alien Friends Act, was never properly implemented to its expiration in 1801, the pair altogether gave leverage to the Republicans for scrutinizing the Federalists on new grounds by posing their legitimacies as constitutional questions. Passed just two weeks after the Naturalization act, the acts granted Adams a virtually uncapped discretion on deporting anyone he suspected to be seditious while also delegating to him the power of punishing those who refused the deportation. In turn, many within the Republican party began to question the powers they had bestowed onto Adams earlier. For some, the act posed as an infringement on the separation of powers as specified within the Constitution: did Adams have the right to assert the fundamental functions of the Judiciary (Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 180)?

Yet for others, it was a more serious as it replanted the ideas of voluntary dissent into those under the threat of punishment, once again bringing back the old question of whether the new country was of a "voluntary compact" among sovereign states or an inherently locked together "consolidation of states" (Berkin, 2017, pg. 205). In this case, the question was whether or not the national government, or in this case Adams, had proper injunction and authority to punish the constituents of the states— like Pennsylvania, which held a larger numbers of aliens than any other states (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 695). Of course, due to the works of Joyce

Appleby (1976) or Alin Fumurescu (2019), we may say somewhat certainly today that the answer was something of a twofold qualitative average between those two; but back then, in their fervor of alienated partisanship, no such compromise was ever considered.

Beyond the worries of the “proper” immigrants, many within the south also came to perceive a different danger from the bill, due largely to the differences in their economic foundations (Elkins and Mckitrick, 1993, pg. 592). The fear was, as Carole Berkin framed it, “if, as Federalists argued, Congress could legislate the deportation of dangerous immigrants, could it also deport a black labor force that many thought was equally dangerous?” (2017, pg. 207). As I have briefly mentioned before, by 1798, from all the many slave revolts that were ongoing in the western hemisphere, the underlying dangers of the slavery population was clear to everyone within the country— even to the staunchly biased southerners. Thus, when coupled with the fact that the North was mostly immune to the potential repercussion, due to their rather material-capitalistic economy that had no need for slave labor, many within the South began to bolster their own fears (Elkins and McKitrick, 1993, pg. 591). As we will see from Jefferson and Madison’s formal dissent in their Virginia and Kentucky resolution later, among the Republicans, the repudiation of the act was so great that it led many to justify desertion by considering it as an override of the “co-states” compact (Fumurescu, 2019, pg. 200). Regardless of the answer, what was clear from Adams signing of the act is that it gave way to a new kind of divisive consideration that would not be seen again until the Civil-War.

In intermission from the scrutiny that will follow, to maintain some fairness, we must also note some of Adams actions meanwhile for their positive influence. Although he was largely absent from the passing of these acts, Adams was ultimately crucial in checking the wild ambitions of the Federalists so that nothing was as bad as they could have been. For example,

Adams was careful to include some Republicans ideas when lobbying for the Alien Friends act, thereby infusing it with some bi-partisan legitimacy (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 588). But perhaps more importantly in his leadership, was that Adams lessened the potential punishment for the violation of these acts, from death— which many Federalists wanted— to merely imprisonment (Berkin, 2017, pg. 208). However, what little praise Adams should garner from these actions, he would entirely destroy in the aftermath of the last act, the Sedition Act.

With the ratification of the two Aliens acts, and for his long delay in developing proper war measures, the respects and admirations that Adams had garnered for valor in his dealing with France was quickly plummeting to zero with each passing day. As such, it meant that the longstanding criticism of Adams that had been a constant for the whole of his career was quickly returning. In many instances, the call for resignation returned as well (Brown, 1975, pg. 126). For the Federalists who were becoming accustomed to, for the first time, unbridled maneuverability in congress, the losses of Adams equated to the loss of their autonomy. Therefore, to maintain their monopoly on public standing, the Federalists answered with the Sedition act— which forbade the public press from “writing, printing, or utterly publishing any false scandalous and malicious writings” (Wood, 2009, pg. 259).

Whereas the Federalists had been somewhat successful in defending the previous three acts by declaring them necessary war measures, the Sedition Act had no such luck. A reason for this was because of the broad covering of the bill, as it seemed to give the Federalists an almost tyrannical final say in determining the definition of what “scandalous and malicious” meant. But more obviously, it was because how transparently the bill was targeting specific groups— understood generally as the Republicans (Berkin, 2017, pg. 128). Specifically, in all its comprehensiveness of protecting the President and Congress, the act did not protect the vice

president (Wood, 2017, pg. 309). Simply put, there was little room, if any at all, within the current political climate of the time for the Federalists to say so otherwise. There was of course, the precarious relationship between the press and the federal government that had been ongoing, as Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick summarized it, “along with the sheer proliferation of newspapers that had occurred in the 1790s went the taking for granted that a fair amount of free and easy language towards public figures was tolerable, and by no means all of it had to be respectful” (1993, pg. 701).

However, in judging the Sedition Act, we must try to look at it not with contemporary eyes, but in the way the Federalists understood it. Although the Republicans view it as an infringement of fundamental liberties, for the Federalists it was perfectly justified. For them, the Sedition Act was in accordance with William Blackstone's argument, who had earlier claimed that the “constitutionality” and “legality” of a law depended upon “either from the words, the context, the subject matter, the effect and consequences, or the spirit and reason of the law” (Thompson, 1998, pg. 274; Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 230). Thus, for the party in power, the uprising of “mass major politics” which seemed to threaten “liberty, property, and civic order” in an era with no precedence to guide them, such conditions were certainly considered to have been met (Freeman, 2003, pg. 22).

Also, unlike the previous three acts which had been applied with great degrees of leniency; in their desperation, many within the Federalists party took to strictly enacting this bill to punish, quite heavily, a broad understanding of what “press” included— including even simple comments exchanged in town meetings (Pasley, 2002, pg. 112). In one instance, the Act imprisoned a popular philosopher named Thomas Cooper for six months along with a fine of 400 dollars, for a mere critique of Adams dealing with the French (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 109).

So rather than to “put the partisan republican press out of business,” the act that altogether resulted in about twenty cases drove to fruition the exact opposite (Pasley, 2002, pg. 126). Despite being somewhat cautious of the punishments that were broadly in view, many within the Republican ranks took to mobilizing more energetically than ever before. For many republicans, the Act was proof of a new danger, one that was worse than the French (Kurtz, 1957, pg. 308). And even though many understood that it was comparatively a better bill, a more relaxed one than the one passed in England, as a domestic problem, those differences “were of little value” (Brown, 1975, pg. 126). As Alexander DeConde summarized it, from the Sedition Acts, “Americans [became] more occupied with bitter internal strife than with the French Problems” (1966, pg. 176). At the very least, the oppressive measures of the act reminded the Republican why the party had been created in the first place— and that was to outlive the tyrannical Federalists in order to fix the country (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 701).

If the implication of their mobilization was inefficient, or even remotely unclear, as there were some Republicans who were supporters of the act, we may instead turn to a clearer depiction by examining the way in which the act motivated the ever-reluctant Jefferson into proper mobilization. As Gordon Wood framed it, it brought about the start of Jefferson’s “growing disillusionment” with the American Revolution ideas (2017, pg. 405). For a long while, Jefferson, like many of his contemporaries, had remained cautious of going against his own government publicly, for fear of undermining its legitimacy. But against these forcefully aggressive measures, which were obviously constitutional infringement, the formalities that had kept him dormant were shattered (Bailey, 2007, pg. 66). For Jefferson, it was simply that “the federal government was not empowered with jurisdiction over [seditious libel]” and that the act was “so palpably in the teeth of the Constitution” that it suggested the Federalists “pay no respect

to it” (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 700; Berkin, 2017, pg. 218). Just as well, like many of his contemporaries, he had always been rather unfavorable towards the press, but scrutiny to such a degree as outlined by the acts was simply unacceptable (Wood, 2017, pg. 311).

On one hand, Jefferson blamed the leadership of the Federalist, as neither Washington, Hamilton, nor Adams opposed the acts (DeConde, 1966, pg. 99). But on a larger scale, Jefferson blamed the very structure of the government he had helped to create, for these were questions whose roots could be traced back to the founding. Consequently, along with Madison, Jefferson began trying to remedy the new government of the damages suffered by the four acts by drafting the Kentucky and Virginia Resolution.

Passed a month apart in late 1798 in response to the oppressive measures of the Aliens These two documents, written by Jefferson and Madison respectively, argued with greater acuteness the question of the compact among the states once again (Fumurescu, 2019, pg. 200). In it, they argued for the Aliens and Seditions acts to be simply subjectively “void and of no force” as each state liked (Wood, 2017, pg. 314). The acts ultimately were overwritten, unutilized, and left to expire. But their legacy persisted nonetheless.

Perhaps more than anything else, what made the two resolution so monumental is that they, for the first time in the new nation’s history, hinted at the possible legitimacy of blunt and conspicuous resistance— at a time when the people were just becoming comfortable with the minimal amount of protest insinuated in political parties. Unfortunately, regardless of how progressive— and for some, legitimate— the ideas were, that underlying reluctance to protest was undoubtedly still the norm within the political climate. As such, the resolutions ultimately became “political disasters that came closer to justifying and saving the Aliens and Seditions acts than stopping them” (Pasley, 2002, pg. 127). The American people were certainly unhappy, but

not to the extent of a formal petition for the undermining of federal authority. However, for Jefferson, the failures were an indication of something else: it was a call for the presidency to be refreshed, “as further security” for the “reintegration” of the Constitution (Bailey, 2007, pg. 229).

Yet, it should be noted that the opposition to the acts were not limited to the Republicans either. In the grand scheme of things, it also converted many Federalists into Republicans, for many could no longer suffer the indignities they felt their leaders were exuding (Buel Jr. 1972, pg. 213). There was, of course, the toll that was weighing on all within the party from the three exhaustive years of alternating leadership between Hamilton and Adams. Put simpler, while the Republicans were strengthening their own faith and galvanizing through the increased leadership of Jefferson, the Federalists were not. Nevertheless, it was not here that we would see the Federalists party collapsing, that was still to come in the final days of the Quasi-War.

9. The Final Days of the War and the Election of 1800s

Though originally an informal cohesion of men sharing the remnant of anti-Federalists ideals, by 1799, the Republicans were as much of an official party as they ever would be. Their once uncertain leader was fully active and had gone as far as to co-author what may be considered the nation’s first threat of secession (Fumurescu, 2019, pg. 200). What had just been merely an erratic group of self-interested independent publishers in the press was finally a collaborative monster with a single goal (Pasley, 2002, pg. 172). And most of all, by taking all the various missteps by Adams and his party as due cause for growth, there was now ample reasons to go against the baneful dangers of parties. On the other hand, the Federalists, led by a leader who never seemed to be driven by any singular goal nor having the talent to obtain said goal, was on the brink of collapse and the ruination was arriving very quickly.

Although Adams had favored the war with France to some degree in between 1788 and 1789, as time wore on, he grew uncertain (Buel Jr., 1972, pg.186). There was the troubling fact that the army that he was sacrificing his standings for, was no longer his (Miroff, 1987, pg. 375). Through a series of clever maneuvers, Hamilton had seized control of commandeering all the new developments for himself (Wood, 2009, pg. 264). But more importantly, there was the increased cost of sustaining the war itself, in which the Federalists had been funding by implementing a series of unpopular taxes. One such measure, had been a land-based tax that raised 2 million dollars which— given the size of southern plantations— had unfairly burdened the South particularly (DeConde, 1966, pg. 102) Together, the war and the resources it required was proving to be too much of a political dilemma.

In response to the problem it posed, the Federalists party followed similar lines as they always had: the high-Federalists maintained Hamilton's desire for war, and many even called for escalation; but for those that followed the more level-headed Adams, alternatives were sought after (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 583). One such alternative was sending another peace envoy. From its very conception, many were quick to dismiss the idea (Hofstadter, 1970, pg. 102). And perhaps they were right to do so, given the long history of failures in peace missions. But for John Adams, past history meant little. What was even more important to Adams, was the inherent desire to return to the "independence" he had chased all his career— he was tired of following the suggestions of the scheming Federalists (DeConde, 1966, pg. 169). What urged him on even more was a growing fear of the underlying repercussion of the war: at the worst of it, was the possibility of a civil war (Miroff, 1987, pg. 376).

Thus, on February 18, 1799, Adams decided unilaterally before Congress his nomination of William Vans Murray as the head of another peace envoy to France, to solve the interrelated

“foreign and domestic crises of his administration (Kurtz, 1965, pg. 543). Immediately, the loose alliance that had given the new country its navy was no more (Newman, 1995, pg. 543).

Upon realizing that Adams was no longer as malleable as he had once been, the Hamiltonians began to defect. In one sense, the vindication may be viewed as such: many Hamiltonians were angry at Adams for ruining their war and army ambitions (Wood, 2009, pg. 272). But perhaps more accurately, it was because the prospect of a peace mission reminded many high-Federalists that Adams was simply lacking the type of draconian leadership that they felt the country needed to leverage proper reparation from the French (DeConde, 1996, pg. 169). The level of contempt the Federalists was so great that it even brought many to criticize Adams within the press, something that they were just punishing the Republicans for months before (Hoadley, 2014, pg. 777). Adams was too gentle, many claimed, and a peace mission simply left too much of the question of peace or war to the French, (Kurtz, 1965, pg. 547).

However, it should be noted that the decision to send Van Murray to France in January 1799 was not the only display of that type of Hamiltonians-alienating unilateral authority either. There would be two more. The first one, arguably the less important of the two, occurred in May 1800 when Van Murray was on his way to France. Frustrated by their unchanging loyalty to Hamilton, Adams finally moved to dismissing his Secretaries: of State, Timothy Pickering, and of War, James McHenry (Elkins and McKittrick, 1993, pg. 584). The second, and arguably more important, happened just a few days later.

In the previous year, in 1798, a group of Pennsylvanian Germans was jailed for refusing to pay the land tax that had been unfairly levied onto them (DeConde, 1966, pg. 196). Consequently, feeling that the right of refusal had been constitutionally guaranteed, thereby making their punishment unconstitutional, another group of Pennsylvanian Germans led by John

Fries took it upon themselves to free those jailed (Newman, 1995, pg. 50). Despite the rather peaceful proceeding of the jailbreak, many Federalists took to calling it a rebellion. Particularly among the Hamiltonians, who were becoming uneasy by the substantial amount of defiance already seen against the Aliens and Sedition Acts, the rebellion was another opportunity to intimidate dissenters (Newman, 2000, pg. 95). As such, many called for capital punishment.

However, just days before they were scheduled to be hung, Adams pardoned Fries and his accomplices— against intense protest from within his party (Henderson, 1970, 317). In five months that had passed since Adams nominated Van Murray, a new accusation of Adams “forging a ‘corrupt bargain’ with the ‘French party’ and its leader Thomas Jefferson” was building, and in their paranoia, the pardon was proof (Newman, 1995, pg. 39). If there had been any room left for reconciliations between the two leaders of the Federalists party before, it was gone. As Paul Johnson Douglas Newman summarized it, what Adams would later consider “the most splendid diamond” of his public service, was “the last straw” for the high-Federalists (1995, pg. 40).

Thus, when Vans Murray returned to the country four months later with a message of peace, the country was fully transformed. In short, not only was the war abroad dissolved, but so too was the “cold war” at home as his own party had decisively split into twos while his opponents remained tall (Charles, 1955, pg. 618).

There was no going back, and not even the prospects of an election was enough to galvanize the once-prevalent party (Buel Jr., 1972, pg. 186). As the election neared, rather than to gather around Adams, who was still somewhat the most certain candidate to win many within the Hamiltonians faction instead turned to Charles Pickney, who severely lacked the type of historical respect that Adams garnered. What was even worse, was the change in Federalists

behavior as took to announcing their defection loudly in the press, Hamilton himself included. Rather than to peacefully distancing himself from his fellow Federalists, Hamilton instead turned to attacking Adams through a series of pamphlets in the public press (Bailey, 2007, pg. 27). For those who had always swung between the two parties, the prospect of joining a ruined Federalists party was hence made appalling.

More importantly, the infighting between the Federalists soon became a greater incentive for the Republican to defeat Adams in the upcoming election (Charles, 1955, pg. 617). Between Jefferson and his supporters, victory was too close to not be reeled in. Their members also grew as they began to absorb the Federalists who had fallen out of the party as a result of the fighting. In other words, because his ruination of the “faction who have been laboring and intriguing for an army of fifty- thousand” many high-Federalists were driven to accept defeat rather than to compromise any further with the man who had proven to be “much too honest, impulsive, and passionate” (Wood, 2009, pg. 272). Accordingly, on December 13 and to no one’s surprise, Jefferson was elected to the Presidency with 60% of the popular votes, including a large part of Adams’ New-England. As Adams himself put it, it was an election in which he had been “obliged to stand Candidate knowing it would end in disgrace” (Shaw, 1976, pg. 267).

Conclusion

As we see in history, the American public usually awards those in charge for victory in wars, and in subsequently, punishes those who lose. In one view, we may say that Adams’ presidency was no different, in that he was punished for failing to secure sufficient reparation from the French, an issue that would not be resolved until the 1900s. Yet, for keeping casualties relatively low and saving his country from total catastrophe, we may say that Adams was unfairly punished.

Unfortunately, the evaluation of whether or not Adams is deserving of his posterity was never the intent of this paper. Rather, this was always just an attempted inquiry in establishing his influences on the development of political parties. In that sense, it would seem that given the sheer amount of times in which Adams was afforded the opportunity to prevent or slow their growth, we have no choice but to deem him extremely influential. But if the proliferation of political parties are to indeed be blamed for his disgraceful loss and his becoming of the only founding father to not be re-elected, then there may be something left to say.

But in such an analysis, we should fundamentally be careful of positioning Adams in such degrees of scrutiny. There is much good to be had in political parties, after all. At the very least, as we have seen in various instances, it forcefully derives compromises from headstrong individuals for the betterment of the whole— and of course, from the friction generated by the disagreements, previously indifferent individuals are catapulted to becoming more politically involved.

Regardless, it would seem that perhaps Rousseau was correct, that when faced with better and greater things, corruption and defeat in the grand scheme of things is simply inevitable. And in Adams case, such defeat was the becoming of a new version of Oedipus. For as we see in the many events long before his ascendancy to the presidency, and for the state of the climate that was so characteristically led by individuals rather than coalitions, Adams was just simply fated with an catastrophic resolution unfit for his time. And by failing to maximize the opportunities he was presented with, the country was left with little option but to turn towards a new leader. In short, despite his ongoing struggle to be known for rallying his country into one, Adams legacy was just doomed from the onset

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